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# PRINT IS NOT DEAD

By Editorial Staff

Print journalism is not dead at Texas A&M.

Despite the whirlwind 24 hours that occurred for The Battalion's leadership last week, and a public announcement that members of the journalism working group could "discuss changes to distribution of The Battalion's weekly editions," there is still a fight to be had. And a fight we will make if A&M's administration continues to ignore us.

We will not be condescended into believing print journalism is not important.

We will not allow the administration to control our content — or the platform on which we publish.

Talks of a digital transformation and future multidisciplinary collaboration to propel our institution into the future sound wonderful. That is, until the true colors start to show. Not to mention, isn't this institution rooted in tradition? Aren't the unique qualities, which "from the outside looking in, you can't explain," what give life to our famous Spirit of Aggieland?

This board agrees that A&M needs better technology, resources and infrastructure — just try to meet deadlines when Canvas or the campus internet fails. However, progress shouldn't come at the sacrifice of the centuries-old traditions which define Aggieland. The Battalion is a tradition. We have printed on this campus for 129 years. That's longer than the Aggies have gathered to trash talk the visiting football team at Midnight Yell. From Silver Taps to historic 41-38 upsets and everything in between, The Battalion reports on and physically documents A&M's history.

Besides The Battalion's sentimental value, we offer concrete job experience for students pursuing journalism, and for those who are not. President M. Katherine Banks, Vice President of Student Affairs, or VPSA, Gen. Joe Ramirez and the administration at large are under the impression that print journalism, globally, is dead. Well, President Banks, they've been telling us that since members of this board were in diapers — yet print journalism is still here. Your job, at an institution of higher education, is to provide students the resources they need, academic or otherwise, to find jobs and succeed beyond graduation. Our job, as The Battalion, is to provide that experience.

It's not the administration's decision to tell us if we can or cannot print. It's not its place to tell us we can or cannot do anything.

We are an officially recognized student organization, and our editorial control has been outside of university purview for several years now. Even when The Battalion existed under the Offices of the Dean of Student Life, we had strict boundaries that allowed the publication full editorial freedom over every single word we chose to publish.

To dispel any other confusion, the newspaper is — and was — financially independent as

well. Currently, we are 100% funded by advertising and revenue streams outside of the university, with all funds provided by the university remaining in savings, untouched. Not a dime from A&M.

And, we're in the black — we're not losing money. Evidently, Banks and Ramirez missed that point.

In a Feb. 11 impromptu meeting between editor-in-chief Myranda Campanella, Student Body President Natalie Parks and Ramirez, the VPSA unequivocally stated the decision was, in fact, final, despite the demand being presented as a choice less than 24 hours before.

The Battalion was simply to accept the university's decision and begin the transition back. Ramirez went so far to say in the meeting that he would need to speak with Dean of Students Anne Reber about this miscommunication, and reiterated the decision was final.

Our presence on the Department of Journalism working group is a victory for the Battalion staff, and an opportunity to be fairly represented in the decision-making process. We are looking forward to working alongside fellow journalists and faculty who will help advocate for our voice.

But, Associate Vice President for Marketing & Communications Kelly Brown said Banks will consider the working group's proposals before making the final decision herself, as with the other working groups for university reorganization. Administration is still under the impression that they hold authority over The Battalion, when that is simply not true.

The Battalion is an editorially independent newspaper, and has been for its entire existence. Its independence doesn't come from any university rule, but a much higher power — vested in the First Amendment. Our independence is as guaranteed as that of our peers at The Eagle or The Houston Chronicle.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education's student press counsel, or FIRE, of the organization's Student Press Freedom Initiative, sent a letter to Banks on Feb. 15, which has since been posted publicly. In the letter, FIRE expressed concerns on legal grounds over the assertion of university authority.

"[A&M's] present demands of The Battalion squarely contradict Texas A&M's obligations under the First Amendment, which bars the institution from regulating the form or content of an editorially-independent student publication," the letter reads.

FIRE's Student Press Counsel Lindsie Rank confirmed that A&M's administration has no right under the First Amendment to dictate the medium to which The Battalion publishes, as much as it dictates the content it publishes.

"[The Battalion is] an independent student publication," Rank said. "[It's] just as free to determine the future of your organization as any other student organization is, and [it's] really an independent entity that is not an arm of that state university in any way, shape or form."

EDITORIAL ON PG. 7

**Myranda Campanella**  
Editor-in-Chief

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Asst. Life & Arts Editor

**Julia Potts**  
Managing Editor

**Robert O'Brien**  
Photo Chief

**Caleb Powell**  
Opinion Editor

**Ishika Samant**  
Asst. Photo Chief

**Nathan Varnell**  
Asst. Opinion Editor

**Cori Eckert**  
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**Casey Stavenhagen**  
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**Jordan Epp**  
Asst. Sports Editor

**Kay Naegeli**  
Asst. Sports Editor

**Kathryn Miller**  
Life & Arts Editor

**Aubrey Vogel**  
News Editor

**Michaela Rush**  
News Editor

**Grant Gaspard**  
Podcast Producer

## As it happened:

A chronological summary of Texas A&M administrative decisions regarding The Battalion's operations

### MONDAY, JAN. 24

2 p.m. - Initial meeting with The Battalion's adviser regarding Banks' wishes.

### THURSDAY, FEB. 10

1 p.m. - Administration meets with The Battalion's adviser

3:45 p.m. — Student leadership learns of administrative demands

6 p.m. — Student leaders inform editorial staff

Approximately 7 p.m. — Banks is unable to provide comment on Thursday

Approximately 10:30 p.m. — Student Government Association voices support for print

### FRIDAY, FEB. 11

10 a.m. — Student leaders meet with university officials

12:20 p.m. — The Battalion breaks the news

Approximately 1:23 p.m. — Emergency meeting with VP of Student Affairs Gen. Joe Ramirez

Before 4:10 p.m. — Multiple publications release coverages

4:10 p.m. — Banks emails The Battalion with decision to allow printing through the end of semester

### SATURDAY, FEB. 12

#SaveTheBatt student organizers pass out flyers in support at Aggieland Saturday

### MONDAY, FEB. 14

Student Press Law Center releases official statement of support for The Battalion

10:00 a.m. — Spectrum News story debuts

3-5 p.m. — Student Body President and Faculty Senate Speaker announce support of The Battalion

6:00 p.m. — The Battalion's adviser and two students asked to join the working group for the new Department of Journalism

8:00 p.m. — Banks releases a statement to the public regarding the additions to the working group

### TUESDAY, FEB. 15

3:40 p.m. — Foundation for Individual Rights in Education sends letter to President Banks

### WEDNESDAY, FEB. 16

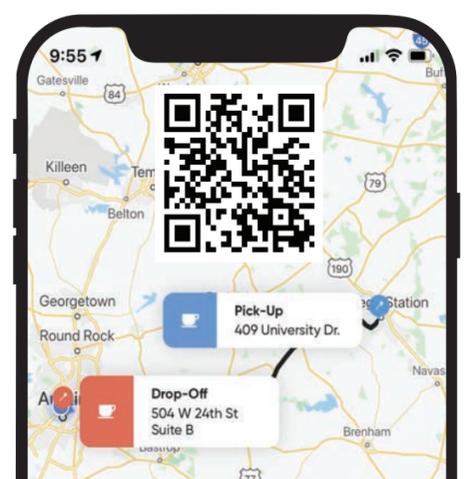
8 p.m. — Student Senate passed resolution in favor of The Battalion



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Ishika Samant — THE BATTALION

The Battalion's newsstands can be found across Texas A&M's campus and in the surrounding community for readers to have access to weekly editions published on

## [Don't] stop the presses

The Battalion continues to print after university administration walks back demands following public backlash

By **Aubrey Vogel, Michaela Rush & Kyle McClenagan**  
@aubrey\_vogel, @Michaela4Batt  
& @KMcclenagan

Today, The Battalion continues its 129-year tradition of informing Aggieland through print.

On Monday, Jan. 24, Dean of Students Anne Reber and interim director of Student Life Stefanie Baker of Texas A&M presented to The Battalion's staff adviser Douglas Pils an invitation for The Battalion to transition under Student Life and later be incorporated into the new Department of Journalism.

Few details regarding the transition were available, and Pils expressed that students within The Battalion may wish to remain a student organization. With regard to these questions and concerns, Reber and Baker were unable to respond at the moment, and intended to meet with Pils in the coming weeks.

