

# THE BATTALION

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Texas A&M University

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## Fails family fights to preserve son's memory

By Melissa Fowler  
THE BATTALION

On Nov. 30, 2002, Texas A&M football players joined a grieving family at a funeral for one of their own.

Parents of deceased freshman defensive lineman Brandon Fails held a funeral, took their son to the cemetery where his body was laid to rest and ordered a headstone for his grave.

Yet until Jan. 16, Charles and Valarie Fails were missing one thing besides their son: his death certificate.

Fails was pronounced dead Nov. 25 following a collapse in his Cain Hall dorm room. Since Brazos County does not have a medical examiner, an autopsy was conducted by the Travis County Medical Examiner's Office.

Justice of the Peace for Travis County Margaret Meece said the death certificate was lost in the mail, and she received it on Jan. 6 and filed it 10 days later.

"It is a horrible feeling for any parent to have to wait as long as we had to wait to get a death certificate," Valarie said.

Not only was Fails' death certificate delayed by almost two months, but it contradicts the findings of his autopsy report.

The autopsy reported the cause of death was a blood clot which formed in Fails' right leg as the result of an October injury to his right knee during football practice that required surgery.

Even though the autopsy reported Fails' death as an accident, the death certificate filed this month lists the death as occurring from natural causes.

Had the death certificate ruled Fails' death as an accident, his family could have collected \$100,000 from a practice and player death benefit for families of A&M athletes who die as a result of sanctioned athletic activity, according to The Associated Press.



FAILS

"This is not about money," Valerie said, "this is about justice. All we asked for was a death certificate and for it to be right."

Meece filed the death certificate and is responsible for the final ruling on the cause of death in accordance with state law that gives justices of the peace that power in counties without a medical examiner.

At the time of Fails' death, Meece's husband, Patrick, was the justice of the peace and disputed the autopsy findings, theorizing the blood clot was the result of a lung infection, not his prior knee surgery.

Margaret Meece was elected to replace her retiring husband in January, and while not sharing his theory on the cause of the blood clot, she did investigate and said she doubts the autopsy findings. Neither Patrick nor Margaret Meece have any medical background.

"They (Patrick and Margaret Meece) are just lawyers and are going against a medical examiner with the proper education for the type of work they are in," Valerie said.

In her investigation Meece said she contacted emergency room doctors at St. Joseph's Hospital where Brandon was pronounced dead and read as much as she could about blood clots.

"I do not have a medical degree but I have access to a lot of people who do," Meece said.

While Meece agrees with the autopsy that Brandon died as the result of a massive blood clot, she does not believe it was caused by his surgery.

In defense of her ruling, Meece said that as a blood clot ages it breaks up and fragments so extremely large clots - such as the one responsible for Fails' death - are not very old. She said the average life of a blood clot is ten days and that from her research it would be impossible for the clot to have remained in his system an extra three or four weeks past the ten days following his surgery.

"I could find no evidence to indicate there was a way for it (the blood clot) to breach the three-to-four-week period (post surgery)," Meece said.

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### Puppy love



JOSH HOBSON • THE BATTALION

Adrienne Murphy, from Dallas, tries to pull her sleeve out of the mouth of an English bulldog, Thursday afternoon at a College Station pet store. English Bulldogs have gained even more popularity because of its exposure on "The Osbournes."

## Regents approve additional campus plan funding

By Brad Bennett  
THE BATTALION

The Board of Regents granted an additional \$500,000 in funding Thursday to the Campus Master Plan, a design plan aimed at making A&M a more pleasing campus and meet academic and architectural needs.

President Dr. Robert M. Gates said the plan is important because past planning had no unified plan and the citing of buildings was seemingly done at random.

"This campus' (design) deserves aesthetic quality and feeling of oneness," Regent Lionel Sosa said. "Many of our (A&M) campuses have a hodgepodge look."

Regents also approved 34 other agenda items, including a new Ph.D. program in

Hispanic Studies, the establishment of five new learning and research centers to be based at A&M and contracts granting the title "Emeritus" to three retiring members of the Board.

The Board also reviewed \$585 million dollars in construction jobs; \$341 million are still in the planning process. Despite recent budget constraints, no changes to construction plans were made.

In the only resolution directly affecting a degree, the regents approved the proposal establishing a Ph.D. of philosophy in Hispanic Studies.

Dr. Charles Johnson, dean of the College of Liberal Arts, said the Ph.D. will "move beyond the study of language and will include literature, culture and even policy."

See **Master** on page 2

## A&M may require applicants to take writing skills test

By Lauren Smith  
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M officials said they are unsure if they will follow the University of Texas' lead in requiring high school seniors entering college in Fall 2006 to take writing skills admissions tests.

Starting in the spring of 2005, the Standard Aptitude Test (SAT) will include a 25-minute writing sample that will directly measure the writing abil-

ity of prospective students.

