

## Compromising education

Initiatives to help relieve overcrowding are causing more harm than good

Classrooms in America are overcrowded. This situation demands the opening of new schools or hiring of more teachers to ameliorate the currently unacceptable learning conditions.



LINDSAY ORMAN

However, building new schools and hiring more teachers costs money. Instead of handling the problem in a way most beneficial to students, state legislatures are using easy fixes that will end up hurting the U.S. educational system in the long run. Take, for example, Florida, which recently passed a law that enables students to opt for the "fast-track" graduation — reducing their high school experience from four years to three.

As executive director of the Broward County School District Fay Clark told to The Associated Press, "This is a strategy for class size reduction, not for quality education."

Implemented on July 1, the Florida law has already begun to adversely affect students, though the real consequences will only begin to be played out over the next year as the first guinea pigs are released into the post-high school world.

The three-year graduation plan abbreviates the traditional 24 credits needed for graduation to a mere 18, with American history, world history, economics, American government, art, physical education and a number of free electives failing to make the cut, according to Florida's St. Petersburg Times.

Ironically, students assume that graduating in three years will put them a year ahead when they start college. However, by axing these core classes, they will not be able to receive Advanced Placement or dual credit or be as likely as their peers to place out of the same college courses by exam. More importantly, by cutting the core curriculum, students are losing the chance to learn the basics they need in order to succeed in college.

Furthermore, the "high-achieving" students who want to graduate early to get into college quicker may not realize that they may not get to college at all; admissions offices at more competitive schools prefer incoming students who display their zest for learning by taking elective fourth year math and sciences or AP classes during their senior year rather than those who just want to get high school over with as soon as possible, according to the St. Petersburg Times.

Students want to graduate early to ease their entrance into college when in fact, they obstruct the very thing they pursue.

Bob Dorn, Pasco Independent School District administrative assistant for secondary schools, told the Tampa Tribune that stu-

dents "are making some important assumptions about the maturity level and readiness level three years down the road."

Important? Foolish seems the better description.

Socially, students will miss out on the experience of senior year and then be thrown into a college environment that many are not yet emotionally and intellectually mature enough to handle.

One parent ignorantly defended enrolling her daughter in the plan to the Panama City News Herald. She justifies sending a should-be high school student prematurely to college based on her idea that, "You have the same atmosphere in college that you do in high school. Or pretty much the same."

She is partly right on the sameness of high school and college: they are both overcrowded.

Florida high schools are not the only place where overcrowding is a problem.

At the University of Southern Florida, 3,600 students will attend classes in nearby mall movie theaters due to the lack of space, according to the St. Petersburg Times. The Machiavellian solution to overcrowding at the high school level will only contribute to existing college overcrowding.

Florida's three-year graduation plan — the cheapest solution translated by Florida lawmakers as the best solution — means

driving students like cattle through the education process.

Condensing four years of education into three inevitably compromises a year's worth of learning.

Texas can sympathize. Principal Sandy McNutt of Wood Elementary School in Arlington described her school to the Arlington Star-Telegram as "wall-to-wall kids." The

University of Texas experienced an overcrowding crisis due in large part to the top 10 percent law implemented by the 1996 Hopwood decision, according to the Austin Review.

While Texas A&M has yet to hold classes at the Cinemark Hollywood USA theater, Texas colleges adopt the same in-and-out approach with the tuition rebate law that went into effect in the fall of 1997 — granting \$1,000 to students who complete their degree plan with an excess of no more than three credit hours.

Rather than fostering academic appreciation and intellectual curiosity that may lie outside the strict requirements of a degree plan, America's schools focus on utilitarian speed and efficiency. That type of education should be reserved for Internet and mail order degree programs.



GRACIE ARENAS • THE BATTALION

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## Government must not fund religious programs

On Monday, the Bush administration announced revised regulations dictating how federal grants to social welfare programs will be awarded. According to Jim Towey, the director of the Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Office, these new regulations are "removing barriers that prohibit faith-based organizations from dealing with the needs of our addicts and our homeless and people seeking to move from welfare to work."



JENELLE WILSON

While it's encouraging that the Bush administration is attempting to help the homeless and needy instead of cutting their funding, these new regulations not only violate federal law, they violate constitutional prohibitions against establishing religion.

In the press briefing on Monday — given by Towey and officials from the Departments of Labor, Housing and Urban Development and Health and Human Services — four finalized regulations were announced. The first would open \$8 million in HUD programs to religious organizations. The second regulation would allow training vouchers to be used for faith-based careers. The third exempts religious organizations hoping to become government contractors from anti-discrimination laws. The last regulation allows religious organizations to

compete for \$20 billion to assist substance abuse, mental health, welfare-to-work and other programs under the HHS, according to The New York Times.

Funding to the Compassion Capital Fund, which is designed to help small religious and community organizations gain access to federal grants, increased from \$20 million to \$30 million as well.

