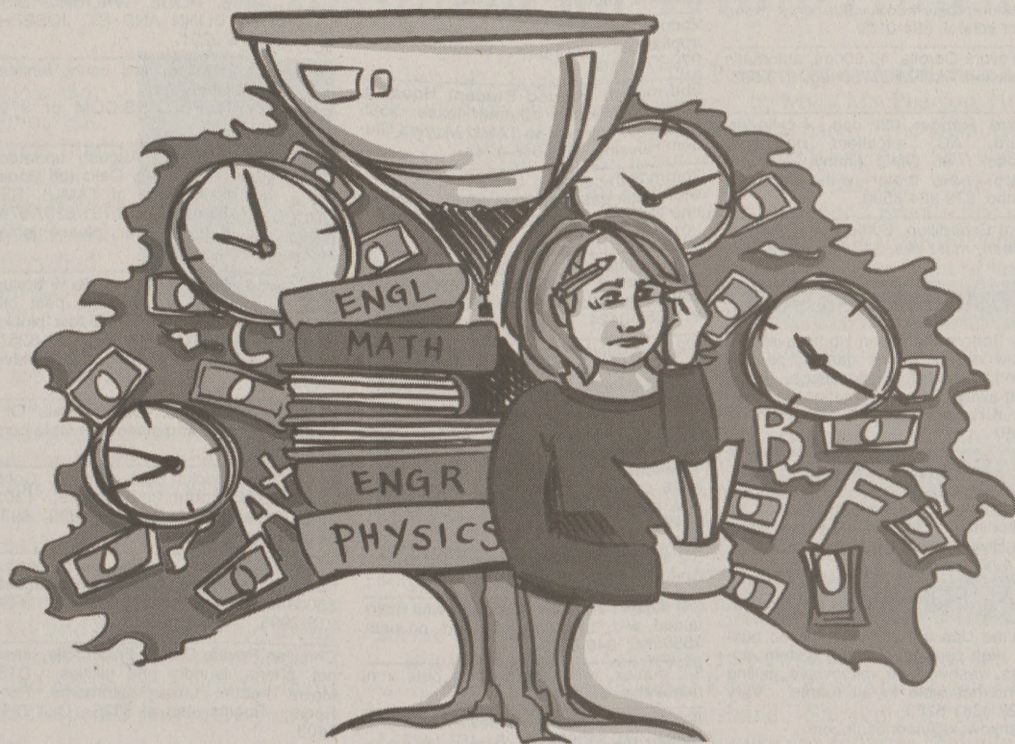


When time is money

"Victory laps" common as four-year graduation rates decrease

By Christina Teichman
THE BATTALION



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VOLUME CONTROL

Bob Schneider
I'm Good Now
Vanguard Records

Review by Daniel Chapman

Anyone who has followed the musical career of Austin indie rocker Bob Schneider knows the drama. The singer-songwriter's honest lyrics let listeners take a bedside seat as pain is recalled and heartfelt emotion is poured out. On his previous releases, those lending an ear learned about heartbreak coupled with drug addiction that has plagued Bob's life, so to many, it is a relief to see the title of his newest album, titled "I'm Good Now."

Insinuating that Schneider's life is now on track actually refers to him being dead. And, according to his online commentary about the album, Bob pretty much thinks that life sucks, but now that he's dead, it's gravy. Strangely enough, Bob is alive. It must be nice to make strange comments and still have people think that you're great. If you said stuff like that around here, you're liable to be given a swirly.

As a public figure, Schneider does not seem to be a shy man. He says what he wants, when he wants and where he wants. A live performance can make even the dirtiest sailor, fresh off a year-long voyage, blush. His comments are funny, insightful, and usually what people are thinking, but scared to say. In the recording studio, though, Schneider is able to channel a much more mature version of himself that creates beautiful music.

