



THE NAUTILUS

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After a tumultuous summer in College Station, what's next for Galveston?

By Gail Lonngi, '24

Texas A&M University garnered national attention this past summer. Events and controversies that unfolded in College Station have left A&M campus communities shaken, even disheartened. With the retirement of President Katherine Banks, the commencement of Mark Welsh A. Welsh III as Interim President, and a standstill on the Path Forward's organizational review, students, staff, and faculty of A&M campuses have been left with many questions and doubts.

Welsh, Dean of the Bush School of Government and Public Service and retired U.S. Air Force general, has assumed the role of Interim President over A&M, following former President Banks' resignation after the failed hiring of professor, journalist, and Aggie graduate Dr. Kathleen McElroy, who was to be tasked with reviving College Station's journalism program.

Originally hiring McElroy into a possibly tenured professor position, the university later offered a 5-year contract of professorship, and ultimately a one-year contracted professorship position. Banks denied that administration was aware of these alterations to the job offer, and accepted responsibility for the flawed hiring, writing in her resignation letter to Chancellor John Sharp, "The recent challenges regarding Dr. McElroy have made it clear to me that I must retire immediately. The negative press is a distraction from the wonderful work being done here."

University faculty, staff, and students alike have been left profoundly shocked and confused. Administration has received widespread backlash from faculty members, the Aggie community,

and various news and social media over the failed hiring in addition to accusations of having been swayed by external political influences and recent state legislation involving Senate Bill 17, suggesting McElroy was a victim of "anti-woke hysteria" and bias against diversity.

Dr. Adam Haney contended at the faculty senate meeting held July 19, when Banks had insisted none were made aware of changes in Dr. McElroy's offer: "How can we say for certain that there's no undue or outside influence if nobody's willing to take responsibility?" Dr. McElroy herself has publicly commented she believes she was treated unfairly because of her race and gender.

It has been revealed in a posted meeting agenda and TAMU's Internal Review and memo of the affair that Banks and university officials including Senior Vice President Susan Ballabina, Vice President NK Anand, former Interim Dean Jose Bermudez, and Department Head Hart Blanton acted contrarily to A&M's hiring policies through their treatment of the hiring process. They had been implicated through multiple exchanged messages uncovered in the Office of General Counsel's investigation to have delayed Dr. McElroy's recruitment because of the SB-17 legislative session and concerns over Dr. McElroy's background.

It was reported that the changes made to the job offer may have been initiated by Banks or Bermudez in response to a "potential problem with McElroy obtaining tenure at TAMU."

Not only have the people of the Aggie community been impacted

WHAT'S NEXT? on pg. 2

One freshman's first Midnight Yell

By Isabella Chan Tack, '27

My first encounter with the Yell leaders was during my New Student Conference (NSC) when all five leaders emerged to lead a Yell practice. This was my first experience of what I believed to be raw Aggie spirit. I had no idea how far from the truth I was.

On Aug. 31, as I approached TAMMAH's Circle of Honor, the staging ground for Midnight Yell, I arrived with the expectation of exactly what I had witnessed during my NSC. But that was only a glimpse. Upon entering, I was astounded by the camaraderie.

The circle overflowed with people. Many freshmen had come for their first experience of the explosion of culture that is Midnight Yell. The atmosphere was unfamiliar yet empowering. This was true Aggie spirit, further strengthened by the spirit of brotherhood of the cadets dressed in costume—ranging from imposing, powerful Greek gods to goofy bananas—and fellow Aggies, the loudest and proudest of the bunch, "the most red ass of all."

As the night went on, the Yell leaders, torches and flags in hand, guided the Aggies to the Rec Center. Senior Yell leaders wielded flames reminiscent of Olympic torches, symbolizing the Aggie spirit yet to be passed down to their juniors and the rest of Aggieland. Junior Yell leaders carried flags, representing their leadership and journey as

Yell leaders and their intent to carry out their vision of being a Yell leader leading the rest of their fellow Aggies. I noticed that, true to the humble beginnings of Midnight Yell, each of the Yell leaders had a woman at their side, their "Yell dates," like the original leaders long before them.

The heat of the moment only grew from there. As the Yell leaders walked toward the bridge to guide the students from TAMMAH to the Rec Center, the crowds split like the Red Sea being parted by the torches' flames. The sound of students marching and chanting on their way to the gymnasium echoed. TAMMAH was ablaze, and I was fully immersed in a fire of Aggie spirit and fellowship.