Pils was also informed that Banks no longer wanted him to sell advertisements for the paper, though no clear alternatives were presented at this time regarding funding solutions if this was taken away. Discussion occurred suggesting the university could subsidize the

paper, though no specifics presented. Additionally, Pils nor any other members of the staff, were ever formally asked to communicate with administration to be a part of a potential transition.

On Thursday, Feb. 10, Reber and Baker once again met with Pils, where they communicated the demand from Banks to cease printing of the paper, effective immediately, and explained plans to include the publication as a part of the new Department of Journalism, with an emphasis on digital formats. At this point, the ultimatum was delivered to Pils regarding the status of the student organization.

Before this, Pils had not been informed the organization was expected to make an immediate decision, nor that it had come down to joining the department or maintaining organizational status. Pils made Reber and Baker aware he would not be able to attend a meeting later in the afternoon, because of personal reasons.

Later in the afternoon, Reber and Baker held a meeting with The Battalion's student leadership in which they were informed of the ultimatum directed by President Banks and the demand to immediately cease print production.

Reber said the decision was up to the student leaders: join the university or remain a student organization and lose resources including its newsroom in the Memorial Student Center — which they had not previously shared with Pils — as well as access to an adviser from the university. Regardless, student leadership was

informed the print edition from that morning would be the paper's last, and they had 24 hours to respond.

An emergency meeting was quickly organized consisting of the entirety of The Battalion editorial staff to inform them of President Banks' decree. Following the meeting, the editorial staff began drafting an article with plans to publish it shortly in order to break the news to its readers.

Student leadership reached out to associate Vice President of Marketing & Communications Kelly Brown for a comment from Banks to include in the article. Within the hour, Brown responded that Banks was not available to comment at that time, and would be available the next morning for a meeting with Battalion leadership. Upon receiving this news, The Battalion leadership and staff agreed to postpone the article until after meeting with Banks.

The next morning, Feb. 11, at 10 a.m. student leadership met with Banks, Brown and Vice President & Chief Marketing and Communications Officer Marilyn Martell, via Zoom where Banks explained her vision for a more multimedia-centric future for The Battalion, a future absent of print and organizational independence.

Banks said the publication could continue to print its special edition Maroon Life, as well as special editions in collaborations with journalism courses, but said she didn't see why the regular print was relevant.

"I'm not a professor of journalism, I don't understand exactly why [print media] is important to the field," Banks said.

During the meeting, Banks said she would allow The Battalion, at this time, to print a "goodbye edition" for Thursday, Feb. 17.

Following this meeting, the staff continued their work on the article and agreed to produce a print edition the next week.

By 12:45 p.m., the article was posted on The Battalion website and was shared on its social media, where it quickly picked up statewide and national attention and was trending by the afternoon among students, alumni and journalists across the country.

"Regardless, The Battalion will print on Thursday, Feb. 17," the article's final line reads.

In addition to the shock of the general public, journalism professors from the university said they were equally shocked, as it was not shared with them by the university.

Speaker of the Faculty Senate and journalism professor Dale Rice said despite his involvement with the journalism department working group, he was uninformed about the decision by the administration.

"The first I heard was last Thursday, [Feb. 10]," Rice said. "I learned about it with vir-

tually everyone else after it had all happened. It was completely new to me."

With his role instructing journalism courses, Rice said the most concerning part of the evolving story has been the implications this may have for the department going forward.

"As a journalism professor, I'm incredibly concerned about any limitations on free speech or free press rights," Rice said. "The first thing that comes to mind is, 'Could this lead to limitations on what is published by a student organization? And ultimately, could that mean pressure to censor and control?' Those are always concerns to someone who thinks freedom of the press is important to democracy."

Rice said, in addition to the immediacy of the announcement, he believes the campus climate has contributed to the widespread reaction.

"I think that one of the things that has contributed to all of this is that we're in a period of high anxiety on campus," Rice said. "There's a lot of changes in the works, and a lot of them are significant and going to play out in ways we can't yet anticipate. This added just one more element to this period of anxiety, and that's why a lot of faculty reached out, not just to me, but to each other."

Rice said the conversation has shifted from a single organization's issue to a larger concern about the process by which the university is making changes for multiple student organizations.

"I think that what goes to the heart of the issue is the fact that a group, incredibly affected by the outcome, wasn't a part of the decision-making process," Rice said. "I think that any student organization that is going to have its operations significantly changed should be a part of the discussion. That is the fair way to treat students."

As the campus community continues to react, Rice said he urges audiences to focus on the long-term influence of the decisions being made, not just the format in which the paper may be published.

"I think [print versus digital] is just the tiniest piece of the overall issue at work here," Rice said. "We really need to focus on the idea of, 'Should our student newspaper remain an independent voice for students on campus, or should it move under the auspices of the university, where there is potential for control?' That is what is at the heart of the issue. The debate over whether The Batt continues to have a print issue is, to me, secondary to the much bigger issue of will The Batt's future be as an independent journalistic organization or will it potentially be, in a sense, another marketing arm of the university?"

Assistant professor of journalism and for-

PRINT ON PG. 8

# It's more than an ordinary towel.



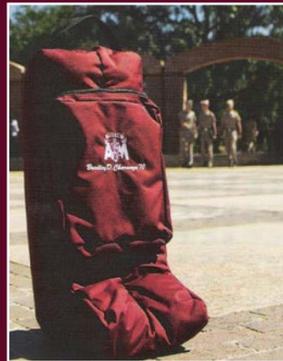
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# Taking say away from students

Student leaders challenge admin changes, lack of communication

By Julia Potts & Michaela Rush  
@juliapotts & @Michaela4Batt

Change is in the air, yet student voices cannot be heard. With so much of the university — from colleges to student organizations — being restructured, some student leaders are concerned they do not have a say in the future structure and operations of their own groups.

The Battalion currently faces such a situation in which its leadership was informed by Texas A&M university president M. Katherine Banks that The Battalion would no longer be printing its weekly paper editions. Though this decision was delayed until the end of the spring semester, other organizations have expressed concerns regarding the overreach of administration and their relevant decision making without consulting student leaders.

## Draggieland

Draggieland, a student-run drag competition, made its first appearance in 2020. While there was controversy, such as protests and petitions leading up to the first performance, it still took place in Rudder Auditorium on Feb. 19, 2020, tickets selling out in its inaugural year. While similar controversy took place before the 2021 performance, the show remained a success, expanding to two nights, boasting impressive ticket sales and keeping audiences safe to enjoy local performance art.

Despite this overwhelming success, Memorial Student Center, or MSC, Town Hall former head of Draggieland Bella Lopez was informed through her superiors in Town Hall on Nov. 19, 2021, that MSC Town Hall would no longer sponsor the event. Bradin Hanselka, Town Hall chair, said in a comment to The Battalion speaking on behalf of the organization, that students within MSC Town Hall were informed by their director.

“The students within MSC Town Hall were not consulted nor given any say regarding the decision made by the administration,” Hanselka said in the comment. “We were only notified by the MSC director of the decision.”

As more students got word of the decision, students involved in LGBTQ+ organizations across campus, such as TRANSCEND, Queer Aggies, Make-up Artist Aggies, LGBTQ+ Aggies and Out in STEM, or oSTEM, began looking for answers and an alternate means to host the event.

Chief of staff for oSTEM Daniel Hou, a chemistry and geology senior and head organizer of an alternative Draggieland event, said he first got word of this decision early in the fall semester through his contacts in MSC Town Hall.

“We got wind around November of 2021; we have a few friends in Town Hall and student government who told us that the administration, the higher ups of MSC Town Hall, decided they were no longer going to sponsor the event,” Hou said. “I think the term was a ‘university administrative entity.’ They did not give a reason why, but ... this is a really big deal, we can’t just sit on this.”

In response to the denial to support Draggieland through MSC Town Hall, LGBTQ+ student organizations formed their own alternate version of the program and plan to host

it on campus in April. Through social media, the new Draggieland program has received support from students, including raising over \$5,000 in less than a week through donations.

Despite MSC Town Hall losing its administrative support for Draggieland, in an official statement to The Battalion, university officials said they did not prevent “the group” from performing.

“Texas A&M did not disallow the group to perform. If a student organization wants to host an event, they are more than welcome to do so as long as they go through the proper protocols,” the comment states. “A student organization did so, and the event is set for April.”

“The group” the statement refers to is unclear, as the performers from Draggieland 2020 and 2021 were invited to audition by MSC Town Hall coordinators, and were not a part of the planning and university approval process.

Industrial engineering senior Zanab Toppa, president of oSTEM, said this lack of support from administration has shown how current students are not being prioritized.