Lyricaly, Schneider's music is laced with subtle comedy that keeps the listener intently captured as the easy melodies flow forth. In "Gold in the Sunset," he chimes, "Made me a beverage thought I had it made/turns out it was a glass of see ya later-ade." He also talks about his religious views, which feel much more honest and real than those of gospel singer Michael W. Smith's latest CD.

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Every year poses the same question to many college students around the country: "Will I graduate this year?" It is still assumed that four years is the "normal" time frame for a student to complete his undergraduate degree. But times are changing, and some reports make this four-year standard seem more like an urban legend.

Time is not the only thing that seems to fly by when attending a university — money can disappear at the same alarming rate. Parents typically try and push the four-year rule to try and save their pocketbooks from becoming non-existent. Assuming that the students themselves pay, they want to spend as little money as possible as well.

According to the Office of International Studies and Planning, based on the 6,180 incoming Texas A&M freshmen, in 1997, 75.1 percent graduated in exactly six years, 68.2 percent graduated in exactly five years and 31.6 percent graduated in four years. These numbers include first-time and full-time incoming freshmen only. These numbers and others can be found on The Office of Institutional Studies and Planning Web site at <http://www.tamu.edu/opir/reports>.

The Education Trust Fund recently reported that only 37 percent of first-time students graduate within four years. Twenty-six percent will graduate in five or six years and 37 percent either do not graduate at all or do not graduate within six years of their start date, according to a CNN Money Web site.

There are many factors that can affect when a student graduates. Some students do not have the luxury of taking more than the full-time status load of 12 credits per semester because they must work to put themselves through school.

Anne Mandola, Class of 2006, is a double major in English and theater arts and said that she believes graduating in four years is possible if one takes about 15 hours each semester, unless he or she is in a program that requires more hours.

"(But) if (you are) working to put yourself through college and you expect to get good grades, then it's impossible unless you are Superman," Mandola said.

Students may also have family matters that need to be dealt with at the same time. The fact that many students enter college not knowing what they want to do with their lives yet and do not immediately claim a major adds to their time in college. Students who change their majors or double major typically do not finish in four years, either.

Catie Jackson, an English major, is Class of 2002

and a fifth-year senior. She said that taking summer school can increase the chance of a four-year graduation, but that the pressure to declare a major can cause problems.

"I do think the majority (of students) come in not knowing what they want to do, or change their mind during the process, which can add on more years," Jackson said.

While college can be fun, "there is the issue of schools that don't necessarily make an effort to keep students on track," as CNNMoney points out. And while there can be nothing wrong with extending your stay at college past four years, the trend of five- and six-year college stints cause more precious time and tuition money to slowly but surely leak away. Some students and parents are of the view that staying in school for longer than actually needed wastes time and money that could be spent elsewhere.

Erin Hollis graduated in December 1996 with her undergraduate degree from Illinois State University in three and a half years. She obtained a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in philosophy. She is now a graduate assistant instructor in Texas A&M's Department of English, and believes that "learning is never a waste of time."

"I don't think taking five or more years is a waste

of the student or the parent's money as long as the student is not just floundering in school because he or she doesn't know what they want to do," Hollis said.

When asked how if the norm of graduating college changed since she received her bachelor's degree, Hollis replied, "I think the requirements are pretty much the same. The degree I got was challenging — I just took a lot of credit hours each semester. I did however, have to sacrifice a lot of free time to graduate so quickly. I did work and go to college at the same time, so most of my time was spent studying."

A&M is not the only university whose graduation rate of four years is getting smaller. For those freshmen entering in the fall of 1996, Princeton graduated 92 percent in four years, Harvard 86 percent and Cornell 79 percent, according to CNN. The reasons for the decrease in four-year graduation rates vary, but for some students, the answer is obvious.

"In my experience I had too much fun during my first year," Jackson said. "Now I am paying for my mistakes as a second-year senior. But it's been fun."

"I think it's a waste of time if not working and not putting full effort into school," Mandola said. "(But) if you are taking 15 hours but sticking around to take classes you personally enjoy, then great."

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