

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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EDITORIAL

GROSS DISSERVICE

Johnson's decision made without consulting industry professionals

Current journalism students at Texas A&M may not know how much impact the closure of A&M's journalism department will have on their careers. Apparently, neither does Charles Johnson, Johnson, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, recommended July 10 that A&M cut its journalism department — a decision Johnson made without doing all of his homework.

In a meeting last week with representatives of the Former Journalism Students Association, The Associated Press, the Dallas Morning News and the San Antonio Express-News, Johnson said he did not consult professionals in the journalism industry to see how they recruit graduates. At the same time, Johnson claimed "the bottom line is how we can serve students."

These two actions directly contradict each other. Those media members attending last week's meeting told Johnson that closing the department would have negative effects on A&M graduates in the job market, something that does not "serve students." The current job market is difficult enough that closing the department will place Aggies at a marked disadvantage when interviewing for media internships and jobs, especially compared to graduates of the University of Texas where there is an entire college dedicated to journalism and communication.

In addition to hurting students, Johnson's ill-informed decision will hurt A&M. He said he did not consult with those teaching on the high school level to see what they look for when recommending a journalism program. One can be sure that a high school journalism teacher is not going to recommend A&M to any students who are interested in a media career, thus costing A&M some of the state's future journalists.

It is an insult for Johnson to make a decision of this magnitude without thoroughly researching the effects it will have on Aggies.

While he says the bottom line is how he can serve students, his actions show a blatant disregard for students and their education.

Bringing Iran democracy

1989 was perhaps the greatest and worst year for freedom in recent history. In Czechoslovakia, during the "Velvet Revolution," peaceful protesters brought about the nonviolent overthrow of their communist government. But during the same year, the world watched in horror as student-led protests in favor of democracy were crushed by the Chinese communist government. In Tiananmen Square, students were viciously suppressed with military tanks, resulting in the deaths of more than 500 civilians. Today, Iran is on the verge of its own student-led democratic revolution, and free people should not tolerate another Tiananmen Square. America must do everything it can to support the democratic movement in Iran, but it must do it from the sidelines.



MATTHEW MADDOX

Democracy cannot come soon enough to Iran. In the summer of 1999, peaceful student protesters in the city of Tehran were beaten and stabbed in their dorm rooms by supporters of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. Hashem Aghajari, an Iranian professor and opponent of the theocratic regime, was sentenced to death earlier this year for a campus speech that offended Iranian religious leaders. Valentine's Day and New Years celebrations are also signs that the population is increasingly resistant to the extremist Islamic government. In the past month, there have been renewed pro-democracy student demonstrations across the country. Once again though, the government has acted with an iron fist. Since June, there have been 4,000 demonstrators arrested.

America must strike a balance between its support of the Iranian people's democratic revolution and the need for Iranians to succeed on their own. "Change has to be brought by Iranians themselves, not foreigners," Fatimeh Haqiqat-Ju, a parliament deputy told The Associated Press. The United States must not hesitate to support the Iranian cause for democracy, but must be cautious about jumping in with both feet. There is another cost to direct military intervention in Iran other than the human and financial ones. In an area of the world where America is viewed suspiciously, direct intervention might rob the democracy movement of popularity.

Popularity is currently not a problem for the demonstrators as the Iranian population is ripe for a revolution. Students, while the most vocal group wishing for a change of government, only make up a small group of such supporters. Nearly half of the population is under the age 25, raised oppressed after the establishment of the theocratic regime. In addition, women, a group that constitutes half the country, are without full rights under the hard-line government. While the rights of Iranian people are important, there are even greater reasons for democracy.

Democracy in Iran could bring stability to the region, especially neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan. This would eliminate the second member of the Axis of Evil without shedding American blood and dollars. Recently, the United Nations' request to test for a nuclear weapons program was rejected by the Iranian government. The White House has made it clear that America may disarm Iran if the preserved threat of weapons is great enough. Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's former president and current leader of the country's highest religious governing body, said last year that on the day the Muslim world gets nuclear weapons, the people of Israel will be easily killed "since a single atomic bomb has the power to completely destroy Israel, while an Israeli counter-strike can only cause par-



tial damage to the Islamic world." So much for a Palestinian state.

Iran must shed its radical Islamic government to have freedom. Currently, elected Iranian officials are powerless. Iran's President Muhammad Khatami, while called a reformist, does not have the power that the religious councils do and has been unwilling to challenge them. Actually leading the government are two branches of unelected radical Islamic leaders, called mullahs. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, a self-proclaimed messenger of God, has complete dictatorial power over the government. Because of the Islamic government, Iranian schools are not effective since they cannot have full dialogue as long as professors and students fear draconian retribution for their thoughts. Communications in the country will not keep the public aware of their world until the government discontinues its censorship. Women will never be equals in a country religiously dedicated to their inferiority. Extremist Islam not only strikes in the form of international terrorism, but as domestic oppression as well.

The best route for America is constant and consistent verbal support. Secretary of State Colin Powell said recently that Washington wanted to encourage "those (in Iran)...seeking the right to speak out." A firm message that recognizes the current government of Iran as part of the Axis of Evil, not the Iranian people as terrorists, is important. Also vital is the message that Iran is not a true democracy that supports the inalienable rights of the Iranian people. America can help by keeping the regime's allies, including Russia, at bay. The United States must use the strongest diplomatic means possible to stop another Tiananmen Square, but it must let Iranian people

Matthew Maddox is a senior management major.
Graphic by Seth Freeman

THE BATTALION

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MAIL CALL

Soldier's wife won't get A&M journalism degree

I am in the process of transferring to Texas A&M. Well, I was. I was going to study journalism. I have waited longer than most undergrads to get my degree. Since I am a Marine Corps wife, I don't have much say over where I live or where I finish school.