“It’s just disappointing for me, honestly, because it seems the university decision is prioritizing former students over current students,” Toppa said. “While A&M has made many strides in the past few years, I think Draggieland has been the most visible on-campus event for LGBTQ+ students.”

Hou said Draggieland’s cancellation and a lack of support made them feel that LGBTQ+ Aggies are not cared for on campus.

“To me, it goes to show that A&M likes to show off the good parts, but likes to cover up the hatred and bigotry and ignorance, the homophobia that happens on campus,” Hou said. “It’s not even caring [about LGBTQ+ students], from my experience talking to administrators, they actively don’t really like us, as an LGBT community, dealing with the hatred that erupts around Draggieland.”

A point of frustration for Hou has been a lack of communication between administration and students about why the event is no longer being sponsored, he said. Many students reached out to the Vice President of Student Affairs, or VPSA, Gen. Joe Ramirez for explanation, Hou said, but have been unsuccessful in this contact.

“MSC Town Hall has a very structured organization with layers, and the top is the VPSA,” Hou said. “MSC Town Hall has been trying to reach out through the chain of command for months. They’ve been doing it properly, the entire time, getting absolutely no response. Every time they go up the chain of command, they get stonewalled, or they get told to [set up] a meeting.”

Despite multiple requests from The Battalion, Ramirez has declined to comment on the removal of sponsorship of Draggieland as of the time of publication.

Moving forward, Hou said his hope is that LGBTQ+ students will unify in the future in order to have their voices heard by administration.

“For the longest time, the queer student organizations have been trying to form a unified voice for LGBT student on campus, because we have six or seven LGBT organizations but we don’t have one unified voice for all of us,” Hou said. “So, Draggieland was the way that a lot of the four major ones united. We want

to use the leverage we have for Draggieland to push for establishment of a queer council at A&M.”

The lack of clarity, as well as the denial of the event, has spoken volumes about the priorities of administration, Hou said.

“I think the administration’s values are being clearly reflected in their policies,” Hou said. “We want Draggieland to happen next year and all the years after that. There is literally no reason to cancel Draggieland. It did well the first year, second year, it made profits; there is no reason that does not end in a ‘-phobia.’”

## Fish Camp

While it is unclear exactly when some student organizations began receiving new instructions and by whom, some changes were suggested toward a particular organization that were made public on Oct. 27, 2021.

Among organizations mentioned in the MGT consultation report was the long-standing freshman tradition: Fish Camp. The recommendation involved more faculty and university oversight into the selection and processes of operation of the organization, which was later accepted by President Banks. Current Fish Camp head director Mikayla Slaydon assumed her role on Sept. 20, 2021. Regarding selection processes, Slaydon confirmed that the organization now requires approval from the Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs.

“Our biggest change is definitely our selection timeline delay. Those started to appear right after I got selected for the position because, in a typical year, the head director starts picking assistant directors very soon after they are selected themselves,” Slaydon said. “So typically I would have assistant directors in the middle of October. I did not get those picked until the middle of November. And typically we would have chairs picked by the end of November, and I did not have chairs until last week.”

Other than the delay of chair decisions and the alteration of the process through VPSA, another change lies in the Fish Camp Values. The values were amended in 2018 to include “Diversity,” with A&M’s Core Values: Respect, Excellence, Leadership, Loyalty, Integrity and Selfless Service. However, diversity is no longer listed in the values, which Slaydon said happened before her term.

“For adjustment in our values and our mission statement, I would put those around the middle of October,” Slaydon said. “Those two changes were phrased as a ‘had already been decided before I had assumed the position.’ So I’m not quite sure of when those initial conversations were. That predated my assuming of the position.”

When asked why diversity was no longer in-

cluded in Fish Camp’s values, university officials responded with the following statement:

“The heart of Fish Camp is diversity — it’s bringing all Aggies together. The change was made to align Fish Camp’s core values with Texas A&M’s Core Values, which are Respect, Excellence, Leadership, Loyalty, Integrity and [Selfless] Service. This program — which is under Student Activities and is supported by a student organization — is a freshman’s first tradition. We want A&M’s Core Values to be a part of that introduction to the Aggie experience,” A&M’s statement to The Battalion reads. “The advisers for Fish Camp and this year’s director of Fish Camp both were told about the change in September.”

Former head director of Fish Camp Eric Muñoz, Class of 2021, said he was not a part of the decision to remove diversity from the camp’s values. So, this decision did not include input from two consecutive students in the highest student leadership position in Fish Camp, according to these two accounts.

“I was informed that the values were changing whenever recruitment [for director staff] was almost done,” Muñoz said. “Whatever head director recruitment was underway, it was then revealed to me that it was something that was on the table and it wasn’t an option.”

As he has no current affiliation with Fish Camp, Muñoz said he personally believes that students should be able to convey the ideas and values of their organization without restraint.

“It was presented that the reason for the change was to align the mission and vision and the values more with the university because it is the sole freshman orientation program,” Muñoz said. “That’s absolutely valid; however, I do stand with the ideology that you should always be able to also express your own personal belief system, if everybody within the organization agrees with them.”

STUDENT ORGS ON PG. 7

## THE BATTALION

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### Negotiating the USMCA: Domestic and International Challenges

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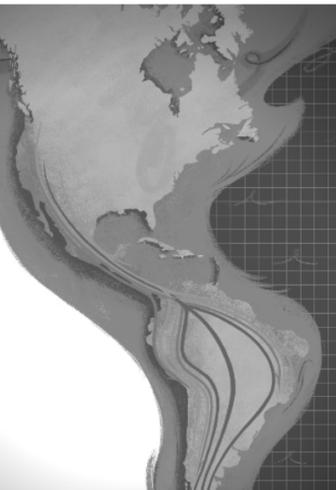
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# 'They've got a fight on their hands'



Robert O'Brien — THE BATTALION

Students from around Texas A&M's campus react to the news that university administration intends to change The Battalion's operations.

## Supporters of The Battalion speak out on president's decision to end print

By Kathryn Miller & Caroline Wilburn  
@KathrynMiller0 & @Carolinewilb

Following university President M. Katharine Banks' demand on Thursday, Feb. 10 that The Battalion cease printing, students and supporters have responded with their views.

Students, journalists and Battalion supporters have taken to social media to voice their opinion on the decision, using #SaveTheBatt to raise awareness about the demand.

International studies senior Alexia Hernandez said she was taken aback by Banks' decision.

"I was surprised, taken off guard," Hernandez said. "However, at the same time, I was suspicious of why this had happened considering that there has been other developments very similar to this such as with Memorial Student Center Town Hall. I was surprised, but at the same time, I wasn't. I was just outraged that the university felt that it could strong-arm an independent student organization into basically doing what it wants."

Hernandez said she believes student expression is incredibly important, especially now, in a time when expression can be controversial and people may not always agree with one another.

"It doesn't matter if you agree with what is being written or said as long as you have the right to do so," Hernandez said. "I think that's what America is founded on. I think it's

founded on freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and I think that's what makes America so great. What makes A&M so great is that it has prided itself on being a free speech institution and hosting a variety of different ideas from all sides of the aisle. To me, that's why it's important to have that independent student voice that is reporting on what's really going on, even if university administration doesn't want to shine any light on the events or issues that are happening on campus."

As a leader in the #SaveTheBatt movement, which is unaffiliated with The Battalion, Hernandez said the group has been focusing on digital advocacy, reaching out to different stakeholders who may be interested in supporting the movement and getting as many eyes on the issue as possible.

"I created a flyer that we distributed at Aggieland Saturday — we distributed about 700 flyers to prospective students and their families to educate them about what the university administration is doing to The Battalion," Hernandez said. "We educated people who were interested on how they can get involved and why this matters, not only for The Battalion, but for the state of free speech on campus and the state of free expression on campus and student autonomy. We have been working strategically to keep in contact with student government, as well as brainstorm some ideas for how we can support The Battalion in any way we can."

Sociology senior Gwen Howerton said she grew up reading The Battalion, even before attending Texas A&M, and has always found it to be good source for community events

and news.

"Free press is one of the core foundations of our country," Howerton said. "It's a great way to keep things transparent and to hold people in power accountable. It's a great way for people in the community and students to just know what's going on in their community and at their university. I think that, regardless of political slant, it's important to have a good newspaper. If The Battalion was a super conservative newspaper on campus, I still think it would be completely disrespectful and inappropriate for the administration to try to exercise control over it. Free press is important, no matter what your stance is."

As a member of KANM student radio, Howerton said she believes the university's recent actions representing its general view on student media.

