In general, life at Texas A&M University is progressing satisfactorily. We are continuing the faculty hiring program and are on track to hiring a total of 100 or so new faculty this year, in addition to replacing retirees. We are very satisfied with Dr. Robert Gates, our president at Texas A&M University. In fact, we appreciate his turning down President Bush's offer of the intelligence czar position and instead agreeing to extend his contract at A&M.

A student may drop a class any time during the first four class days without penalty, and he/she may add a class any time during the first five days of classes. This plan appears to work very well. We restrict our students to a life-time total of three Q-drops, which can be taken any time during the 5th to 50th class day of any semester. There is a steady background of agitation from the students to increase the number of Q-drops and/or to extend the period during the semester in which they can be taken. We have considered other policies, and we have tried longer stretches of the semester for taking the Q-drops, but we have found our present number and period satisfactory.

However, in January President Gates announced a new grade forgiveness policy, in which a student may ask that up to three courses taken in the student's freshman year be removed from the courses used for computing the Grade Point Ratio. Such courses are left on the student's transcript. The election of a course for grade forgiveness prevents its being used as credit toward graduation unless the course is retaken.

The purpose of the new policy is to allow true freshmen -- first time enrollees in college -- who discover they have taken on more than they can handle, or who just want to experiment with classes in fields other than their declared major, to not suffer the consequences this one time.

Previous to the adoption of this policy, a somewhat different grade forgiveness policy was passed by our Faculty Senate and accepted by President Gates. However, the Rules and Regulations Committee rejected the policy. Responding to this disagreement, Senate Speaker Gunn sent the policy to President Gates for a decision, and, after consulting with the Senate leadership and other groups, President Gates decided upon the policy of freshman-only grade forgiveness. It is too soon to say what the effect of this grade forgiveness policy will be.

Continuing the progress of Texas A&M University's Vision 2020 plan, in addition to hiring additional faculty, we are continuing to move administrative functions off campus, thus freeing up office space for new faculty and their laboratories. We are also closing some of the dormitories on campus and will renovate them into office and laboratory space.

In our last Roundup Report, we stated that a task force to explore all aspects of undergraduate education was being formed. This task force is focusing on such areas as revision/enhancement of the undergraduate core curriculum, development of a common freshman experience, enhanced honors opportunities, the formation of an honors college, learning communities, freshman interest groups, summer school, leadership, distance education, a general studies degree, and extracurricular experiences (now referred to as "co-curricular" to portray the synergy gained). This task force is working now with the intention of reporting to President Gates in the near future.

The Texas A&M University library has now developed an office with access to the US Patent and Trademark Office. It offers patent and trademark searching services and direct interviews with
A memorial to the students killed in the 1999 Bonfire accident was dedicated on November 18, 2004.

Following controversial statements made by a public official on campus, Senate Speaker Gunn stated, "Texas A&M's faculty supports free speech and neutrality in political matters. We affirm tolerance and acceptance of all views - political, religious, racial, and sexual, among others - and support our institution's goals of providing a diverse and welcoming environment for faculty, students and staff." This statement was forwarded to President Gates.

In its December 2004 meeting, the Faculty Senate passed a resolution calling for our lowest-paid workers to receive substantial raises to give them a living wage. In addition, it passed a resolution supporting the principles of intellectual freedom in our libraries. These include the privacy of library users, the right to build and maintain balanced library collections relating to controversial issues, and the right of library patrons to full and unfettered use of the collections.