"The idea is a proctored writing sample with nothing but the student, the paper, and a No. 2 pencil, an event similar to a capstone experience to every school's writing curriculum," said Dr. Bruce Walker, associate vice president and director of admissions at the University of Texas.

Following the June decision by the College Board to add the writing test to the SAT, the providers of the American

College Test (ACT) admissions exam are offering an optional writing test. The ACT is not required for admission to A&M.

"I fully expect that other major universities in Texas and beyond will adopt the writing test as part of their admissions standards," Walker said.

A&M, however, will wait on a series of tests to decide if it will add the test or not.

"Because the test is still

See **Writing** on page 2

## Rec Center proposes new fee

By Rhiannon Ubelhor  
THE BATTALION

The Student Recreation Center's proposed \$10 increase of the Rec Center fee is pending in the Student Senate and will be approved by Student Services Sunday, speaker Pro Tem Logan Renfrow said.

Dennis Corrington, director of the department of recreational sports, said the Rec Center is more than 7 years old and is in need of repairs. The increase, if approved by administration, would raise the fee from \$78 to \$88.

"Roofs usually need to be repaired every 10 to 15 years, costing up to \$2 million. If funds are set aside each year to maintain the Rec Center,

then all students, now and in the future, will share equally in maintaining the building," Corrington said.

Corrington said the fee will generate \$8.6 million for Texas A&M, which includes the aquatic center. The University of Texas' rec center generates \$8.7 million, but does not include its swimming facilities.

The proposed fee would cover a weight and fitness room expansion, the Penberthy Intramural Sports Center expansion, student worker wage increase, a new sports club coordinator and maintenance of the facilities now and in the future, Corrington said.

The weight and fitness room is full between the hours of 5 p.m. and 11 p.m., which is when most students want to work out, he said, so one goal will be to control the overcrowding.

Penberthy Field currently supports 200 to 300 games per year, and there are more intramural teams that want to join, but do not have the playing space, Corrington said.

Corrington said the Rec Center is a major factor in recruiting for A&M that could help increase the number of faculty and diversity at the University.

Keeping with University President Dr. Robert M. Gates' Vision 2020 goal of improving campus

See **Fee** on page 12

## Helicopter crash kills four Marines

FALCON HEIGHTS, Texas (AP) — When he saw the two fireballs after a South Texas military helicopter accident, it was clear to witness Larry Sholl that the occupants of the two choppers had no chance.

"There was nobody that could have survived that," said Sholl, 67, who lives in a state campground near the site where four Marine Corps reservists died when their AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters collided Wednesday night.

"There was no way to help them," Sholl said Thursday. "We heard a loud boom and all of a sudden the engines in the helicopters quit, so I went outside and looked and there was a ball of fire."

He saw another fireball close by.

The Marine Forces Reserves said in a release that witnesses saw the two helicopters collide and go down in Falcon State Park shortly before 9 p.m. CST.

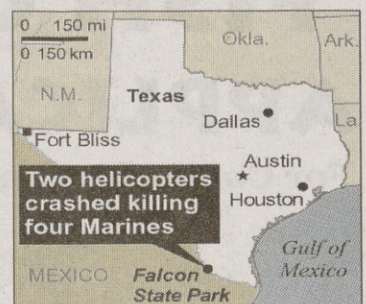
Wreckage from one helicop-

ter was just inside the entrance to a recreational vehicle park, and burn marks from that crash stretched for about 40 yards. The other crash site was about 300 yards away, with rotors and other charred helicopter parts strewn between them. Brush and prickly pear cactus were blackened about 40 yards around, a witness said.

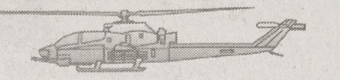
Officials said the reservists were helping the U.S. Border Patrol with surveillance of Falcon Lake, a huge Rio Grande reservoir that straddles the U.S.-Mexico border and is a known hot spot for drug trafficking.

Noise from the collision jolted the 40 or so residents, most of whom are retirees from northern states and Canada.

"I thought it came down where the other campers were," said Eileen Ruiz of Milpitas, Calif. "My heart was racing. Everybody came out to watch." The Marines killed were



Two helicopters crashed killing four Marines



**AH-1W Super Cobra**  
Primary function: All-weather day/night attack helicopter  
Length: 58 feet (17.67 m)  
Height: 13.7 feet (4.17 m)  
Speed: 169.05 mph (272 kph)  
Ceiling: 18,700 feet (5,703.5 m)  
Range: 294.4 miles (473.8 km)  
Armaments: One 20 mm cannon; four external wing stations to hold rockets and missiles

SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI; AP U.S. Marine Corps.

See **Crash** on page 2

**Proposed Rec Center Fee**

- Increase from \$78 to \$88
- Will generate \$8.6 million for A&M
- Two options:
  - Increase fee by \$3 per year
  - \$10 for three years

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SOURCE: DENNIS CORRINGTON, DIRECTOR OF REC CENTER