

EDITORIAL

Book it

Joshua Dwyer wants abstinence-only texts

Adam Scharn argues for contraceptive teaching

This August, a tragedy befell members of the Aggie family. The family of Sasqib Ejaz was seriously injured when a fiery explosion consumed his residence in the University Apartments by Hensel Park. In the aftermath of the fire, Mr. Ejaz's 4-year-old daughter and mother died, and his pregnant wife and father are still recovering from injuries. But, like any disaster, the search for answers began soon after and has grown to include a University Task Force formed by Texas A&M President Robert M. Gates and investigations by the Brazos County District Attorney and the State Fire Marshal.

The fire marshal's report was released last week, and it blamed the explosion on gas leaks coming from the appliance and water heater piping in the apartment. The pipes had corrosion damage and loose fittings, which allowed the gas to escape.

Obviously, for the pipes to be in such bad condition, the maintenance must have been deferred for years. It is likely that this unit was not the only one with problems with its gas lines. It could probably safely be said that the University Apartments are poorly maintained and pose a serious risk to those living in them.

This raises many questions. Why is the state of repair so poor? Why did people have to die for the problem to be addressed? And are the problems confined to University Apartments, or are they more widespread?

If the issues, both physical and managerial, that bedevil the apartments are more widespread, it is likely that there are many more disasters across campus just waiting to happen.

If the problems are just localized to the apartments, then the question becomes why that is so. One would hope that the answer does not relate in any fashion to the residents of the apartments, many of whom are international students. The international students at A&M may lack a powerful off-campus constituency to look after their interests, but that does not mean that the University has the right to ignore their problems.

There are still many questions left unanswered at this point on the matter. But one thing is clear — it is simply unacceptable for the University to allow students to live in the conditions that presently exist there. Changes must be made and responsibility must be taken.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Kendra Kingsley, Editor in Chief
Nishat Fatima, Managing Editor
Matt Rigney, Opinion Editor

Sonia Moghe, Local News Editor
Lindsye Forson, Opinion Asst.
David Shoemaker, Opinion Columnist

MAILCALL

Drawings don't offend everyone

Ivan Flores' drawings are the best (no, I don't know the guy personally). I don't see what problem people have with them. The girls are always hot, and the graphics in general are truly works of art. Sometimes I open The Batt just to see if he has drawn anything for the day. He should get his own parking spot constructed wherever he chooses on campus.

David Ege
Class of 2005

Bats are helpful, don't pose threat

In response to Cindy McReynolds' Sept. 21 column:

Fundamentally, I agree that human life is more important than animal life. That said, people have a responsibility to act in the best interest of wildlife and to serve as good stewards of the environment when possible.

Of the small percentage of bats that carry rabies, most are too lethargic to present a significant threat to anyone with the good sense not to approach them.

With regard to rabies, skunks pose a greater threat. As a matter of fact, so do domesticated animals; many statistics indicate that humans are more likely to contract rabies from a pet than a bat. Worldwide, 99 percent of human rabies fatalities are transmitted through canines, but would anyone seriously advocate the lethal control of "man's best friend?"

Furthermore, bats are ecologi-

cally and economically critical as their diet includes many common pests. The Mexican Free-tailed bat, in particular, consumes moths that result in significant losses in the agricultural industry. Even those without concern for bats as part of a complex ecological system and as life in their own right can appreciate that fact.

Carrie Lytle
Class of 2007

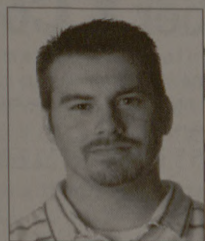
UPD should get some TS money

UPD has no jurisdiction over bike theft. That task belongs to TS, but apparently TS employees would rather drive around in their new Chevy Tahoes, which is very unnecessary spending by the University.

In case you did not know, UPD is struggling due to lack of funding, and is on a hiring freeze. I have been inside their cars — which happen to not be new at all — and they do not have the necessary equipment to work with. I have personally performed inventory checks for the department, and it is very sad to see that in a lot of instances, they lack resources.

Every year they compete for more funding from the SSFAB, and never get enough money to even hire the necessary amount of police officers to keep up with 45,000 students. The University and SSFAB are more concerned with spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on making this campus more diverse, and shoving cultural diversity down our throats.

Manny Garcia
Class of 2005



JOSHUA DWYER

A current debate in education is whether health textbooks should inform students about the role contraceptives could play in preventing unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases versus the viewpoint that abstaining from sexual activity prior to marriage is the best message for the students.

According to State Board of Education member Dr. Don McLeroy, the textbooks to be approved lack content on contraceptives because each school district can supplement them as it sees fit. To include contraceptive information in the textbooks would undermine the school districts that wanted to promote abstinence, and McLeroy foresees no major changes to the textbooks.