George Washington Law School professor Ira Lupu told the Religious News Service that the Bush administration's actions violate constitutional law, specifically the Lemon test.

The 1971 case of Lemon v. Kurtzman established the three-pronged test to evaluate cases involving the establishment clause of the First Amendment. First, a government action must have a secular purpose. Social programs administered by religious organizations to help the homeless and addicts clearly have such a purpose, but they fail to pass the other two prongs of the test.

A government action cannot help or inhibit religion. This means that if these organizations are infusing religious principles into their programs supported by federal funds, the government is supporting those religious principles. So, under this rule, the government providing money to an alcohol rehabilitation center that simply tries to sober someone up is fine. However, if as a part of the program, an alcoholic is encouraged to be baptized, it fails the test because it would be sup-

porting the religious beliefs of the group running the program.

The Compassion Capital Fund money, in helping religious groups develop programs that are eligible for other federal funding, violates this second prong because it is being used to initiate religious programs.

The last prong of the test prohibits an excessive entanglement between government and religion. "Excessive entanglement" is a lot like "obscurity" — it's hard to define, but people will know it when they see it. Federally funding any social welfare programs infused with religious beliefs fosters this excessive entanglement. Even if the program is not blatantly promoting religion, it is still based on the religious principles of those running it.

The revised HUD regulations also fail this part of the test. According to the Religious News Service, "prorated" HUD funds could go to a hall on the property of a house of worship if a program to help the homeless took place in one of the rooms (even if a religiously-motivated program took place in the other rooms). By providing funds for the building, the government is supporting all other programs that take place in that building, which is prohibited.

The new regulations are praised by the Bush administration as "leveling the playing field" for religious organizations and ensuring that these organizations are treated equally with the non-religious programs eligible for federal funds. The

actual regulations, however, directly contradict this purpose. They are not holding religious organizations to the same standards as nonreligious ones, specifically in the rules for employment.

The Bush administration's actions violate Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, sex and pregnancy. There is a specified exception for religious organizations as private entities; however, once these organizations start to receive funding they must be held to the same standards as other government contractors.

If government contractors lose eligibility to federal funds when they discriminate in employment, so should religious organizations. Exempting religious groups from this requirement is not putting them on a level playing field; it's giving them special privileges not available to others.

Providing funding for America's downtrodden is always a noble cause, but it has to be done in a way that conforms to constitutional doctrine and federal law, which these regulations fail to do. They fail to meet the requirements of the Lemon test, and they fail to conform to the Title VII rules dictating hiring practices. Funding for these programs belongs in the private sphere, not the public.

Jenelle Wilson is a senior political science major.

### MAIL CALL

#### Fourth Amendment not applicable to RIAA

In response to Mike Walters' Sept. 23 column:

I will not get into opinions on the RIAA and peer-to-peer file sharing, but I am getting awfully tired of people blindly claiming Constitutional violations. I do not know where Mike Walters found the RIAA claiming to be immune from the Fourth Amendment because they are not the police, but that is a moot point.

When someone shares files on a peer-to-peer network, they have a selected file folder that is shared. Any copyrighted material being shared has been made accessible, and other network users search for the files they want. Therefore, the RIAA's searches are "akin to the

police randomly knocking on doors and searching for drugs." However, there is nothing illegal about police randomly knocking on doors and asking to search for drugs if the homeowner opens the door and consents to the search.

Archie Goodman  
Class of 2004

#### Negative aspects of Iraq war newsworthy

In response to Nick Nethery's Sept. 23 column:

In his column, Nethery complains how some journalists report only the negative aspects of the Iraq war. He forgets in his commentary that some people consider the entire war to be negative. As a fel-

low history major, I must remind him that Iraq is located where Mesopotamia — the world's first civilization — once existed. The news coverage of people looting museums is important to all humanity because some of the world's oldest historical artifacts were in danger. These artifacts represent the heritage of the entire civilized world, including the United States.

Nethery also takes issue with the fact that journalists want revenge for the death of their coworker who died in Iraq. I must again remind him that the entire war on terrorism started as revenge for people who died in 9-11. I guess it's OK for President Bush to pursue violent revenge but it is not OK for journalists to engage in peaceful vengeance.

Jonathan Smith  
Class of 2005

#### Evolutionary theory evidence is weak

In response to a Sept. 23 mail call:

I agree with Dr. Cassone's statement that the "invocation of (a Designer) is a outside the boundaries of (science)." I'm not a scientist, but I think I understand correctly that science is the study of the natural world; it does not address the supernatural world.

I also agree that students should "take a course in introductory biology, read the evidence and think

about it." A few years ago, I was unsure whether or not evolution was a real process and an accurate account of history, primarily because I was unfamiliar with the arguments used to support it. So I studied the basics of modern biology and historical geology.

As I did, I became convinced — convinced that the arguments (at least those to which I was exposed) are in fact rather weak. I now think that evolution, in particular evolutionary history, is little more than "scientific" dogma.

Jonathan Hebert  
Class of 2004

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