

OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 9 • Wednesday, March 10, 2004

EDITORIAL REMEMBERING MARGARET RUDDER

Aggies everywhere are deeply saddened by the death of Margaret Rudder, the first lady of Texas A&M. Rudder died one week ago today at St. Joseph Regional Health Center in Bryan. While it is appropriate for the A&M community to grieve over the loss of a legend, this should also be a time to celebrate Rudder's incredible life.

The Aggie family was first graced with Rudder's presence in 1958 when she moved to College Station with her husband, war hero Gen. James Earl Rudder. Gen. Rudder would become the most important president A&M has ever had, and his wife built a separate and equally extraordinary legacy. After Gen. Rudder died in 1970, Mrs. Rudder remained an invaluable member of the A&M community.

This entire newspaper could be filled with stories of Rudder's dedication, loyalty, kindness, grace and her love for A&M and Aggies. She wrote "The Muster Song" in 1975, which is sung at every Muster by the Singing Cadets. "The Muster Song" is an integral part of one of A&M's most important traditions.

A&M showed its appreciation to Rudder in various ways. She was an honorary member of the Singing Cadets. A Southside residence hall is named in her honor. A Memorial Student Center leadership award is also in her name. But none of those tokens could ever equal what Rudder gave this University.

The title of legend is one to be given away sparingly, but Rudder surely earned this designation many times over. She is irreplaceable, and her loss will be felt deeply. From the bottom of every Aggie's heart, thank you, Mrs. Rudder.

THE BATTALION EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor in Chief	ELIZABETH WEBB	Opinion Asst.	MATT RIGNEY
Managing Editor	KENDRA KINGSLEY	Member	DAVID SHOEMAKER
Opinion Editor	GEORGE DEUTSCH	Member	CHRIS LIVELY
Metro Editor	MELISSA SULLIVAN	Member	COLLINS EZEANYIM

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebattalion.net

MAIL CALL

SGA essentially a 'well-funded clique'

In response to Sara Foley's March 9 column:

I am glad to see that more people are finally coming to the realization that the SGA, in its current form, is nothing more than a well-funded clique that does little (and in many cases, nothing to promote student interests or concerns.

When Student Body President Matt Josefy says that most of the SGA's work is done "behind the scenes," he is telling me that most of its work is done for the benefit of the SGA and not the greater student body. With the SGA receiving nearly \$160,000 in student service fee appropriations for this school year, the students of Texas A&M should demand to see some type of return on this investment. With student body elections just around the corner, it is my hope that we will start electing student leaders who will stop working "behind the scenes" for the benefit of the SGA and start working in public view to represent all Aggies.

Wesley Dixon
Class of 2007
SGA Watch

Parties defined by more than two issues

In response to Clint Rainey's March 9 column:

Clint Rainey's piece filled the word count requirements nicely. It would have been equally nice if his 877 words possessed some measure of content. Rainey banded about the terms "conservative" and "liberal" as if just using those terms is content enough. In his call for conservatives to rise up and combat liberalism, he never defines a conservative or explains what this liberal menace actually is. The only clue he offers is his explanation about liberals wanting more diversity and gay rights. Is he calling for conservatives to openly hate gay people and minorities? Or should they just deny them equal rights? Rainey never comes close to explaining what these conservatives need to stand for. I would like to think that conservatives base their ideology on more than two issues. If Rainey truly wants to see the oppressed majority of conservatives rise up to end liberalism, perhaps he should be more specific in his marching orders. But that might mean a more thoughtful consideration of the actual issues, which would mean Rainey might have to put some actual work into his future pieces.

Burton French
Class of 2002

Stop playing the MSC Flag Room piano

I felt it necessary to write in about what is going on in the MSC Flag Room. People are playing the piano. I am trying to fall asleep to the soothing sound of a crowded room and somebody has the nerve to start playing Moonlight Sonata or Claire de Lune. Now don't get me wrong, I love the piano and do enjoy the occasional Super Mario Bros. theme or even a tune from Rocky, but please stop playing that classical noise. There are plenty of other places downstairs where you can play instead of attempting to "serenade" us while we study or try to pass out in peace and quiet.

Charles Holland
Class of 2005

Student body should hold administration accountable

At Texas A&M, removing a tradition from campus is a difficult and rare thing, and it often induces a serious culture shock. Bonfire was one such event that caused students to question the University's decision-making processes in events that are student-run. A shift began to occur in student-administration relations. It is not because the quality of the University's staff has declined, as many smart, capable and creative people work at A&M. The student body has not declined in quality either. Somehow, the process in reaching decisions that affect students has changed.

