



ART WRIGHT • THE BATTALION

Junior education major **Laura Heine** inserts a suggestion into the newly-renovated "Aggie Input" suggestion box in the Memorial Student Center Thursday evening.

TAMC: Students voices' can be heard

By **Rhiannon Meyers**
THE BATTALION

Rickey Davis, a junior construction science major, said he has always had a problem with the University's drainage system, but has never known who to complain to.

"It doesn't work, and the sidewalks turn to gullies," Davis said. "The only people I would think to ask would be maintenance, but the drainage system isn't really their problem."

Christina Bethancourt, chair of Texas Aggies Making Changes, said concerns such as Davis' prompted TAMC to build suggestion boxes. TAMC installed the boxes in the Memorial Student Center last spring to give

students a way to voice their concerns to the administration.

"Anybody can make suggestions for stuff on campus or off campus," Bethancourt said. "(Suggestions can be about) anything they see that can be improved or changed. Anybody is more than welcome to come put their input in."

Katie McKennon, director of TAMC's Aggie Input, said that the organization received 130 valid suggestions since last fall. McKennon said the organization enters all suggestions into a database and then takes the suggestions to the proper authorities.

"A&M may be an amazing place, but there is a lot of room for improvement," McKennon said. "You may as well have your suggestion heard, because you are paying enough money

to come here."

McKennon said that this semester TAMC decided to renovate the boxes to attract more attention. Earlier this week, she said, a new box was unveiled, and students should expect to see more renovated boxes around campus soon.

"The last (boxes) were a great first-time effort but overall we needed a facelift," McKennon said. "I think the new look will cause more people to stop by and drop off a suggestion, and actually have it heard."

Bethancourt said the new boxes were constructed by TAMC members and volunteers, and cost the organization \$150 — paid from its

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SGA severs ties with FCIC due to diversity

By **James Twine**
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M Student Senate severed ties with the Faculty Committed to an Inclusive Campus (FCIC), due to differences in race-based admissions ideals.

The two organizations had scheduled a Feb. 18 diversity march before they realized their agenda differences, said Student Services Chair John Mathews.

Although both organizations support diversity, the FCIC supports race-based admissions and SGA opposes race being a factor in admissions criteria, Mathews said.

"I believe in the admission policy based on merit," said Sen. Jeff Graham, a junior business major.

The legislation was a part of the "Support for Diversity Bill," an emergency legislation bill passed by the Student Senate during Wednesday night's scheduled Senate meeting.

According to the bill, "the Student Government Association denounces the discriminatory agenda of the Faculty Committed to an Inclusive Campus and shall not cooperate with that organization in any way."

The FCIC takes a different stance on diversity. The organization's Web site states, "We urge (University) President Robert M. Gates to reverse his stated policy on admissions and consider race and ethnicity as central factors in admissions as well as in recruitment and finan-

cial decisions."

Gates' admission policy includes individual achievement, leadership potential and personal strength, but not race.

As part of its split, SGA will not cooperate with the FCIC including participating in the Feb. 18 march, Matthew said.

Harris Berger, a member of the FCIC, said that the FCIC was upset that the SGA recalled their support of the march.

"(The idea) started out as an informal discussion," Berger said. "Some people don't wish to be involved because of their standing with the University... but if something's going to happen it's going to happen."

"The event that was originally publicized was a noble event. Then I discovered FCIC's position on diversity," Mathews said. "(The FCIC position) appeared to be withheld from sponsors."

The Student Senate has authorized its diversity team to organize a march of its own to be called Aggie March for Merit, beginning at 3:15 p.m. on Feb. 18.

The SGA march supports the admissions policy instituted by Gates as well as the progress it will represent for diversity at A&M.

Mathews said he was disturbed because the FCIC withheld information from SGA and others.

"So many people had united for this cause, and to now realize that FCIC was

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Be mine



JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION

Biomedical sciences major **Sarah Angermiller** searches for thornless roses to complete an order for Petal Patch Florist Thursday afternoon. Petal Patch ordered 30,000 to 40,000

roses in preparation for Valentine's Day. Last year, Petal Patch received more than 500 orders on Valentine's Day alone.

Gay couples marry in San Francisco

By **Lisa Leff**
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO — In an open challenge to California law, city authorities performed at least 15 same-sex weddings Thursday and issued about a dozen more marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples.

By midafternoon, jubilant gay couples were lining up under City Hall's ornate gold dome and exchanging vows in two-minute ceremonies that followed one after another.

"Today a barrier to true justice has been removed," said Gavin Newsom, newly elected mayor of the city considered the capital of gay America.

