

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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College station's new last call

Later bar closing times result in apathy for some, extended party time for others

By Crystal Polasek
THE BATTALION

Julie Martinez has grown accustomed to staying up until the wee hours of the morning and waking up in time for class in the morning. Bartending at night had forced her into this routine, but recent changes to a city ordinance will force her to readjust to new closing times.

Drink specials, pool tables, live music and dancing have often drawn students to spend their evenings at bars until last call, just before 1 a.m. — make that 2 a.m., the new closing time approved by the College Station City Council in August.

Students are developing opinions regarding the new closing time though it is questionable what kind of impact the change may have on student life and night club businesses.

Martinez, a 1999 A&M graduate and College Station resident, has been employed at several nightclubs across Texas that closed at 2 a.m. and some that closed at 1 a.m. She said it's hard to adjust to a new schedule, but that's the nature of the business.

"I eventually got used to waking up late and going to sleep late. And if business is good, I never really notice what time it is," Martinez said. "The new closing time might help the clubs here make more money and that's what it's all about."

She said the extra hour will give students something more to talk about, and they will believe there's more party time, but in reality, most will spend the same amount of time at clubs that they had before.

The Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission now requires all bars in Texas to close at either 12 a.m. or 2 a.m.

Therefore, College Station's City Council opted to have bars close at 2 a.m., said Becky Hagen, police assistant for the College Station Police Department.

"I can't tell whether this will be beneficial because the law has been in effect since only August 28," she said. "It's too soon to know if there will be a change in alcohol-related incidents."

Some students, such as Josh Martin, a sophomore math major, anticipate the new closing time will lead to further intoxication and contribute to accidents.

Martin said many of his friends have decided to start drinking earlier in the evening, before they go to the bars. Many of them are also under the legal drinking age of 21, he said.

"Before the new closing time, they would get home from work around 10 p.m., and didn't drink much because they wanted to get to the bar before it closed," he said. "But now, they drink more because they have more time to make it there."

