

OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 9 • Wednesday, September 22, 2004

PAGE DESIGN • LINDSYE FORSON

What's right is night

Aggie Nights' payoff to the student body merits the costs to the University



ADAM SCHARN

Texas A&M is well known for the vast number of extracurricular programs and activities it offers students. While some programs offer the "other education" A&M is renowned for, others have been designed for pure entertainment. One such program of entertainment is Aggie Nights. The national trend among American colleges and universities over the last three years has been to offer students late-night programs on campus over the weekend. In the fall of 2002, A&M followed suit by creating Aggie Nights.

Unfortunately, after only two years, the program is in jeopardy of being dropped due to lack of funding. It would be a tragedy to see a great program like Aggie Nights, which offers a night of free food and fun for Aggies and their friends, dropped because the school would rather waste money on frivolous expenditures. Of course, the only way to save the program is for the administration and students to recognize the true value of the program. Furthermore, the administration needs to recognize that the well-being of the students is more important than spending inordinate amounts of money on things that might make the school look better in the public eye.

The best thing about Aggie Nights is that it is free. Almost every student has felt the wrath of an empty bank account. Being broke should never stop a college kid from having some fun on the weekend. At Aggie Nights, students can go bowling, play pool and participate in a variety of other activities. And by scrounging up a dollar, students can go see movies from time to time, some of which are out of theaters, but still not in stores. As Dave Salmon, assistant director of the MSC, puts it, "We want to let Aggies know that there are free opportunities for recreation and entertainment on campus."

Salmon is, the primary adviser to the program and one of its greatest advocates, is one who sees the value of the program and attends most of the Aggie Nights. From his frequent attendance, Salmon has noted that "a significant portion of our audience is graduate students and international students." In fact, attendance reports, which are done by Aggie Card swipes, show that graduate students and freshmen account for nearly half the attendance, which exemplifies the idea that Aggie Nights is a great way for many newcomers in Aggieland to meet people and relax from the stresses of school.

Aggie Nights has many other positive aspects, but of course with most great things come great critics. Critics' central argument is that Aggie Nights wastes too much of the students' money. Rest assured fellow Aggies, the administration wastes money on far worse ideas than free entertainment.

Some critics say the program takes too large a chunk out of the MSC's apportionment of the student services fee revenue. This is not true. The MSC is allotted roughly \$2.3 million each year, according to reports from the Student Service Fee Advisory Board. Aggie Nights receives only \$40,000 from the MSC's fee allotment, or just barely 1 percent. The first year, the rest of its \$130,000 budget came from a reserve fund. The second year, the vice president of student affairs felt the program was important enough to grant Aggie Nights the remainder of its budget. However, these two sources will be unavailable for the third year because each was intended as a one-time grant.

This brings up the question of why Aggie Nights is so expensive to run. The program subsidizes the costs of all activities planned for



BRANDI DUNN • THE BATTALION

each night, including the cost of movies. This is quite expensive. Some have suggested that if the program is going to spend so much money on all these things, it should fund itself by charging admission. That defeats the purpose the program, which is to provide free entertainment to students.

The main problem with funding Aggie Nights is that its money comes primarily from MSC budgets. As Jennifer Ford, who sits on the oversight committee for the program explains, "Aggie Nights is a University-wide initiative, not an MSC project." For that reason, the program should perhaps be funded through other departments.

There is not a lack of funds at the school, just a lack of desire to fund programs that actually matter or that don't get public attention. Many clubs and organizations complain about lack of funding; meanwhile, some University employees are driving around in expensive new Chevy Tahoes. And Vision 20/20 always

seems to be taken care of.

A&M has enough money, but the administration chooses to provide resources for programs other than those that will directly benefit the students. Aggie Nights is one such program, and it would be a shame to see it go because somebody in charge of money is more concerned with a U.S. News & World Report ranking.

Adam Scharn is a junior political science major.