No state legally sanctions gay marriage, and it remains unclear what practical value the marriage licenses will have. The weddings violate a ballot measure California voters approved in 2000 that defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

The move by San Francisco's mayor came as lawmakers in Massachusetts continued to debate a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage in that state, where the nation's first legally recognized same-sex weddings are set to take place this spring under a ruling from the Massachusetts high court.

The assembly-line nuptials

began with longtime lesbian activists Phyllis Lyon, 79, and Del Martin, 83, who were hurriedly issued a married license and were wedded just before noon by City Assessor Mabel Teng in a closed-door civil ceremony at City Hall. The two have been a couple for 51 years.

About 30 couples crowded outside the San Francisco County Clerk's office awaiting licenses, many arm in arm. One of the women, wearing a white wedding dress and veil, encouraged couples to shout out their names and how long they had been together.

"I understand there are wrinkles that need to be worked out, but as far as I'm concerned, we will be married," said Molly McKay as she and her partner of eight years, Davina Kotulski, stood at the clerk's counter.

During one of the weddings, performed before TV cameras, the vows were rewritten so that "husband and wife" became "spouse for life."

A conservative group called the Campaign for California Families called the marriages a sham.

"These unlawful certificates are not worth the paper they are printed on. The renegade mayor of San Francisco has no authority to do this," said Randy Thomasson, executive director.

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UPD promotes bike theft prevention

By **Pammy Ramji**
THE BATTALION

University police urge students to take precautions in protecting their bikes on campus.

In 2003, a total of 261 bikes were stolen from campus, including 100 last semester, according to University Police Department statistics.

"It appears that there are now more bikers than ever," said Sgt. Allan Baron of the UPD crime prevention unit. "To prevent bikes from being stolen, we try to educate the students by letting them know that bike theft can be a problem, and it's very important to secure your bike."

UPD officers also warn students to be aware of the quick-release tire on newer model bikes.

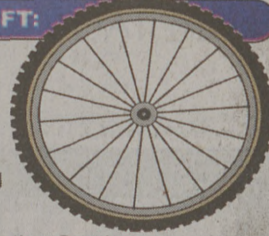
"Students often lock their bike with a case-hardened lock through the front tire only, but bike thieves can easily slip the front wheel off and take the frame," Baron said.

In 2000, Esteban Irigoyen, 26, an electrical engineering graduate student, was arrested for stealing bikes. Members of UPD staked out the Memorial Student Center and Rudder complex, where they placed two bikes as bait one morning. Irigoyen jumped on the bicycle and

HOW TO PREVENT BIKE THEFT:

- Engrave your driver license number on the frame of the bike.
- Secure the bike frame and rear wheel to a bicycle rack.
- Use a quality case-hardened steel U-bolt lock.
- Register your bike with Transportation Services.

If your bike is stolen, immediately report it to the UPD by calling: 845-2345



RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION
SOURCE: ST. ALLAN BARON

tried to ride away when two undercover police officers arrested him.

Baron recommends students engrave their driver license number on the frame of the bike, secure the bike at least through the frame and rear wheel to a bicycle rack, use a quality case-hardened steel U-bolt lock and register bikes with Transportation Services to prevent bikes

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U.S. commander in Iraq escapes injury

By **Robert Burns**
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FALLUJAH, Iraq — Insurgents launched a bold attack Thursday on an Iraqi civil defense compound in this volatile city just as the commander of all U.S. forces in the Middle East, Gen. John Abizaid, arrived to visit.

Three explosions ripped through an area near the compound and a six-minute gun battle ensued. Abizaid and his party, including another senior Army commander, escaped injury and quickly left.

Although soldiers said insurgent attacks on the compound are not uncommon,

Thursday's close call suggested the attackers may have targeted Abizaid, the four-star general who runs the war in Iraq — raising new questions about how much control Americans have in the region.

It also seemed to underscore that much work remains before the Iraqis are ready to handle violence encouraged by shadowy former members of Saddam Hussein's government as well as foreign terrorists. In Thursday's incident, Iraqis initially refused to go into a mosque to search for the attackers, U.S. officials said.

The violence broke out as a U.N. envoy met with Iraq's leading Shiite cleric and told him the world was behind his demand for

national elections. But there was no sign of agreement on when a vote would be held — the central issue in Shiite opposition to the U.S. plan for handing over power to Iraqis this summer.

The cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Hussein al-Sistani, wants elections to create a provisional legislature that can run the country, but the United States says there is not enough time to organize an election before the deadline for transferring power.

In New York, the spokesman of U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan suggested that

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