After two universities, I feel I have the right to be picky. I mapped it out: My goal is to have a B.A. in journalism from a prominent school.

Since my husband returned from Iraq, we have been planning to move to College Station. You see, out of all of the journalism programs in the country, A&M fit my criteria. Being an Aggie himself, my husband willingly gave up optimal career opportunities for me to have the Aggie experience that had molded him.

I did not take my research lightly. I found lists upon lists of top journalism programs. In the journalism world, A&M is on the map! I'm afraid that being stuck in an academic bubble, the decision makers and department heads at A&M might not realize that it is considered an honor to have a journalism degree from A&M.

A&M was the school that was going to provide for me the opportunity for which I've been waiting.

Students who are serious about journalism, as I am, are not going to be apathetic if bumped to the English department. I am already editing and writing for magazines; I do not need someone to teach me how to read and write. I need an education that will fine-tune the skills I need to someday run my own magazine.

While reading comments about the department's closing, I came across one that said something to the effect that it's not a journalism degree that matters, it's that it says "Texas A&M" across the top. Is that what education is at A&M — a piece of paper with the school's name on it? For me an education is what I learn while I'm earning that piece of paper.

Students seeking a journalism degree will come to A&M, probably sometime

around Thanksgiving, and they'll be wearing that nasty burnt orange! I'm sure I do not know all the details of the closing department, but I am appalled that they are giving up the fight so quickly.

Ginny Fisher

Professors alone make journalism 'worth saving'

Dr. Charles Johnson, As a journalism graduate, I am perplexed at your decision to cut the department entirely. I understand you intend to keep the jobs of the faculty and to promote incoming students to migrate to other majors, though I have no idea what in the world I learned in any other major about copy editing, the structure, design and layout of a newspaper, or of Dr. Douglas Starr's "cut-the-fluff" style of writing a news story. Professors like Starr and Ron George make the journalism department worth saving, and I am a better person having learned under their guidance.

As a journalism student, I recognize the problems that exist within the department and probably would have a few suggestions to throw your way after I say my peace, but it seems a bit spineless to take a problem and cut your losses instead of creatively arriving at a solution that could possibly save a very necessary department. I realize it must be difficult in your position to have to make these decisions and to please all people, all the time, but when it comes to the education of students who are willing and able to learn and excel you definitely do not receive an "E" for effort.

I am not sure what can be done about your little "recommendation" to cut the journalism department, or if it's even a recommendation at all, but I do know that men like Starr, whom I consider YOUR department's "diamond in the rough," have the experience, knowledge and gumption to make this department what it needs to be. I don't know if you have ever sat down and talked with the

man, that wasn't in a business meeting, or discussing curriculum, but I strongly suggest you do. The life that he has lived in journalism and that he pours into his students gave life to your dying department. You want a solution? Then rethink this decision, because the back-lash you will receive as not only a liberal arts dean but as a Texas A&M educator will ring in your ears for years to come.

I will leave you with this final thought from the world's greatest piece of literature and truth. "Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it established" — Proverbs 24:3. When you encounter journalism students in the future and they look at you like you're a fool, then remember this proverb and I hope it brings understanding.

Jon Griffey
Class of 2002

"... it seems a bit spineless to take a problem and cut your losses instead of creatively arriving at a solution that could possibly save a very necessary department."

— Jon Griffey
Class of 2002

Journalism closure robs students of opportunities

I took a photojournalism class in the department of journalism. It was an excellent class with an amazing prof (Howard Eilers).

I would hate to see such a great possible experience for future students go to waste. Much has been lost from the Aggie traditions and experiences in the last few years, and I'm afraid this one won't be appreciated until it has been added to that list. Let us not consolidate on the impression that something

is expendable, let us work to improve what could be, and is, a valuable resource at hand for the Fightin' Texas Aggies!

Chris Niebuhr
Class of 2003

Insurance problems hit graduate students hard

Although we are happy that A&M has pledged to cover single graduate students' health insurance premiums, we are disappointed that under A&M President Robert M. Gates' plan, the students needing the most help — those with spouses and children — are still hit hard.

A typical graduate student with a wife and child, after taxes, makes just \$1,000 per month and has to pay mandatory tuition (\$444/month) often including no classes but just research. In September, this student will pay \$281/month for health insurance instead of \$108. This leaves just \$275 to take home. Many will opt to leave themselves and their children uninsured and use that \$281 for rent and food.

Worst hit are the international students who are required by law to carry health insurance and are not allowed to seek any supplemental employment.

This plan will force some students to drop out, sometimes after having

acquired significant debts. Hiring quality graduate students will become more difficult as A&M will present a less competitive graduate school (compared to the University of Texas, which routinely gives significant tuition reimbursement). This hurts A&M at its very roots, as grad students are at integral parts of both the teaching and research missions.

Dr. Gates' plan to hire 100 new faculty every year for the next four years aims to expand A&M and foster excellence in research and education but it is clear that all else being equal, top faculty will not choose A&M knowing they will be unable to obtain good grad students to work on their projects and help them teach.

To help, A&M could give some tuition reimbursement to pay part of the premiums of graduate students who are parents and/or married to pay these students to work for more than the normal 20 hours. Another way would be to slightly cut down the number of new faculty hires. Not allowing the Legislature to erode our graduate school would send the message that A&M cares about the quality of research and teaching. This presents a more direct path to Vision 2020 than the proposed alternative.

Prepared by physics graduate students, representatives and signed by 278 students.



Monday, July 21, 2003
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2/1 Apartment. 1-yr. lease. +1/2bills. W.D. behind North ASAP! 220-0195.
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