"It is part of a broader course of action from the administration that shows complete disrespect to student leaders and student organizations and the independence that comes with them," Howerton said. "It's important that every student organization on campus, regardless of what they do, comes together for this because it shows kind of about what the university admin[istration] thinks of student [organizations] and student leaders and students in general."

Journalism junior Peyton Reed said journalism, without the freedom of the press, is propaganda by a higher authority.

"You can't censor journalists in any way," Reed said. "It is not journalism. As an institution of higher learning, [A&M] should be supporting proper journalism, because there's

enough issues right now in the world with journalists who are, who have agendas. And, Texas A&M shouldn't be discouraging the freedom of press. It's wrong and it's embarrassing to take away a journalist's right to write what they have seen and what they believe and what they've done research and hard work on. You can't censor that."

It is hard to silence all the voices in support of The Battalion, and the fight is nowhere near done, Reed said.

"I think it means that they've got a fight on their hands," Reed said. "There are a lot of people from a lot of different places that are very, very upset about this. And I think that if A&M thought that we were going to go down without a fight, they're horribly wrong."

Biomedical sciences junior Lauren Cramer said she is disappointed in Banks' decision to end a longstanding tradition without input from The Battalion's leadership, members, staff adviser or other levels of administration.

"This is such an old tradition, even before World War I. If she takes this away, what's stopping her from taking away anything else?" Cramer said. "Tradition: it's important to everyone in different ways. If you pick and choose which traditions are important, how are you going to find value in traditions?"

Cramer said if The Battalion were to cease printing, it would affect the lives of Aggies across multiple generations.

"I have a friend taking an entomology class and he was talking about how his professor was really disappointed that The Battalion was asked to stop printing," Cramer said. "He's an older man, and he wakes up with his coffee every [Thursday], he'll read the print version of The Battalion and he looks forward to those mornings. I can definitely see how disappointing it would be for someone else."

Cramer said she is most disappointed in Banks' response and her failure to see the importance of print journalism.

"Either she's choosing not to see the importance or she's not qualified for her leadership position," Cramer said. "I think it's wrong of her. A&M is based on community that I just don't understand how she, as president, can cancel the words of the student voice."

Philosophy freshman Ruby Brand said The Battalion shouldn't be censored because readers need the whole truth of campus occurrences and not just pieces of it.

"I know people who pick up copies for memories, like for instance the [Ala]bama game or Silver Taps," Brand said. "The Batt refills newsstands on Thursday — the next day, it's already halfway gone. I see how fast the newspapers are read. We need to have student newspapers so that students can have a voice on campus and so people can actually hear about and see life at A&M."

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Kay Naegeli — THE BATTALION

The Reed Rowdies revive an old tradition by reading copies of The Battalion before the Texas A&M men's basketball's game against the Florida Gators on Tuesday, Feb. 15.

# Commentary: Tangible value of print

Assistant sports editor Jordan Epp argues physical copies will be forever important in the sports world

Jordan Epp  
@j\_epp22

When you walk into my apartment, you won't see much decoration. I lack the creative eye — and desire — to adorn my walls with mementos and ornaments. I only have a few keepsakes I brought along with me from my hometown to my new-found home.

As someone who doesn't consider himself materialistic, I don't keep many physical items for reasons beyond practicality or sentimentality. Some of these items include a gifted picture frame with a photograph of me and my girlfriend, a flag of my favorite football team since I was a child and gaming consoles to connect me with my high school friends,

as well as some others.

One collection in my possession I would consider unique to me, however, is a file holder in which I keep old Sports Illustrated magazines I found special in one way or another. Whether it is the design, the story or the moment, if I feel compelled to save it, then I will file it away for the future.

But why do I keep them? If it's the design, couldn't I find the images online? If it's the story, couldn't I read it online? If it's the moment, couldn't I find the videos online?

Stories are best appreciated in the moment. The print copies of these magazines are the closest objects I have to these moments; they honor the past in a way that's tangible and not just kept on a screen behind a sequence of ones and zeros. It's a way for me to own a piece of history.

Online copies can help preserve the moments I was never able to keep myself or provide additional content unavailable in print format. Print copies preserve history that can be kept in my hands.

To me, it's no different than owning a picture frame. Photographs hold moments and stories eternally in a tangible way. We put them on our walls to decorate our lives with them. We choose our favorite stories to show off in our homes, and we make it easier to look at and reminisce on our memories of them.

If the value of existence is greater than or equal to tangible value, the practicality of saving every photo on a hard drive would be far more favorable. But, we don't. They're not equal. That's why we frame photos. It goes beyond the idea of tradition. It's the ability to trap a moment in time like a living fossil in amber. So, in my room I have a few items. I

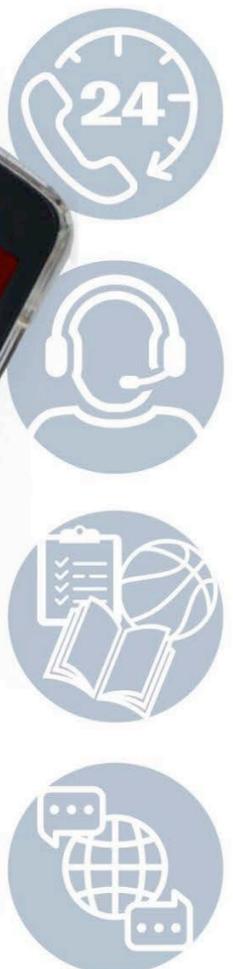
have Sports Illustrated magazines I saved with various covers such as UConn star guard Paige Bueckers winning Gatorade Player of the Year in highschool, the Chicago Cubs celebrating the moment they broke the 71-year-old Curse of the Billy Goat, former New England Patriots receiver Julian Edelman making the improbable catch to overcome the Atlanta Falcons' infamous 28-3 lead and more than a dozen more stories that define sports history in different ways to me. And, I have that picture of my girlfriend and me, because the moments worth saying and remembering are the moments worth physically owning.

Jordan Epp is a journalism junior and assistant sports editor for The Battalion.

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# NOTABLE REACTIONS



## Natalie Parks

Texas A&M Student Body President

"The Battalion is a longstanding tradition at [A&M]. I stand in strong support of independent student journalism and will always be an advocate for the student voice," Parks tweeted.



## Lyle Lovett

Singer-songwriter, Former Battalion staff

"I don't understand this decision. I still like holding newspapers — and magazines and books — in my hands as I read them," Lovett tweeted in reaction to the news that The Battalion was demanded to stop printing.



## Charean Williams

Pro Football Hall of Famer, Former Battalion staff

"The Battalion taught me more about real-world journalism than any class ever did or could. The printed product remains a big part of the education process for future journalists. So for non-journalists to make a decision about the future of something they admit they know nothing about is ludicrous," Williams said in a statement to The Battalion.



## Leon O'Neal Jr.

Former Texas A&M Football defensive back

"Let 'em print 🗞️👏," O'Neal simply stated on Twitter in reaction to the news.



## Chris Whitley

College Media Assoc. President, Fomer Battalion staff

"As [College Media Association] president, I would find this disturbing at any school. But as a former [Battalion] editor myself, this makes me angry. I support the students and the adviser of The Battalion and will stand behind them and help in any way they need," Whitley tweeted.



## Sonia Moghe

CNN reporter, Former Battalion staff

"I am devastated. I was editor-in-chief of The Batt and would not be where I am today were it not for my time working on the print edition of this phenomenal student-run paper. A&M is killing off a nearly 130-year-old tradition," Moghe tweeted in response to the news President Banks ordered The Battalion to stop printing.



## Dallas Morning News Editorial Board

"Texas needs great journalists. We hope this hiccup reinforces the Aggies' commitment to high-quality journalism education, and at least 129 more years of The Batt," The Dallas Morning News Editorial Board wrote in an opinion piece published Feb. 16. Read more at [tx.ag/DMNEditorial](http://tx.ag/DMNEditorial).

## SPLC, SPJ, FIRE, CMA, ACP, TIPA

"Decisions about the content and format of The Battalion should rest with the students who create it with support from professional staff. Our organizations support the students and the adviser of The Battalion and stand ready to assist them during this time. We look forward to hearing the steps you will take to return ownership of The Battalion to those who produce it," an editorial signed by the Student Press Law Center, the Society of Professional Journalists, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, the College Media Association, the Associated College Press and the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association reads. Read it in full at [tx.ag/CMAEditorial](http://tx.ag/CMAEditorial).



