

Taking responsibility

Students partly to blame for loss of college programs as the result of budget cuts

When Texas A&M got strapped with a \$20.5 million reduction in state funding, the University was forced to make some changes. Thirty-nine people were laid off in July and the journalism department is potentially getting the axe, as is the Dairy Center. The colleges of business, architecture, engineering and liberal arts all have enrollment caps, according to The Eagle, and the agricultural education department had a scare earlier in the week when an enrollment cap was implemented, then reversed. Academic programs are all feeling the pinch as the University tries to reduce costs.



JENELLE WILSON

As A&M students come to grips with the changes proposed by the University, they should be happy to know they are not the only ones getting programs stripped out from below them. College students across the nation are facing the same problems as states attempt to offset budget shortfalls by cutting education funding.

And students are partly to blame. Students are not to blame for the existence of the budgetary shortfalls; that blame certainly rests elsewhere. What should be blamed on them, however, is how easy they have made it for state legislatures to cut post-secondary education funding.

College-age Americans have the lowest voter turnout of all groups. During the 2000 elections, only 32 percent of all 18-to-24-year-olds voted. While, according to a poll conducted by the Harvard University Institute of Politics, 59 percent of college students say they will be voting in the 2004 presidential election, voter participation in state and local elections is usually small.

The state and local governments decide policies that directly affect students. It was the state of Texas that, instead of using creativity to design more fund-raisers, simply cut funding and offered public college administrators deregulation as a way to make up the difference.

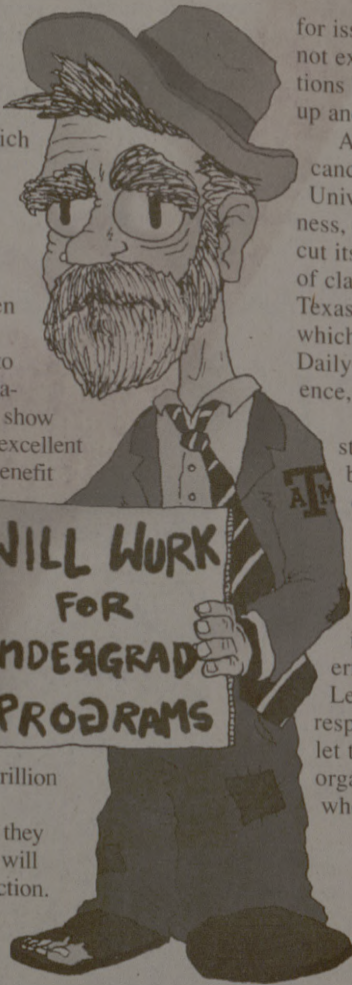
Students let the Legislature do it by not being more

involved, by not making it clear that they would not stand for politicians putting their education on the chopping block.

The United States is a republic, which means the populace elects representatives to government to protect its interests. If students do not vote, do not determine who is in office and do not follow state and local government activities, it should be no surprise when they get the short end of the stick.

Government officials would not dare to propose cuts to funding for elderly populations, because they know the elderly will show their displeasure in the voting booth. An excellent example of this is the prescription drug benefit being reconciled in Congress, which, according to The New York Times, will cost an estimated \$400 billion. Both houses of Congress have passed this bill at the same time the federal government is facing large deficits — an estimated \$5 trillion over the next 10 years, according to the Congressional Budget Office — because they know that if they don't, older Americans will kick them to the curb during the next election.

College students need to follow the example older citizens have set. Students must take responsibility



for issues that affect them, including their education; they cannot expect others to do it for them. If they disagree with situations being forced onto universities by states, they need to stand up and do something about it.

According to The Times, this year the University of Illinois canceled 1,000 classes on hundreds of subjects. The University of Colorado eliminated academic programs in business, engineering and journalism. The University of Michigan cut its teacher training program by half and reduced the number of class time slots across the university. The University of Texas has had to trim \$14.2 million off its academic budget, which resulted in the elimination of 500 jobs. According to The Daily Texan, staffers were laid off in the colleges of natural science, engineering, education and the nursing school.

This budgetary cutting only makes it harder for college students to graduate. When the loss of programs is combined with the rising cost of tuition and reductions in federal aid, such as the Department of Education's Pell Grant funding getting slashed by \$270 million, for many, graduating will become nothing more than a pipe dream.

And this slashing of budgets will not stop until college students force state legislatures to find solutions, be it trimming budgets elsewhere, pushing the federal government for more money or, yes, even raising taxes. Legislators have to know that students are willing to take responsibility and fight for their education. The surest way to let them know that is by getting out and joining political organizations, signing petitions, writing representatives and, when the time comes, punching that ballot.

Jenelle Wilson is a senior political science major. Graphic by Josh Darwin

Stoning of Nigerian woman must be stopped

On March 23, 2002, Amina Lawal, a 30-year-old Nigerian woman, was condemned to die for allegedly committing adultery. If her sentence is carried out, she will die by being buried up to her neck in sand and then pummeled with stones until her skull finally collapses or her head becomes completely severed. Her case necessitates such punishment under a strict Islamic legal code called Shariah because she became pregnant and gave birth to a child outside of marriage.



LINDSAY ORMAN

America and the rest of the world must not tolerate this outrageous and direct assault on human rights with quiet sympathy or deaf ears. While births out of wedlock are no longer punitive in America as they were in Nathaniel Hawthorne's day, such an offense in Nigeria is currently grounds for death. The 2000 return of Shariah brings with it the reinstatement of capital punishment for sex outside of marriage that, in most cases, only applies to the female partner because she is the one left with definite proof of the encounter — a child.