Now, it seems the University administration has decided that it knows what is best for students, and students' opinions are no longer important, due to recent major decisions that were made without consulting students or even giving them information about those decisions. Such issues included the ruckus over the closing of Hotard Hall, the mishandling of the Parsons Mounted Cavalry case and the decisions to close the schools of journalism and dairy science.

University administrators made important decisions and then simply presented them to the affected parties — primarily students — as a fait accompli, or an act already done.

These decisions were largely — if not entirely — made without meaningful student input. For example, at no time during the decision-making process to close Hotard Hall were the residents asked for their opinions about what was going on. Even after they were told that a decision had been made without their input, the Committee on the Built Environment did not provide residents with facts to justify its decision. And after the decision was announced, administrators tried to quiet dissent by offering first choice for on-campus housing and discounts for the displaced residents.

In another instance, although the University did provide some information about its decisions to close the colleges of dairy science and journalism, none of that information made an irrefutable case for closure. Decisions to close a residence hall or an academic department are major ones, which can leave students in a bind.



DAVID SHOEMAKER

In the case of the Parsons Mounted Cavalry, there were allegations of hazing throughout the unit. Hazing is in violation of A&M rules and can have serious consequences. But the University's investigation seems to have gone wrong from the beginning. In a matter where students' careers and the University's reputation were at stake, extra efforts should have been taken to make sure the investigation weren't tainted.

According to The Eagle, the accused cadets were denied the right to an attorney and were subjected to verbal abuse during their hearings, among other problems. In the end, this case of mishandling resulted in an embarrassing court defeat for the University. Those in charge of the case should not have violated the students' rights to due process in order to make a case.

With these instances in mind, it seems as if the administration feels that there is only one important constituency on campus — other staff members. Repeatedly, decisions are made without proper consultation of students, in meetings closed to the public and presented without much, if any, justification. This is unacceptable.

Students are one of the most important constituencies on campus. As taxpayers, they are shareholders of the University, and they pay tuition as customers. Although student concerns are not always going to be the most pressing, they still deserve to be heard. Those in power can afford to take time out to seek students' opinions on matters that affect them.

President Gates' tuition forums have been an imperfect means of accounting for student opinion. Although at these forums students were allowed to pose questions to administrators, and they provided some answers, at no time were these forums presented as a meant for students to actually influence the present decision to raise

tuition. The forums still asked for student input after the fact, not in a constructive fashion before a decision is made.

One person that actually took the time to seek student opinions about a decision that had not been made was Transportation Services Director Rodney Weis. After outrage over proposals related to the Southside Parking Garage, TS and the Student Senate organized parking forums to discuss proposed changes to the parking plan. There, TS representatives answered questions about future plans and explained why those plans were made.

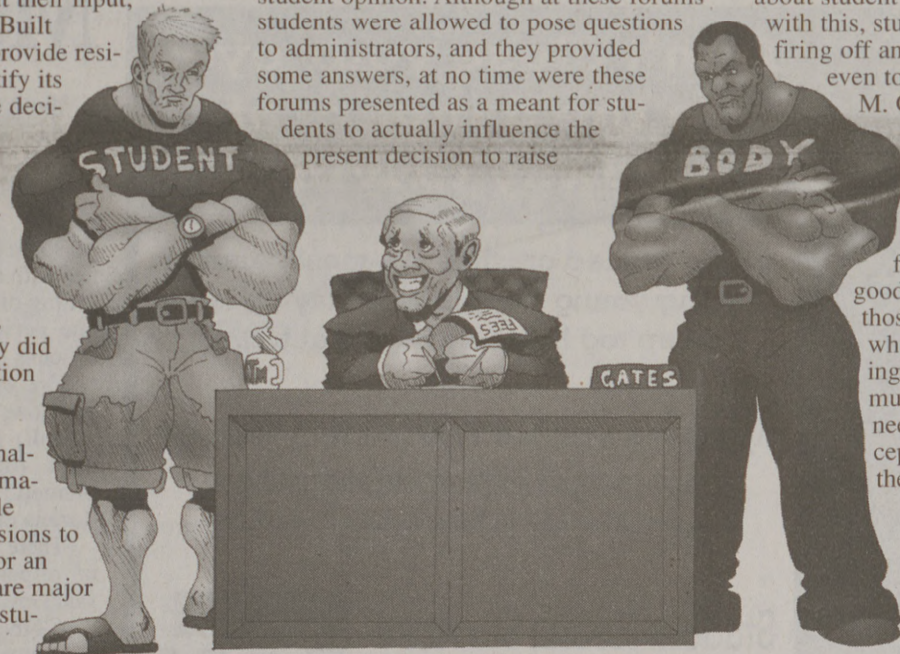
Although TS parking plans have been shelved for now, the idea that students should have a say in a transparent decision on other important matters should not be. Having meetings where students can voice their opinions on matters before a decision is made would be much more constructive than the adversarial confrontations that will inevitably occur after a decision, such as the one on the Hotard Hall issue, is made.