University should listen when students raise issues



JIM FOREMAN

Throughout history, Americans have seen events in which problems are not fixed until after they culminate into some sort of tragic accident. The Columbia space shuttle, the collapse of Enron and the attacks of Sept. 11 are prime examples of such events. The most recent addition to this list is the

July 31 explosion of the University Apartments. This event is a prime example of the University's pattern of ignoring problems until they become a priority.

According to The Eagle, the day of the explosion, residents complained that they smelled gas and believed there was some sort of leak. Unfortunately, appropriate actions were not taken, and the problem was not solved. The explosion tore through the apartment of two married graduate students, resulting in the death of their 4-year-old daughter and resident Saqib Ejaz's mother. Also injured in the fire were Ejaz's father, who is still in the hospital, and wife, who is undergoing physical therapy in Houston.

According to the State Fire Marshal's office, the explosion was a result of large holes in the gas pipes surrounding the apartments. On the day before the explosion, a maintenance worker said there was no gas leak in the building and that the residents should close their windows because they believed the gas was coming from outside, as reported in The Battalion. The worker said they would return the following Monday to check again. Unfortunately by then the apartment would be in ruin.

Residents of the apartment complex have complained in the past that maintenance workers provide the residents with little assistance, doing the bare minimum to ensure that the apartments were livable. Residents believe that they received poor treatment because they could not afford to live anywhere else, especially the little girl who paid the

ultimate price.

Naturally, A&M President Robert M. Gates is looking for ideas to prevent future accidents. In an e-mail to students, he announced the establishment of a special hotline that will prevent future accidents, and the latest American trend in dealing with tragedies: Organizing a task force.

However, the formation of the task force was halted after District Attorney Bill Turner ordered it, pending the official fire marshal's report.

Gates seems to have all the bases covered, but he also claims to have taken a few initiatives before the accident. Those actions included improving the department of environmental health and safety, which unfortunately did not prevent the apartment fire.

Residents are worried about those who are still hospitalized but when they asked Gates if he would consider paying their medical bills, he said he would rather not discuss that until the investigation into the fire is complete. Either he is still hoping the University is not at fault or he is trying very hard not to incriminate it.

Of course the apartment residents are being treated to all the necessary amenities: Free food, Aggie Bucks and hotel lodging. Suddenly a group that once felt ignored and neglected is being treated with great consideration, but at what cost? Some residents are still bothered by the incident and feel the University is still not taking full responsibility.

It should come as no surprise to see administrators become so enthralled with boosting rankings that they forget the most important division of the University: The students. At the very least, the unfortunate death of a little girl will remind them that their responsibilities lie not only in attracting new students, but also caring for the ones they already have.

Jim Foreman is a junior mechanical engineering major.

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MAILCALL

Popular bike locks have a flaw ruins effectiveness

In response to Mike Walters' Sept. 20 column:

Mr. Walters makes a good point about the need to crack down on bicycle theft; however, he unwittingly I suspect, offered advice to bike users that might only increase the chances of theft. As reported by The New York Times in an article on Sept. 17, U-lock bike locks that use a cylindrical keyhole can easily be picked open using only a ballpoint pen. Lydia Polgreen writes, "Mashing the empty barrel of a ballpoint pen into the cylindrical keyhole and turning it clockwise does the trick that has struck fear into the hearts of bicycle owners."

Bike owners would be advised to purchase something other than a U-lock, contrary to Mr. Walters' suggestion, until the lock manufacturers have solved this problem.

Stephen Addcox
Class of 2005

Aggieland hasn't changed over the past decades

As an old Ag, I was asked by a co-worker (here in Greenville, S.C.) about Texas A&M before her trip to the Clemson game. She was duly impressed by the traditions, and I told her she would be treated graciously.

I was bursting with pride today when she told me how they had been greeted and welcomed repeatedly; someone gave them a beer at the Dixie Chicken after the game, and a fellow diner Sunday paid for their breakfast! They were astonished and impressed by the warmth and kindness they were shown.

No doubt a lot has changed since I was there; I'm so glad some things are still the same.

Michelle Quartermaine
Class of 1980

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