The State Board of Education should approve the list of abstinence-only health textbooks, and if school districts were truly concerned about the health of children, each would adopt an abstinence-until-marriage program. At least 10 scientific studies have found that abstinence programs significantly reduce early sexual activity, according to the Heritage Foundation, a public policy research organization.

Some alternatives to abstinence until marriage have been incorrectly labeled "abstinence-plus." Advocates often use the term to describe curricula that actually marginalize the effectiveness of abstinence. In a review of nine such programs, fewer than 10 sentences out of 1,000 pages of material "urged or suggested that teens wait before beginning sexual activity," according to a Heritage Foundation study. By comparison "nearly 30 percent of their page content" described and encouraged the use of contraceptives. These programs also neglected to educate students on building healthy relationships or marriage, so they can hardly be considered comprehensive sex education.

According to a poll by the nonpartisan firm Zogby International, 70 percent of parents of school-aged children disapproved of the content of "abstinence-plus" curricula when it was quoted to them. A separate poll by the same organization found that 96 percent of parents agreed that "abstinence from sexual activity was best for teens," and 85 percent believed that teaching abstinence should be emphasized as much or more than the use of contraceptives. Only 8 percent believed education about contraceptives should be emphasized more than abstinence.

The primary reluctance to promote the abstinence-until-marriage program is the fear that such an approach is simply unrealistic given the number of school-age children who engage in sexual activity. Granted, regardless of the amount and intent of the instruction, there will be students who decide not to listen. However, if abstinence education is neglected on that philosophy alone, school districts must abandon teaching children to avoid drugs, alcohol and tobacco products.

Such an abdication of responsibility would be absurd. Adolescents are not animals that are unable to control their desires or resist physical drives. To expect them to fail and to teach them accordingly is tantamount to dooming the students to failure. Teachers don't lower the passing grade so that more students will graduate; they know that some will fail, but they do their best to make sure it's as few as possible. Similarly, knowing that some students won't wait until marriage to become sexually active shouldn't keep schools from promoting it.

The decision whether to become sexually active before marriage is a health issue. The costs of premarital sex can be devastating. A Heritage Foundation report found that sexually active girls are three times more likely to be depressed, as well as three times more likely to attempt suicide than girls who are not sexually active. Sexually active boys are twice as likely to be depressed and eight times more prone to attempt suicide as non-sexually active boys. Perhaps that explains why the same study also reported that 67 percent of teens and 77 percent of teenage girls who had sexual intercourse regret it.

Sex education should be more than how to avoid the threat of disease and inconvenience of pregnancy. Sex should not be portrayed simply as a means of recreation, a tool to be used for selfish gratification, nor an activity that "everyone is doing." Its effects are more significant and more extensive than just physical.

Given these facts, it seems obvious that few teens participate in sexual activities for purely rational reasons. Some young people believe the intimacy and approval they lack at home can be provided by some physical activity with a peer. This "solution" usually compounds the problem, leaving the teen feeling more alone and less loved. Hardly a pattern that schools should encourage by teaching students how to avoid the negative physical aspects of sexual activity without addressing other issues like the difference between love and sex.

Students should be taught what their parents approve of and what history and science substantiate: Outside the intended bounds of marriage, sexual activity is detrimental to the physical, emotional, psychological health of individuals, especially adolescents. To tell the students anything else is dishonest and should not be included in their education.

Joshua Dwyer is a sophomore political science major.



ADAM SCHARN

The Texas State Board of Education will adopt a new list of textbooks this year. A great deal of controversy has risen over the decision, because three of the four books likely to be chosen are considered "abstinence-only" textbooks; that is, in the sexual education section, not one of the books explicitly covers the use of contraceptives. Sex education is taught in schools not only to educate students about the process and purpose of sexual intercourse, but as a way to inform students of STDs and teen pregnancy, including preventative measures. The curriculum standard set by the Education Board exemplifies this point, stating, "(Textbooks) should analyze the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of barrier protection and other contraceptive methods, keeping in mind the effectiveness of remaining abstinent until marriage." Abstinence-only textbooks not only fail to accomplish this goal, they have negative effects on the students with regard to sex education.

A fearful audience is often an uninformed audience. Children must be made aware of STDs and the risk of pregnancy before they can be taught how to prevent each. However, after teaching students these risks, by preaching abstinence and nothing else, the students may become fearful of sex itself.

Abstinence in this context means refraining from sexual activity. Sending a class of high school students the message that, "The only way to prevent STDs is to not have sex," may send a message that sex leads only to negative, detrimental results. This strategy misses the overall purpose of sex education, which is to inform students of possible negative outcomes, as well as different methods of prevention and their effectiveness. Teaching students about contraceptives and weighing that against abstinence will give them a much better understanding of the risks involved.