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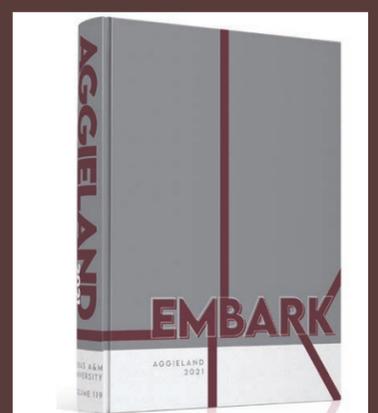
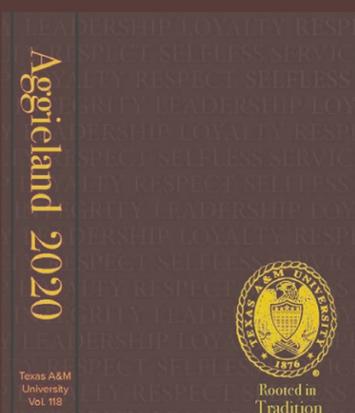
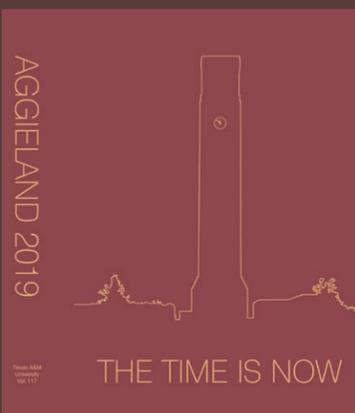
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**EDITORIAL CONTINUED**

And determine the future of our organization we will, as we advocate for the continuation of print editions in the journalism working group. We are willing to collaborate and discuss new options for The Battalion to work with a new Department of Journalism, but we will not change our editorial decisions based on what this department — or administration — may or may not want.

The tragic irony of the situation is at the same time Banks has claimed to advocate for journalism at A&M through the new department, she is actively killing the trust of potential students in the program.

“Good luck finding any prospective students who would want to write for a publication that is the university’s lapdog,” Ian Curtis said in A&M Consolidated High School’s publication, The Roar. “What do they gain from writing for a paper that’s nothing more than a public relations arm for the school?”

There has been one time in The Battalion’s 129 years when an A&M president tried to control editorial decisions, and there’s a plaza and a tower named after him. In 1965, Texas A&M University was facing a number of monumental changes, chief among them was allowing women and minorities. But it also faced serious administrative censorship.

President James Earl Rudder routinely told former editor-in-chief Thomas DeFrank, Class of 1967, “We do not air our dirty laundry in public.”

In DeFrank’s own words, “[Rudder] did not want his student newspaper to cause trouble.”

If The Battalion tried publishing anything political — or anything Rudder considered “detrimental” to A&M — DeFrank said members of the administration would completely remove the story when the paper arrived at A&M’s printing press, without notifying anyone at The Battalion.

In September of 1966, DeFrank said Rudder’s administration suddenly changed The Battalion’s masthead to read “Publisher: Texas A&M” above any student editors’ names — seizing the seat of true editorial control for the administration above student journalists. Administrators told DeFrank The Battalion was not allowed to publish anything in regard to the masthead changing. However, when a reporter from the Associated Press’ Dallas office called The Battalion to ask why the masthead had changed, DeFrank replied, “Well, none of us feel like we’re really a newspaper anymore.”

Thomas DeFrank was fired by the university as editor-in-chief of The Battalion on Sept. 30, 1966.

“[Rudder] felt like the student newspaper should be a chronicle of the good things happening around the university. He thought it should be ... a public relations adjunct,” DeFrank said.

The independent student voice of Texas A&M is not a public relations adjunct of anyone. We print the news; the good, the bad and the ugly. Anyone who has any concerns over that can take it up with the First Amendment of the United States’ Constitution.

**STUDENT ORGS CONTINUED**

Muñoz was made aware of the decision through conversation with one of the Fish Camp advisers, not through an office of university administration, and was similarly not given a reason as to why.

“I think that [diversity] was added for a reason,” Muñoz said. “I think that it wasn’t something just to fill a void. I think, obviously, we saw a need for it as an organization and that’s why it was added.”

The entire experience of last semester was a learning curve for both administrators and Fish Camp leadership, Slaydon said. She added the increased involvement with the VPSA’s office in recruitment along with the typically student-made decisions still require some adjustment, especially considering the recent organizational changes.

“I think that since changes started happening last fall, we, the Fish Camp organization and the VPSA office, have undergone a learning curve and what it means to be collaborative with another audience,” Slaydon said. “From our side, we’re not used to having people other than only student leaders and with our adviser, approve membership or conduct our selection processes when we originally had them set. The VPSA office typically takes a more detached role from student organizations and doesn’t really collaborate with students directly. Both of those changed this year.”

When the faculty advisers of Fish Camp, Carly Rice and Andrew Caruth, were asked for comment, The Battalion was directed to A&M’s Department of Marketing and Communications, which provided the aforementioned comment from university officials.

**SBP Reactions**

Student Body President Natalie Parks said the recent news of The Battalion made her wonder about the future of other student organizations, as some have faced situations in which they did not know what they could challenge or why changes were being made to their organizations in the first place.

“Student leaders have been blindsided in those situations, or sat down and given a list of demands that they felt like they didn’t have the possibility or opportunity to say no to, given the

environment and intimidation factor,” Parks said. “A lot of them are probably more willing to speak up now versus back in the fall. A lot of us didn’t want to or just felt uncomfortable doing so.”

Parks said, starting in November of 2021, members of the Student Government Association had heard some conversation about Draggieland’s discontinuation, and some formal discussions were had regarding gathering information about the circumstances of this decision. Through this, similarities between this situation and other organizations became apparent.

“We did get the full story of what was happening, but there wasn’t anything written down,” Parks said. “That is something that we have seen with these different scenarios, whether it’s Fish Camp or The Battalion or MSC Town Hall, is that these student were sat down and told all these different things that they either had to change going forward about their processes or the fact that an event wouldn’t be able to happen and they wouldn’t even be able to go through the approval process in the first place without any sort of written memorandum or email; no sort of written correspondence.”

Parks said one of the common themes she has heard through conversations with student leaders is the lack of communication and collaboration between who in administration is making decisions about organizations and the organizations’ members.

“It seems that discussions are being had with and between administrators and university officials,” Parks said. “It’s never mentioned who those people are. We can make our guesses, but nothing is ever clarified, necessarily, when these students are sat down, usually not with the individuals who have made the executive decision. I guess that [is] a pattern of delegation.”

One factor which also seems to be ignored, Parks said, is the vast experience some student leaders have, after being in their respective organizations for most of their college lives and knowing more than anyone outside the organization about their operations.

“With these various things that have happened, and the fact that students, the student leaders who put on these traditions, put on the programs, write the paper, are the experts in that field, and these decisions are being made without any consultation of their perspectives and experience in those spaces,” Parks

said. “That, to me, is largely unacceptable, and quite honestly doesn’t make any sense, because we are — like I said — the experts at what we do.”

Specifically regarding changes to Fish Camp, Parks said the lack of input from students and the sudden actions out of students’ control bring up many questions about its implications now and for the future of other organizations.

“Being sat down in a meeting and basically told, ‘You are going to alter your entire selection timeline for choosing directors,’ that’s what happened with Fish Camp,” Parks said. “‘You are going to change your values of your organization that are extremely important to every single aspect of the culture and the way that you function to reflect the university Core Values,’ when other organizations on campus don’t have to do that, raises a lot of red flags.”

Currently, Parks said no such changes have been made to SGA by administration — or any other entities outside that may influence such decisions — but some have expressed concerns about the future of student government.

“People do fear that that could be next for SGA, specifically certain committees in student government that put on huge traditions such as Aggie Muster or Traditions Council [who] puts on Silver Taps,” Parks said. “Those are things that have a lot of value to the university and to former students, and it seems that certain groups of former students want to have a seat at the table and essentially want a say in how these traditions are run on campus, even though they don’t go here anymore. That’s something that we’ve also noticed.”

Parks said she believes many of the current problems with administrative overreach could be solved simply by involving students in spaces where decisions regarding their organizations are being made. She also expressed concern from her perspective as a leader of a student organization that administrative changes may not align with the future goals and wishes of herself or members of SGA.

“The fact that administration isn’t including key stakeholders, the students, the experts of these organizations, in these different spaces where the decision is being made ... it doesn’t make any sense,” Parks said. “I really don’t understand how you can think you’re an expert in an area that you’ve never been involved in.”

