

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Mission: Possible

Freshman Business Initiative helps students form bonds with fellow Aggies

By Julie Ahmad
THE BATTALION

When Osei Bonsu, a senior accounting major, fell sick with pneumonia his freshman year, he had to spend a week in the hospital. Because Bonsu was new to Texas A&M, he was not expecting many visitors, but he was in for a surprise.

"My Freshman Business Initiative mentors showed up with all kinds of gifts and it really made my week," Bonsu said. "The best part of being in the FBI is the mentors."

For the past three years, the Freshman Business Initiative has provided Mays Business School freshmen the opportunity to participate in a learning community that fosters successful transition into the University and the business school. The student-developed and student-run organization is also a registered class with a curriculum and grades. FBI was established in Fall 2000 by 20 honors-program freshmen who wanted to address the issues faced by other freshmen at the University.

Sally Mullins, a junior marketing major and program participant, said one of the main purposes of FBI is to help incoming freshmen cope with the difficulties of college life.

"You come in as a freshman, and you're overwhelmed," Mullins said. "FBI helped us get a better perception of A&M and the business school."

Student body president and founding member Matt Josefy said FBI had a humble beginning.

"The FBI started on sticky notes," said Josefy, a senior accounting major. "We wrote all the problems that freshmen faced on sticky notes, put them on the chalkboard, and asked each other what we could do to solve some of them."

Dr. Martha Loudder, an accounting professor and FBI's faculty adviser, said the students collaborated to develop a business plan, a funding proposal, a curriculum and a class. After a semester of preparation, FBI was launched with one clear purpose.

"Our objective is to ease the transition from high school to college and increase the retention rate," Loudder said. "We look at everything and ask the question, 'does this give a small school feel to a large university?' Finding the solutions to this question is our mission."

The FBI curriculum, which can be taken for two credit hours as a business elective, includes weekly presentations, workshops and small group discussions on business education, such as resume writing and business ethics; general education, such as time management and good study skills; and social adjustment, such as interpersonal relations and business etiquette. The FBI combines substantive education with interactive social training.

"We try to include fun things that involve learning," Loudder said. "For example, we have an etiquette dinner at Pebble Creek Country Club and we have a professional trainer to show students proper dining etiquette."

Loudder said that for every 10 freshmen participants, the FBI program provides two student mentors and a faculty adviser.

"The more contact with upperclassmen and faculty, the more likely it is that a student will succeed," Josefy said. "The organization is about personal connection and how to develop relationships



JOSHUA HOBSON • THE BATTALION

Senior accounting majors Katie Bailey (left), director of mentor development and Sarah McMaster, developer of curriculum, work on a comment box before the weekly FBI meeting in Wehner 136 Monday evening.

with peers and faculty."

Joe Medina, a senior accounting major and one of the FBI founders, said FBI helped him develop into the person he is today.

"When I came to A&M I was so shy," Medina said. "I had a really hard time, but you wouldn't know that now. In FBI, bonds are definitely formed."

Medina said steps are taken to make sure that mentors fulfill their duties as desired.

"We offer the mentors two options. They can use the experience as three credit business elective hours or they can choose to take a \$500 stipend for their efforts," Medina said. "The rationale behind this is to have a form of regulation. If they don't meet the required expectations, we can lower their grade or reduce their stipend. Fortunately we have never had to use this option."

Letters about FBI are sent to incoming freshmen after they are admitted to the business school encouraging them to register for the program. Since there are only a limited number of spaces, students are randomly selected from the pool of registered students. The random selection process was established to provide all students an equal opportunity to participate.

"We didn't want FBI to be exclusive toward honors students, we wanted to reach as many freshmen as possible," Josefy said.

The FBI program started with 100 student spots in 2000.

"Within four minutes, all the spots were taken and 250 people were on the waiting list," Josefy said.

The popularity of the program has led to a rapid expansion, doubling the number of participants to 200. Loudder anticipates further expansion.

"We hope to expand to meet the demand of all the students who want to be in FBI," Loudder said. "It all depends on how much funding we have, if there are enough students to be mentors, enough classrooms and enough faculty advisers."

Falling short of mentors, however, is an unlikely problem for FBI. Katie Bailey, a senior management major and FBI board member, said that more than 25 percent of freshman participants apply to be mentors the following year.

"All the people who put FBI together shared a passion for helping other people," Josefy said. "The greatest evidence of the success of the program is the number of students who want to come back and be a mentor."



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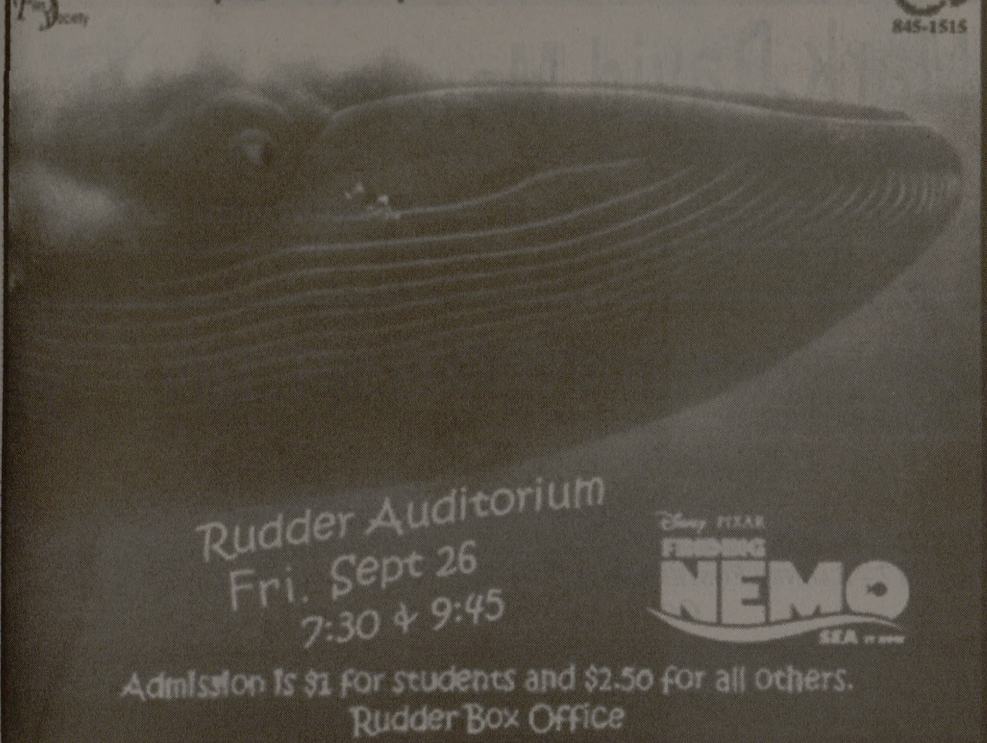
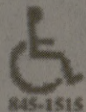
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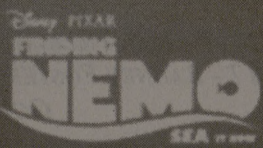


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