Excluding material about the use of contraceptives does not mean children will not learn that condoms and pills can be used to prevent pregnancy and some STDs. Some students may even learn by reading the box that condoms are only 97 percent effective. However, according to The Culture of Life Foundation and Institute, condoms can have a failure rate as high as 30 percent. Moreover, these effective rates are based on birth prevention, not disease prevention. Where will adolescent males learn this, if not in a textbook? These success rates are not just common knowledge.

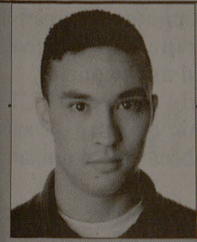
Furthermore, although birth control pills are 99.9 percent effective, that is only if the pill is taken every day, as a related publication on e-pill.com explains. Perhaps doctors can inform females of the birth control statistics, but condoms are sold at most grocery stores and gas stations in the over-the-counter drug aisles. Students must at least be informed of these issues to understand why abstinence is still the best alternative. Simply explaining that, "Barrier protection is not 100 percent effective in preventing the spread of STDs," as the Glencoe/McGraw-Hill textbook says, is not enough.

To make matters worse, textbooks are not only leaving out the mention of contraceptives, but one book has even replaced the topic with a ridiculous, unproven idea. "Lifetime Health," published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, lists 10 steps for students to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases. One of these steps actually admonishes students to "get plenty of rest," because "when you're tired, it's hard to think clearly." Sleeping eight or nine hours a day is not going to prevent a person from contracting the AIDS virus. Leading a student to believe sleep is all he needs does absolutely nothing in accomplishing the goals of education.

The main arguments for abstinence-only education are based on moral issues. For example, some will argue that sex should be reserved for married couples. Teaching about contraceptives, they say, advocates premarital sex. For that reason, supporters claim, only married couples should use contraceptives. This ignores the fact that half of Texas' high school students have had sex, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control.

Supporters claim teaching the use of contraceptives sends students the message that premarital sex is OK, as long as it is protected. Once again, this misses the purpose of education: To inform. Neither view should be advocated nor forced upon students without the alternative.

Adam Scharn is a junior political science major. Graphic by Brandi Dunn



ERIC BROWN

Byrne's spirit band wastes the students' money

As another school year begins, students are seeing more changes by Texas A&M Director of Athletics Bill Byrne — some for the better, some for the worse. Unfortunately one that's for the worse is the new spirit band.

For a student who has not had the opportunity to attend an A&M volleyball game this semester, not only is he missing out on seeing quite a good team this year, but he's also missing out on a chance to hear the new spirit band, Hullabaloo.

The spirit band was formed because attendance at A&M men's and women's basketball games over the past few years has been less than pitiful.

Byrne thinks making the game more exciting with a spirit band will help to increase attendance.

Before making the assumption that changing the atmosphere would help increase attendance, Byrne should have looked at the records of the teams and known that not winning games might be a big factor in low attendance. Nobody wants to come and see losers play.

Winning, however is not a problem for the volleyball team and attendance is generally high at volleyball matches as a result.

On top of the poor ideal on which the spirit band was formed, it is a

complete waste of money. About \$100,000 was spent on initial costs for the band. New instruments had to be purchased, shirts were bought and a new staff member was hired to direct it.

It is quite interesting that the Athletic Department can come up with this kind of money to start a band it likes, yet a few years ago, members of the Aggie Band who played at basketball games would have to pay to park at Reed Arena.

Also, members of the spirit band are not representative of the student body. Some are rude and lack complete respect for the Aggie Spirit and what it means.

In an e-mail to a former band member written by Kevin Sullivan, a senior sports management major and bass guitarist for Hullabaloo, said, "...I joined the pep band because the Corps of Cadets does not play at all of the men's basketball games, none of the women's basketball games and none of the volleyball games. A pep band was created to fill in for their lack of school spirit (or maybe it's their laziness?). On top of that, they are 'B-rate' musicians that play boring music."

Sullivan has not attended a basketball game in his previous years here, because if he had, he would have known that the Aggie Band did in fact play at men's and women's basketball games and volleyball games. But due to time and schedule constraints, the band was unable to attend all

the games, as the Athletic Department had wanted.

Sullivan also wrote, "The War Hymn" is the same song you are hearing when the Corps plays it, with the exception that it is played with better quality by the pep band."

Sullivan has a skewed perception of quality and school spirit. To say the Aggie Band has a lack of school spirit and are B-rate musicians is an insult to the thousands of Aggie Band members who have attended this school and helped make it what it is today.

If the rest of the student body thought this of the Aggie Band, it probably wouldn't stand for the halftime performance.

The Athletic Department should take a step back and ask itself if this is the quality of students we want to represent? Should this kind of investment be made on something that will not last long?

Of course, like Transportation Services, the Athletic Department has many moneymaking schemes to pay for all of its blunders. More control should be exercised over its expenditures. So hopefully in the future, there is not another costly mistake as the one in question.

Eric Brown is a student of post baccoloriate studies in education