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CHEM 1305: Introductory Chemistry Lab I (Lecture)	CHEM 106	PSYC 2314: Lifespan Growth and Development	PSYC 225
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PRINT CONTINUED

mer editor of the National Press Photographers Association Tom Burton said he was also surprised by the announcement.

"We were all blindsided ... in the end this is really not about whether or not there should be a print publication," Burton said. "It's about the way it was introduced and also the very real question about whether the administration even has the authority to tell The Battalion whether or not they can print or how they distribute their information."

If The Battalion was to join the new Department of Journalism, it's too early to tell what its role might be, Burton said.

"There is suspicion that moving The Battalion, under the non-existent journalism department, would allow the administration to apply certain content controls that they have currently over, say, a departmental website ... which I think would be wrong [and could] run counter [to] what journalism is," Burton said.

These suspicions are highlighted by a new policy, Rule 09.02.01, passed on Oct. 7, 2021, regarding the oversight of online content produced by the university.

The rule states, "[Official messaging of members], such as signage, social media postings, press releases, news media interviews and website postings, must be approved in accordance with applicable member rules or procedures. Each member chief executive officer will adopt necessary rules and/or procedures to implement this regulation and may delegate approval authority as needed to facilitate effective operations."

Journalism is not defined or dependent upon its media, Burton said.

"A print newspaper like The Battalion allows student journalists to develop skills that are transferable," Burton said. "It's not about the ink going on the paper, it's about doing the reporting, it's about doing the interviewing, it's about writing a story that is well balanced and serves the community."

This does not mean print is no longer viable in the modern world, Burton said.

"There are markets and communities where the print product is the best way to communicate," Burton said. "Magazines, for instance, are actually growing circulation in demand right now."

Burton said this is even more important

when it comes to local news.

"There's a saying that 'the only news is local news and local news is best reported by the people who are there,'" Burton said. "The best stories have always been done by people who are a part of the community that they are reporting on, and that's the value of having good local journalism."

By the end of the day, the news had spread to media outlets ranging from Brazos Valley publications to statewide outlets, reporting the story and interviewing Battalion staff members. Coverages can be found from KBTX, KAGS, KXXV, The Eagle, Houston Chronicle and the Texas Tribune.

At approximately 1:23 p.m., The Battalion's editor-in-chief and Student Body President Natalie Parks met with Vice President of Student Affairs Gen. Joe Ramirez, after Parks requested an emergency meeting. Gen. Ramirez declined to have the meeting recorded, but said Banks' decision to move The Battalion under the university and cease printing was final.

In the hours following publication, the original story garnered over 2 million impressions on Twitter alone, and a #SaveTheBatt movement was created by students and community members concerned about the paper's future, both online and in print.

Shortly thereafter, Banks followed up with staff via email and said she and Ramirez had met and reconsidered their position.

"Vice-President Ramirez and I considered your comments carefully as well as our advertising commitments and decided to allow The Battalion to continue printing until the end of the semester. At that time, we will make the change to digital only," Banks' email read.

Banks' office released an official press release publicly confirming the update at 4:24 p.m.

The following day marked Aggieland Saturday, A&M's largest open house event of the year, hosting thousands of prospective students and their families, where the #SaveTheBatt organizers, who are unaffiliated with The Battalion, passed out flyers on campus outlining their concerns, including international studies senior Alexia Hernandez.

"Today, student organizers handed out flyers at Aggieland Saturday to spread awareness & educate prospective students and their families about the current movement to #SaveTheBatt. Want to get involved in supporting the cause? Reply under this tweet,"

Hernandez tweeted.

Following a series of communications with editorial staff, the Student Press Law Center released an official statement on Feb. 14 in support for The Battalion, co-signed by various media organizations such as the College Media Association and Texas Intercollegiate Press Association.

"All of us are concerned that this undermines the ability of student journalists to maintain their editorial independence," the statement reads. "College media organizations, just like professional media, only work when they have control over their product."

The same day, at a meeting of the Faculty Senate, Rice addressed concerns of faculty members, leading to further discussion. Parks attended and shared student perspectives on the situation.

During the meeting, Rice said he had received various calls of concerns from faculty members regarding The Battalion's future status.

"It's also easy to see why many faculty fear the [ir] academic freedom and their own free speech rights could be next on the hit list," Rice said. "One of the biggest concerns for me is the absence of a consultation process in decisions that affect students, staff and faculty. Why are decisions repeatedly made unilaterally, although some may be cheering a return to the General Rudder era, I do not believe that is the way to lead a university forward into greatness — and I know many of you feel exactly the same way."

On behalf of students, Parks said she knows the university has intentions of propelling forward, but she is concerned about some of the changes being implemented.

"I really have noticed this overall just kind of lack of communication and collaboration from university officials when it comes to making decisions about student life and extracurricular[s], specifically on campus," Parks said. "Myself and fellow student leaders have witnessed and been on the receiving end of these patterns of unnecessary administrative oversight into areas that have functioned for decades without the influence of executive orders; demands for immediate levels of significant change without consultation of key stakeholders, those stakeholders being the students."

Additionally, Parks said student voices are necessary for all decisions regarding "The Path Forward," led by Banks.

"Our voices must be included in all future decision-making processes," Parks said. "I really want to say that the Student Government Association is very much willing to work and partner with the Faculty Senate in the time ahead to ensure that all constituencies on campus are heard, and we are very open to collaboration and open communication across all fronts all the time."

That night, at 6:00 p.m., two students on the editorial staff and adviser Pils were invited to join the working group for the new Department of Journalism. Shortly after, at 8 p.m., Banks released a statement to the public regarding the additions.

In response to the updating situation, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE, sent a letter the afternoon of Feb. 15 to President Banks, expressing their support for the publication.

"Demanding that The Battalion cease its print edition and submit to university oversight or

lose its office space and faculty adviser is an impermissible encroachment upon the student editors' right to determine the content, mode of production and organizational structure of the publication," the letter reads.

To further support the publication, in their Feb. 16 meeting, the SGA Student Senate unanimously passed a resolution in support of The Battalion, Student Resolution 74.23.

Most notably, and recently, Texas A&M System Chancellor John Sharp said, in an email to The Battalion, he believes the changes implemented to the publication will be for the benefit of campus journalists.

"I asked four presidents to restore journalism as a major and President Banks was the first one who immediately said, 'Absolutely.' She agreed to do it her first day in office," Sharp said. "Her critics are wrong to categorize her as opposed to free speech on campus. She is the President who will return journalism to its rightful place at Texas A&M. She wants it to be number one in the nation. Few things are as important as having Aggie journalists stationed around the world. And she knows that."

The Battalion's staff will continue advocating for its editorial control in meetings with the journalism working group throughout the remainder of the spring semester, and explore options to maintain the independent student voice on campus.

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1 7 4 2

3 9 6 4

5 8 2

1 5 4

5 9 4

9 6 2 3

2 4 5

8

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**ANSWERS to todays puzzles**

1	8	2	4	5	7	3	9	8
8	7	3	9	6	2	4	1	5
9	4	5	8	1	3	6	2	7
6	3	8	1	2	5	7	4	9
7	5	9	3	4	6	2	8	1
4	2	1	7	8	9	5	3	6
5	9	6	2	3	8	1	7	4
2	8	4	6	7	1	9	5	3
3	1	7	5	9	4	8	6	2