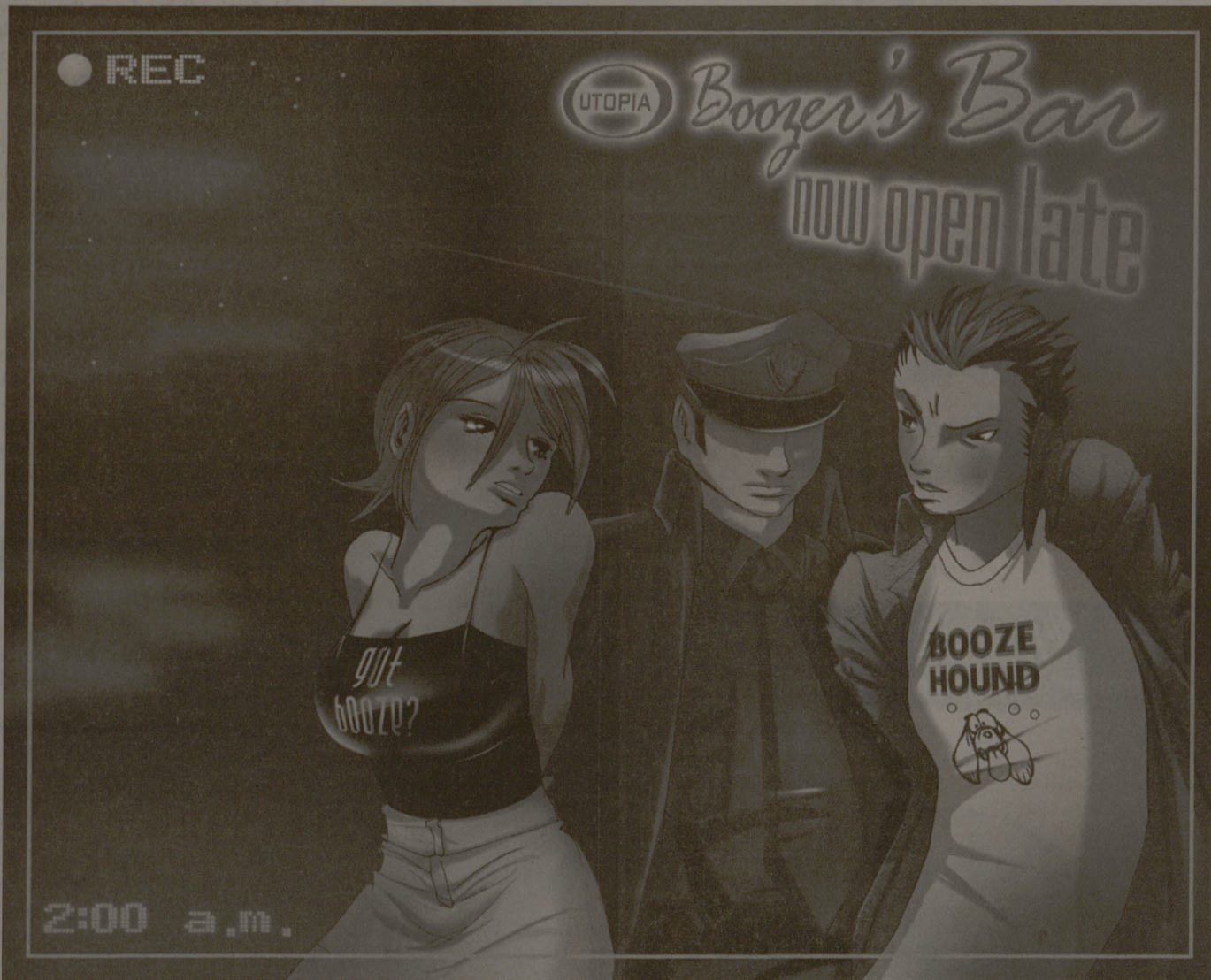
Chris Niebuhr, a senior wildlife and fishery sciences major, disagrees.

"I end up staying out later but don't necessarily drink more," he said.

In addition to concerns about underage drinking, some fear the roads may be less safe in the early morning hours.

"Students who choose to drink will do so regardless of the time and whether it happens at home, a restaurant, a club or a bar."

— Erin McMurray
senior bioenvironmental sciences major



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"The bars aren't opening any later, but now they can close later. That means there is one extra hour for people to get more drunk and then get in their cars and try to drive," said Allison Talley, a freshman education major.

"The added hour doesn't inspire people to show up later at the bar, but instead provides them with more time to get intoxicated," said Valerie Redd, a sophomore business major.

The extra hour may, indeed, give veteran partygoers more time to drink but most students probably won't choose to make use of it, said Amie Cole, a senior psychology major.

Since she's been out at clubs, Cole said, most of the crowd is still gone before 1 a.m., and few remain until 2 a.m.

"Most people will just go out later, knowing they have an extra hour," she said.

There are people who still leave earlier than 2 a.m. and often don't even notice the bars are closing later.

Hole in the Wall is a great place to hang out no matter what the hour is, said Tara Oprea, a junior agricultural development major.

"I'm not your typical party girl — I don't stay out until 2 in the morning, even though I could now," she said. "But I do have friends who work at the bar, and they don't get home now until 3 or 4 a.m. It would literally kill me to work those hours."

Party habits will continue as they have in the past and students will drink just as they've been doing for decades, said Erin McMurray, a senior bioenvironmental sciences major.

"Students who choose to drink will do so regardless of the time and whether it happens at home, a restaurant, a club or a bar," she said. "And if they still want to drink after the bar closes, they will go to a friend's house and continue."

McMurray said a lot of students are delighted about the change even though they can drink anywhere, at any time.

Niebuhr will continue to take advantage of the later closing times.

"I think it was necessary," he said. "Most cities and towns have 2 a.m. closing times and a college town like College Station definitely should have one."

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