

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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Unfair drug law

Scholarship policy punishes students for crimes already handled by the courts

Something is horribly amiss when the government will grant federal aid for education to violent offenders such as murderers, rapists, arsonists, armed robbers and child molesters, but not to a former drug offender trying to get his life back on track. Something is not right when such a law affects drug offenders from wealthy families very little while robbing those convicted of the same crime in poorer families of the opportunity for an education. Something is terribly wrong with a law when its author has encouraged those who have suffered because of it to sue the government.



LINDSAY ORMAN

A provision enacted in October 1998 under the Higher Education Act bans past drug offenders from receiving student financial aid but does more harm than good and fails to accomplish the purpose for which it was originally established.

According to the provision, aid in the form of federal grants and loans is suspended for one year following a first drug offense and two years following the second. For students, this means that as many as 26,000 applicants were refused assistance in 2003, not including those who never bothered to apply as a result of the rule, University Wire reported.

Many of the would-be students were denied aid on account of drug possessions for which they had already been punished and sentenced years before. For them, the law did not deter drug use, as was its intent, but rather in ex post facto style "end(ed) up discouraging people from moving on with their lives," as Michael Dean, a Denver-based substance abuse counselor told The New York Times. "At what point in our society do we say that a person has paid their debt?"

His concern is echoed by Jason Bell, a senior at San Francisco State University who served almost 10 years in prison for attempted murder and now assists other ex-convicts in getting a higher education. Bell wonders how he managed to fund his education through federal loans and grants — without a problem — while so many convicted of much more minor crimes have such difficulty. "It's a form of double jeopardy," he told the Times. "They do the time, but then there are still roadblocks when they finish. I don't believe people should be punished twice."

The author of the law, Rep. Mark Souder, R-Ind., agrees. "It's absurd on the face of it," he told the Times.

Souder blames the Clinton and Bush administrations for the misapplication of the law, saying they transformed it from its intended purpose of discouraging drug use among financial aid recipients to a means of keeping reformed offenders from getting

an education, arguably the most essential factor in rising above a life of drug use.

Education is especially important for poor students, if they are to escape poverty and the lifestyle of crime that so often accompanies it. These students are hardest hit by the law, as wealthier students are more likely to attend college, without federal aid. The discrimination is intensified by the fact that wealthy families are also more likely to avoid drug convictions in the first place, as they can afford more expensive legal counsel, according to University Wire.

In defense of the provision, proponents cite the stipulation that students can regain aid through attending drug treatment. However, many treatment programs are as expensive as a year of college, coverage by private insurance companies is scant and in some states such as Connecticut, subsidies for inpatient youth treatment have been virtually eliminated, as reported by The Associated Press. "If I couldn't afford to pay for school, then how was I supposed to pay for these programs?" one student said to the Times.

Congress is scheduled to clarify the law, as the president's latest budget includes a commitment for its revision. According to the proposed change, the law would then apply only to students already in college when the offense was committed. Though this revised law would be better than the first, it would continue to discriminate against poor offenders and hinder small or first-time offenders from finishing their educations in a move more conducive to perpetuating their drug use than ending it.

As Jen Choi points out in The Lantern, Ohio State University's newspaper, both the current law and the proposed revision must be abandoned as they are contrary to the "ultimate goal of the Higher Education Act, to make college more accessible to all students; not more difficult."

Lindsay Orman is a senior English major. Graphic by Ivan Flores.



The price is right

Texas A&M students should be happy to get such an education at bargain pricing

Let's get one thing straight: Texas A&M is cheap. In fact, state schools in the South are almost all dirt-cheap in comparison to universities in other parts of the country.



DAVID EGE

Here are a few examples of undergraduate costs at some major universities across the United States:

University of Oregon students pay \$6,500 for tuition and fees per term. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign charges its students \$3,500 for tuition and fees per semester. University of Minnesota charges \$3,000 for tuition alone per semester. The University of California-Santa Barbara charges \$4,984 for tuition, and even The University of Texas at Austin costs \$3210 for just tuition.

Yes, this is how much other students actually pay to attend college in their home states. Those costs hardly seem feasible to the student com-

plaining about A&M's going rate of about \$2,400 for tuition and per semester.

Keep in mind that all of these examples represent the state resident rates at public schools.

The above-mentioned costs do not even take into consideration the expensive private schools of this country.

Some students say the University is "getting them" — not on tuition, but when it comes to the seemingly ridiculous fee statements. It's time for people to realize that Mary Poppins does not take care of them at college. Services do cost money. Even if University officials are screwing over the students when it comes to fees, the costs are still extremely low. An unfair extra \$200 fee on a student's bill is much better than an extra \$3,000 of tuition.