**ANSWERS to todays puzzles**

**Across**

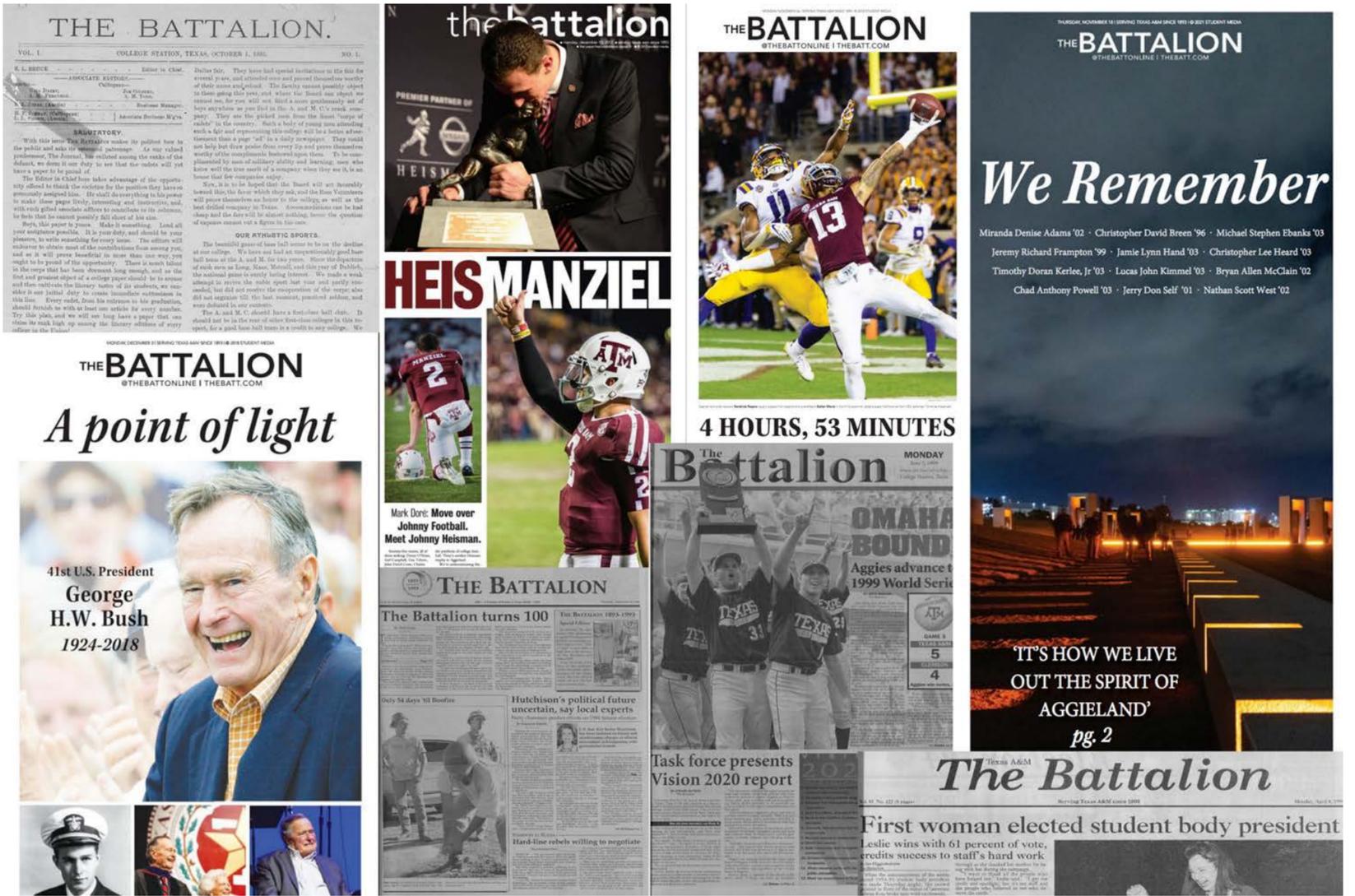
- Taro root
- Absorbs, with "up"
- Iraqi city
- Discomfit
- Samoan cash
- Ordinary
- Chick warmer
- Durable fabric
- Rubicon crosser
- Floppy
- Drops on blades
- Mark of perfection
- Angler's basket
- Black ink item
- Educ. group
- Robust
- Ranch, maybe
- Pocketbook
- Support person
- Shamu, for one
- Fabricated
- Sag
- Juicer
- High point
- Surrealist Max
- Court do-over
- Weep
- Computer list
- Mess up
- Circumvent
- Looking to get ahead
- Teaser
- Send packing
- Juncture
- Breezing through
- List abbr.
- Bohemian

**Down**

- How Junior behaved
- Maori "woman"
- Sine or cosine
- Expel
- Modify
- Bubbly drinks
- Refines, as ore
- Evita, for one
- Fiesta fare
- Pallid
- Legal action
- Diatribes
- Lily family member
- Introduction
- Weighed down
- Bay window
- God in Vedic mythology
- With, in Paris
- 2004 Queen Latifah movie
- Hotel convenience
- Give off, as light
- Isinglass
- Decant
- Craving
- Unit of pressure
- Blood carrier
- Shipping hazard
- Victoria's Secret item

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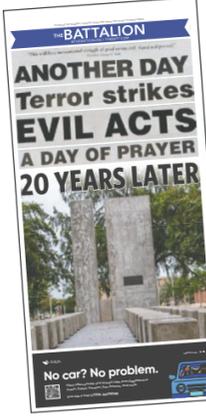
"Wouldn't be where I am today without The Batt. I learned how to work on deadline, lay out a paper and delegate as an editor. Some of my favorite years in school."  
**Jonathan Wall, '07, English**  
 Managing Editor, Golf Magazine/GOLF.com



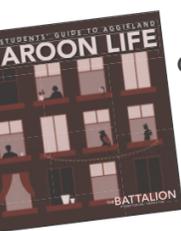
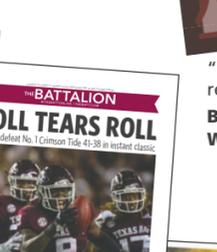
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**Stacy Bertinelli, '93, English & History**  
 Manager of Community Accounts Market Enginuity



"My entire professional career has been shaped by my time spent working at @TheBattOnline as a student reporter and editor. I'm no longer in the J-biz, but make no mistake: I use elements of what I learned there every hour of every day. Can't imagine my life without it!"  
**True Brown, '04, Agricultural Journalism**  
 Senior Director of Development, A&M Foundation



"It truly helped me figure out the direction I wanted to go in career-wise!"  
**Bethany Irvine, '18, Communication**  
 Washington, D.C., Reporting Fellow, Texas Tribune



"Learned so much during my time there and definitely made lifelong friends. Wouldn't be who I am today without my time at The Batt."  
**Doug Fuentes, '01, Journalism**  
 Registered Nurse/Assistant Nurse Manager, Baylor Scott & White



"The Batt is where I learned my craft and caught the journalism bug. Hopefully many more generations will get the same opportunity."  
**Matthew Watkins, '08, Political Science**  
 Managing Editor for News and Politics, Texas Tribune

"I would not be the journalist I am today or have the goals I do now if it wasn't for The Battalion. These students are the future of news. We need them."  
**Chevall Pryce, '17, University Studies/Journalism**  
 Reporter, Houston Community Newspapers

"As a reporter and editor at The Batt, I learned real-time lessons: how to live the ethics of journalism; skills that made success as an entrepreneur publisher possible; and the conviction that journalism matters."  
**Angelique Gammon, '81, Journalism Professor, Texas A&M, former owner & publisher of Insite Magazine**

"My experience as a sports editor/writer was so much more valuable than most of my classes."  
**Carter Karels, '18, University Studies/Journalism**  
 Junior Account Executive, Revolut

"What I learned at The Battalion helped land internships with the Philadelphia Inquirer and The Dallas Morning News. It gave me skills to seamlessly integrate into a professional newsroom."  
**Angela Franco, '19, Telecommunication Media Studies**  
 Communications Coordinator, Houston Dynamo/Dash



# A photo chief's guide to the First Amendment

Photo chief Robert O'Brien analyzes legal history of student journalism within the context of the Bill of Rights



Robert O'Brien — THE BATTALION

Photo chief Robert O'Brien responds to President M. Katherine Banks, saying freedom of the press applies to all newspapers, especially student-run newspapers.

Robert O'Brien

@bob4batt

First and foremost, I'm not a lawyer and I'm not a journalist — I'm a photographer.

With that out of the way, I'm sure most of the people reading this are aware that in the last week, The Battalion managed to unite TexAgs, Texas A&M Barstool, Old Row, TAMU Affirmations, TAMU Barbz, Leon O'Neal Jr. and almost the entirety of Aggie Twitter. In case you missed that, I recommend you read any one of the numerous news stories published about the situation, though I am partial to our own. But, to give a brief summary, A&M administration demanded The Battalion stop printing, effective immediately, and was asked to make a decision to fall under university purview by the next semester or continue as a student organization without certain resources. Personally, I'm not a huge fan of the ultimatum, but that's not what this opinion piece is about.

This piece is about the First Amendment, and my opinion is that Aggies online have been doing a really good job in demonstrating why the University of Texas is still home to the state's premier law school. I've seen many people on Twitter, Instagram and Reddit post about the First Amendment in the context of this situation with various levels of accuracy. I'm no 1L, but I did pass Intro to Business Law, Constitutional Rights and Liberties and Communications Law. I'm not claiming I have even taken the LSAT, and I'm definitely not claiming I would pass the Bar Exam but I'm pretty confident that I know more about the First Amendment than you do, genius.