The United States must do more to stop the enforcement of this inhumane punishment. America rushed to the aid of Michael Fay in

1994 when a Singaporean court sentenced him to caning for vandalism. Because the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects against "cruel and unusual punishment," then-President Clinton issued a plea that resulted in a reduced sentence for the teenager.

Other than a House of Representatives resolution condemning stoning as a punishment, little else has been done for Lawal by American government officials. Apparently, corporal punishment for an act of vandalism appalls Americans, but capital punishment for supposed adultery elicits shockingly little response from national leaders.

The United States — a celebrated champion of the voice and worth of people — hypocritically watches this atrocity continue.

Because she is only the second woman convicted — the first was acquitted on a technicality — Lawal's case takes on immense significance for the future of women's and human rights. If she loses her appeal, she will set precedent by becoming the first person to die by stoning in Nigeria, a human rights violation

that the United States and the world community must not allow.

The Katsina State Shariah Appeal Court is now hearing the case and a decision is expected later this month. If it grants Lawal her life, there is a chance this case will quietly fade from the spotlight, leaving an uncertain future for others condemned to stoning. In order to accomplish the preservation of human dignity beyond Lawal's case, something more drastic must be done.

The Supreme Court of Nigeria must overturn her sentence, but more importantly, declare Shariah unconstitutional. The world community must put pressure on Nigeria to ensure this happens.

The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 directly opposes Shariah by asserting "the sanctity of the human person shall be recognized and human dignity shall be maintained and enhanced." Nigeria's national government, according to the British Broadcasting Corporation, concurs and has demanded Lawal's release. This demand has not been met.

“Apparently, corporal punishment for an act of vandalism appalls Americans, but capital punishment for supposed adultery elicits shockingly little response from national leaders.”

Lawal's lawyers, whose funding has been provided by various human rights organizations, believe that the appeals court decision expected on Sept. 25 will be in her favor.

If the Katsina State's Shariah Appeal Court upholds the March 2002 stoning sentence issued by a lower court, then Lawal's only hope is to take her case to the Supreme Court. This battle in the state court needs to be lost in order to win the battle and accomplish a lasting change.

Only through a ruling by the Supreme Court will the federal government have leverage to enforce federal laws in the northern Muslim states, saving not only Lawal's life, but also the lives of others accused in the future.

It is imperative that this case reach the Supreme Court, and that may require intervention on the part of a world power with the economic pull and military backing of the United States.

The judiciary of the federal government must utilize this situation as an opportunity for exercising its power. Otherwise, Nigeria's image will be irrevocably damaged as a country whose federal government lacks sovereignty over its states, a place where human life lacks sanctity and women only dream of equality before the law. For Lawal and daughter Wasila, the stakes are even higher.

Lindsay Orman is a senior English major.

MAIL CALL

Homosexuality not respectable culture

In response to Chris Lively's Sept. 4 column:

As with most news coming out of the "gay and lesbian" division of the country, I find this latest move to incorporate homosexuality as a branch of intellectual study into one of America's foremost universities very disturbing. Contrary to Lively's article, homosexuality is not a culture to be celebrated or a mindset that one is born with. It is a choice that one consciously makes to integrate and pervade in their lifestyle.

I thought it humorous for homosexuality to be equated with some sort of American value that we ought to cherish. It is not a value; rather, it is a degradation of all that is moral and good. I would also like to point out that stereotypes in this case represent exactly what the homosexual "culture" inherently is — perverse and disdainful.

Contrary to what is unfortunately now popular belief, there are absolute morals; there is a right and a wrong.

Homosexuality is not a culture to be respected or tolerated, or as many have liked to say, "celebrated." It is an affront to morals, and values, and should be shunned as the vulgarity that it represents.

Lindsay Arms Class of 2005

Homosexuality a dangerous lifestyle

My main concern is not whether the course on male homosexuality should be taught at a public university in Michigan. What worries me is Mr. Lively's seemingly full acceptance of homosexuality as a "progressing lifestyle," without consideration of the less palat-

able facts regarding that lifestyle. Having an understanding of homosexuality is very important in our culture, but such understanding is not possible if facts are ignored and/or stifled.

According to the Family Research Council Web site, homosexuals tend to have been abused as children and to suffer from poor self-image. Others' violations of these men and women leave them with world views from which it is very difficult to make good judgments regarding sex and relationships, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Studies show homosexuality to be risky and often harmful. Lesbians are at a higher risk for abuse by their partners than heterosexuals and are also more likely to consider suicide. Homosexuals tend to have many more sexual partners.

Disrespect for homosexuals is not tolerable. Such disrespect includes the disservice of failing to inform homosexuals and our society at large of the unpleasant details of this lifestyle choice.

David Dunton Class of 2005

Gays should be allowed to marry

Most Americans do not support legalized gay marriage, but popular opinion is a poor basis for law. There is no foundation for denying equal protection to homosexual couples. Marriage is a legal institution because it is in the best interests of the state to offer protections that promote long-term, committed relationships. The idea is that people in stable relationships are better citizens.

Laws regarding marriage have changed, i.e. the decriminalization of marriage between people of different races. But fundamentally, the state does not determine the appropriateness or the morality of the relationship. The law doesn't prevent people from marrying sole-

ly for financial benefit. It makes no moral statements about those who marry despite a 65-year age difference. A marriage certificate is blandly given to drunken individuals who just met in a casino.

Legal marriage has nothing to do with the "sanctity" of the institute. It provides legal protections to consenting couples to promote the stability of their relationship, and thus of the state. The law does not judge the morality of the relationship when it hands marriage certificates to heterosexual couples, nor should it do so for homosexual couples. Equal rights must be offered to all under the law.

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