Gasps came earlier this year when

University President Robert M. Gates announced a potential tuition fee increase for the upcoming fall semester. The \$19.50 fee increase would be added to the current \$101

per credit hour fee, bringing the total to \$120.50 per credit hour, or \$1807.5 per semester for the average student.

"It's time for people to realize that Mary Poppins does not take care of them at college. Services do cost money."

According to The Battalion, Gates said that one of the reasons for the fee increase was because of a decrease in state funding. And with more faculty being hired, it is understandable that the University needs more money to pay salaries.

Although the potential fee increase is quite significant percentage-wise, it is still a small amount. Under the potential fee increase for the fall, an undergraduate 14-hour load would be just \$273 more than it would have been this semester. Two hundred and seventy three dollars is well worth

having smaller class sizes, especially when compared to how much money other universities charge.

Amid the grumblings and screams of protest, there are some students who are reasonable. Mike Deck, a junior computer science major, says that as of now, he thinks he is getting his money's worth at A&M. Referring to the University's plan to hire more faculty, Deck goes on to say "I would rather see tuition raised than the quality of the education diminish."

If students don't have money or scholarships or parents' money, there are such things called student loans. Although an education at A&M is dirt cheap, it's never going to be free, so stop complaining.

David Ege is a junior computer engineering major.

MAIL CALL

The misuse by a few shouldn't kill cloning

In response to Josh Langston's March 22 column:

Josh Langston seems to think that the best way to avoid the costs of developing cloning technology is to disregard the benefits it would have for the prevention and treatment of disease. I think that research, conducted thoughtfully and judiciously, is an opportunity that should not be thrown away.

Langston points out, quite validly, that cloning technology could fall into the wrong hands. However, this can be said about any technological advancement in the course of human history. I doubt that early experimenters with saltpeter knew the variety of uses gunpowder would have. Every technology has its cost. He also asserts that once a threshold is crossed, society cannot turn back. Again, I agree with him. We cannot go back, but we are not condemning

ourselves to a genetic wasteland by choosing to investigate further the possibilities of genetics.

I do not doubt that perfection in biology cannot be found. However, we have the opportunity for knowledge, and should make the best of that opportunity.

Rebecca Wilson
Class of 2003

The Spanish people did not want war

In response to Mike Walters' March 23 column:

As a Spanish Aggie, I am disappointed in Mr. Walters' simplistic and misleading "analysis" of the chain of events taking place in Spain since March 11. Sadly, his point of view is representative of many. It seems that a few days' worth of one-minute blurbs on a couple of major news

channels have convinced people that they now have enough information to give their "informed take" on the situations in other countries.

Never mind that when Jose Maria Aznar decided to join the United States in this war, he did so against the will of as much as 90 percent of the population. Never mind that Aznar's administration tried to mislead everybody there into thinking that the bombings were committed by ETA for his own political gain. Never mind the record voter turnout. Dismissing this reaction as cowardice only takes steps to prove the stereotype of the absurdly ethnocentric American to be true.

The problem isn't that the terrorists won a battle at the expense of cowards, the problem is the fact that the vast majority of the people of the world knew better than to go to war in Iraq in the first place, and it's finally starting to come back to the politicians of the world in the form of democratically chosen change.

When peace-loving people are misrepresented or misled by their lead-

ers into invading a country that doesn't actually pose a threat to them instead of attacking the actual terrorists who did them harm, everybody suffers the consequences. The politicians only lose their jobs.

Que viva el espiritu de la democracia!

Carlos Delclos
Class of 2005

Don't judge students by their organization

In response to a March 25 mail call:

Apparently, Ms. Gray has only met a portion of the Corps to say that they are more dedicated to Texas A&M than non-reg. I have friends who are in the Corps, and they are the most dedicated men I know. However, I have also met those in the Corps who know about our traditions, but do not believe in them. They are in the Corps for whatever reason they

need to be, and I respect them for that. That shows a dedication to something bigger than any one person.

I do not agree, however, that just because someone is in the Corps of Cadets that they are more dedicated than a non-reg. I was fortunate enough to meet quite a few people this past fall by participating in Student Bonfire who are more dedicated to the University than some of the members of the Corps I have met. The Corps, as with a fair number of other things around campus, has those who love this school with everything they have, and I'm lucky enough to know some of them.

As with other organizations, there are also those who have various other reasons, personal or not for being in the Corps. All I ask is that you not question a person's dedication to this school based on the simple fact that they are not in a certain organization or program.

Brandon Talbott
Class of 2007