I'm drawing mostly from my communications law class, taught by David Donaldson, Class of 1973, who graduated from "the only acceptable school an Aggie can go to in Austin: UT Law." He was a damn good professor who taught at UT and A&M, and Professor Donaldson, if you're reading this, please know I really enjoyed your class. If you're wondering why I feel this is worthy of note, just search "David Donaldson Daily Mail meme."

He began his first lecture of the semester by reading the First Amendment out loud to us. That seems as good a place to start as any. Now obviously, I can't read it aloud to you, dear Batt reader, but please read it in your head the way you think someone who is a retired First Amendment lawyer and cowboy action shooting champion would:

**"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."**

The relevant part there is, "or of the press." So, what does that actually mean, Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of the press? The nine people who live in Washington, get paid to put on some drippy robes — drippy means cool — and listen to people who

get paid even more money to argue about what it means, and over the last 230 years, they meet on Fridays to argue about things in a secret room and then they either agree or don't. Eventually, one of them writes down their opinion and at least four other people agree with them and write more opinions and it becomes the law.

But what do they argue about? The American legal system is a combination of precedent, history and tradition. American legal history, regarding the First Amendment, goes back far beyond 1789. We have to first understand why the First Amendment was written before we can even understand how it has been applied today.

Sir William Berkley, royal governor of Virginia in 1671, said this:

"I thank God, we have not free schools nor printing; and I hope we shall not have these hundred years. For learning has brought disobedience, and heresy and sects into the world; and printing has divulged them and libels against the government. God keep us from both!"

I think, regardless of your political beliefs, we can all probably agree what he said doesn't sound very American. Also, it's not a typo, that's how they used to talk. His Majesty the King, much like some people today, could not stand criticism, so the British made it a crime called seditious libel. Anyone who made statements critical of the government could be thrown in jail.

In 1735, exactly that happened. A guy named John Peter Zenger published an article complaining about the local government, and for doing so, the local government threw him in jail. Zenger hired a lawyer named Andrew Hamilton — no relation — who argued while Zenger did indeed publish something that made the government look bad, it was true. So, why should it be a crime? The jury agreed and truth became an accepted defense to libel, and it remains so to this day. And everyone lived happily ever after, and nobody ever got mad at a journalist again.

Ha. Tongue-in-cheek aside, it turns out, many people have gotten mad at journalists since then, and the Supreme Court has decided journalists are protected by the law, often. As long as they meet professional and ethical standards necessary to publish, journalists are supposed to be able to say whatever they want. Especially if it's critical of the government.

Government censorship in professional journalism is supposed to be minimal. There are very few instances in which the government can censor the press. The only two real instances are in times of war or instances where the speech invites violence, see *Neer v. Minnesota*.

Since then, the Supreme Court has proven this barrier is extremely high, allowing The New York Times to publish classified documents during Richard Nixon's administration. The administration attempted to exercise what is known as prior restraint and obtain a judicial order to prevent The New York Times from publishing what would go on to be known as the Pentagon Papers. In *New York Times Co. v. United States*, the Supreme Court found that just because The New York Times would likely embarrass the government, it doesn't put the nation in danger, ultimately ruling that The New York Times was protected under the First Amendment.

Criticizing authority is as much of an American pastime as baseball. Many Americans might think of that whole "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it," quote when they think about free speech in America — funnily enough the spuriously attributed Voltaire and actual author Evelyn Beatrice Hall are French and English, respectively. But, like I

said earlier, I'm not a journalist. I'm a photographer who works for a student newspaper, a student newspaper which is 60 years older than the AP Stylebook; a student newspaper at a state university where the university is the government. What has the Supreme Court decided that I get to say?

Well, here's where it gets tricky and it could take a judge, potentially a panel of judges, to decide specifically what I, as a member of The Battalion, am allowed to do. This comes as a result of the case *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*. One of the many questions raised in *Hazelwood* is if school newspapers are considered a public forum. In First Amendment law, a public forum is simply a protected place in which speech happens. No restriction based on content may occur in a public forum. Specifically, the question raised in the case is whether school newspapers are limited public forums. Limited public forum is a jargon phrase for a category of public forum established in *Perry Education Association v. Perry Educators' Association*, so anytime I refer to a public forum, I mean a limited public forum.

The majority opinion of *Hazelwood*, written by 1937 Heisman runner-up Justice Byron White, states that curriculum-based school newspapers — where students contribute to the paper as a part of a class — are not forums for student expression. He goes so far as to say public schools "need not tolerate student speech that is inconsistent with its basic educational mission, even though the government could not censor similar speech outside the school." Now, before you go and jump to conclusions, let the 1938 and 1940 NFL rushing yards leader finish.

White adds, "School facilities may be deemed to be public forums only if school authorities have by policy or by practice opened the facilities for indiscriminate use by the general public, or by some segment of the public, such as student organizations." By that ruling, as long as school newspapers are produced by students for no reason other than the fact that it is weirdly fun to stay up late making a newspaper, a state university can't censor the student paper's content.

What if, as a few people online have argued, it's an issue of quality, and the quality of The Battalion doesn't meet the level of an institution that is the prestigious farm school of Texas A&M, the world-class research university where we scream nonsense at midnight and worship a dog and where we embrace the fact that other schools call us a cult. What if we make a newspaper that is so bad, we sully that reputation?

Aside from the fact that by an actual quantitative metric, The Battalion is the sixth best college newspaper in the country, it wouldn't change anything. In a 2001 case before the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, *Kincaid v. Gibson*, school officials refused to allow a student-run yearbook to deliver their finished print because they thought the yearbook was of low quality and "inappropriate." The court found that college students, believe it or not, are adults, and should be treated as such — unless you write something like "Bong Hits 4 Jesus." That's a whole different story though, so you'll have to look that one up on your own.

The judge who wrote the *Kincaid* opinion, R. Guy Cole Jr., did what I will describe as the legal equivalent of that unoffensive yell Head Yell Leader Memo Salinas had to write a letter about last fall. He says calling something low quality is an issue of content. I'll just let him take it from here:

"There is little if any difference between hiding from public view the words and pictures students use to portray their college experience, and forcing

students to publish a state-sponsored script. In either case, the government alters student expression by obliterating it. We will not sanction a reading of the First Amendment that permits government officials to censor expression in a limited public forum in order to coerce speech that pleases the government."

Public universities are a hotbed for First Amendment issues. That's why groups like Foudation for Individual Rights for Education publish rankings for how different universities compare when it comes to support for the First Amendment. In my research, I found a paragraph from Justice Anthony Kennedy's majority opinion in *Rosenberger v. University of Virginia*, and while that situation in that case is not the situation in every other First Amendment case, I still feel it perfectly summarizes what the First Amendment means on college campuses:

"The first danger to liberty lies in granting the state the power to examine publications to determine whether or not they are based on some ultimate idea and, if so, for the state to classify them. The second, and corollary, danger is to speech from the chilling of individual thought and expression. That danger is especially real in the university setting, where the state acts against a background and tradition of thought and experiment that is at the center of our intellectual and philosophic tradition.

"In ancient Athens, and, as Europe entered into a new period of intellectual awakening, in places like Bologna, Oxford and Paris, universities began as voluntary and spontaneous assemblages or concourses for students to speak and to write and to learn. The quality and creative power of student intellectual life to this day remains a vital measure of a school's influence and attainment. For the university, by regulation, to cast disapproval on particular viewpoints of its students risks the suppression of free speech and creative inquiry in one of the vital centers for the nation's intellectual life, its college and university campuses."

The Battalion is a student organization. Any student at A&M is welcome to apply to be a writer or photographer. But, as long as I have been a student here, faculty — including the Texas A&M System chancellor — have been welcomed as guest contributors. The content of the newspaper should not be influenced by anyone other than current A&M students. It is the students who are supposed to write the stories, take the pictures and design the paper. It is ours to make, ours to screw up and ours to learn from. As the very first editors of The Battalion said in the inaugural edition, "Boys this paper is yours. Make it something. Lend all your assistance possible. It is your duty, and should be your pleasure, to write something for every issue. The editors will endeavor to obtain most of the contributions from among you, and as it will prove beneficial in more than one way, you ought to be proud of the opportunity."

So, if you're a former student who has an issue with the content in The Batt, I'm glad you feel like you're still in Aggieland, but you're not. You don't get a say in student life anymore, your time here is done. It's a college newspaper, for college students. That's the purpose of our publication: a campus forum for current A&M students to enter their thoughts into the marketplace of ideas. So, current students, please contribute. Share your ideas and let the best idea win. That's the whole point.

Robert O'Brien is a political science senior and photo chief for The Battalion.