And opposition to holding such forums due to lack of student involvement is not a valid excuse. True, not every student will care, but the opinions of those who do still matter. Perhaps if students know that their comments will affect a decision's outcome, they might be more inclined to participate. There is nothing more damaging to feelings of civic responsibility than being told, "thanks for your suggestions, but we're going to do what we want anyway."

Student leaders must also push students to speak out on major issues. The Student Government Association and other representative bodies on campus cannot continue to lag behind events on campus. They need to be more proactive in finding out about student concerns. In accordance with this, students should not be afraid of firing off an e-mail to their senators or even to University President Robert M. Gates.

The one thing the A&M administration and students should remember is that we are all in this together. The University will not remain a flagship University without good communication between those who attend it and those who run it. There is no rule stating that either side must have mutually exclusive desires. They need to overcome their preconceptions and work together for the future.

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.
Graphic by Chris Griffin



Sloan did the right thing by speaking out against editorial

And you thought The Battalion was the only collegiate paper to be mired in controversy for its opinion section. The Lariat, Baylor University's student newspaper, has found itself in the hot seat recently due to a controversial editorial praising San Francisco city officials for seeking to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. But Baylor University President Robert B. Sloan has caught more heat over the controversy for speaking out against the editorial. While clearly Sloan and the editorial board had good intentions for their actions, the religious bigotry displayed by one Texas newspaper gives a perfect example of why Baylor has good reason to exert control over its own publication.

The Lariat editorial, which equated the current ban on homosexual couples marrying to racial discrimination, was rightfully met with reproach last week from Sloan. Sloan stated in a public letter, "Espousing in a Baylor publication a view that is so out of touch with traditional Christian teachings is not only unwelcome, it comes dangerously close to violating University policy." By remaining silent on the issue, Sloan would have been condoning the erosion of Baylor's principles. By taking a public stand to clarify university policy and philosophy, he was protecting the body of rules and beliefs that has made Baylor what it is today. However, the student editors were not all wrong.

An editorial board and opinion section is designed to express the personal views of the publication's writers, editors and readers. The opinion section serves as a reflection of and indeed the facilitator of public discourse. The expression of differing opinions, the true diversity needed in higher education, has dramatic educational benefits. Sloan's opposition to the editorial board for expressing its personal opinions defeats the purpose of the board and the opinion section itself. By the very existence of an opinion page, writers and editors have a duty to engage the debates of the day. The Lariat's student editorial board did exactly that. There is little point in having an opinion section if writers must toe a specific line and not honestly engage in current events.

What sets the situation with The Lariat apart is that The



MATTHEW MADDOX

Lariat is a publication of the country's largest Baptist institution of higher education. Whereas The Battalion is largely independently financed and operated, The Lariat is actually owned by Baylor. If public officials, such as the Texas A&M administration, call for the censorship of opinions published in this paper, they are treading dangerously close to stepping on First Amendment rights. In Baylor's case, private institution officials were keeping their own publication in line. As The New York Times reporter and former editor-in-chief of The Lariat Edward Wyatt wrote on a journalism electronic bulletin board, "The student editors had picked up a vital real-world lesson: the difference between censorship and ownership." Ultimately, Sloan did his job as spokesman for the university.

Enter The Houston Chronicle. Since Sloan issued his condemnation of the Lariat editorial, The Chronicle has run a syndicated column and its own editorial personally attacking Sloan and the Christian beliefs that Baylor is built upon. The column referred to Sloan, a Baylor alumnus and holder of a Doctorate of Theology, as "Bubba" and claimed that "deep Baptist Texas" does not have "American mainstream and 21st century thinking." The column also referred to Baylor as a "Bible-toting, baby-sitter school." It finishes by joking about Baptists and sexual positions. The Chronicle's editorial claimed that Baylor could not become a great institution if "all university endeavors must be aligned with biblical precepts" and called for Sloan's resignation.

The Chronicle, which lacks any resemblance to a fair and balanced editorial board, has no room to speak when it comes to using a single mindset to dictate editorial policy. The Chronicle's actions speak louder than words in the debate of whether or not Baylor should regulate the anti-Christian content of its paper. The Chronicle could learn a lot about tolerance from a Baylor education.

Matthew Maddox is a senior management major.