The Rec Center, bathed in blood-red light, was packed with Aggies ready to take part in butchering and roasting the Lobos. Cadets swarmed the floor and began running in circles like a raging stampede. After everyone had arrived and filled the space between the gym walls, the Yell leaders ran in and started riling up the Aggies.

The junior Yell leaders got down to the floor and began doing push ups while the senior Yell leaders accosted them, stacking up the pressure for each junior to do better than the other.

As the heat of the battle rose, the cadets joined in on the pushup duel, showcasing how so many Aggies can come together despite differences of major, class, or age, demonstrating their unison with

MIDNIGHT YELL on pg. 3

Silver Taps Honors Jett Creighton

By Gail Lonngi, '24

On the night of Sept. 6, Silver Taps was held in remembrance of senior Texas A&M University--Galveston student and Marine Engineering Technology major Jett Thomas Creighton, who passed away on June 30, 2023. The ceremony was held before the Bracewell Clock Tower at the heart of the campus and officially began at the traditional 10 p.m., when all lights in and around the middle of campus began to be extinguished.

Silver Taps is regarded among the most revered and sacred traditions of Texas A&M University. It is only held following the death of an Aggie that was enrolled in undergraduate or graduate studies at the time of their passing. Previously, the passing was observed as soon as possible after the enrolled student's departure, but today it is held on the first Tuesday of the month following the Aggie's death, from September to April.

On the morning preceding Silver Taps, flags are traditionally flown at half-mast. At night, lights on campus begin to be extinguished at 10 p.m., as flashlight holders take their places, switching on their lights as campus is given over to shadow come 10:15 and family, friends, and fellow Aggies come together in mourning and remembrance. The enduring tradition and the profundity of the Silver Taps ceremony and legacy was doubtlessly present at the Sept. 5 Silver Taps held in honor of Jett Creighton.

As the ceremony commenced, the rows of flashlight holders assumed their positions on either side of the walk which led up to the Clock Tower, and a steady current of Aggies made its way to the center of campus between them. Students, swiftly marching cadet companies, and loved ones encircled the heart of the campus, solemnly gathered together in silence to grieve and remember their departed Aggie.

The light of the Clock Tower went out last, and, in accordance with the traditions of Silver Taps, a three volley salute was fired. The



Photo by Sean Chavez, '24

Silver Taps honoring Jett Creighton concluded with a special rendition of the Silver Taps theme played by the Sea Aggie band. This version of Silver Taps is not officially written but said to be passed down from bugler to bugler specifically for nights on which Silver Taps ceremonies are held, and is played facing north, west, and south—never facing east, symbolizing the sun has set on an Aggie's soul and will not rise again.

On Sept. 13, the Creighton family sent their warm thanks through an AGGNEWS email to the university acknowledging all involved faculty, staff, corps cadets, and students for their help and respect and the Department of Marine Engineering Technology for their teaching. The family extended their thanks to all the Aggies who attended as they continue to try to heal from their loss.

WHAT'S NEXT? (CONT.)

by these events, but so has the ongoing process of the university's Path Forward organizational review. This process was initiated last year as a plan for recommendations and improvements to College Station and Galveston campus operations that would be compiled into a report, the result of which was the MGT Reports. Feedback was to be gathered from faculty, staff, and task force teams, such as the Academic Programs Task Force and the Marketing and Communications Task Force on the Galveston Campus to form a complete evaluation of the campuses.

Interim President Welsh arranged an All Faculty and Staff virtual meeting from College Station on Aug. 15 to speak on matters surrounding Banks' resignation and McElroy's failed hire, as well as on the status of the university's organizational review, his goals as Interim President, and his answers to faculty and staff questions.

In the Aug. 15 meeting, Welsh emphasized the importance of addressing and correcting the issues of instability, which controversies and struggles from the summer revealed, in order to learn from such unfortunate experiences and return to the focus of being the best possible version of A&M.

During the meeting, Interim President Welsh stated the clear need to re-establish trust in the university and between faculty and campus communities, as well as the goal of mending problems of communication among the university, so every Aggie can have the opportunity of being equally well informed of campus decisions, functions, and changes.

Welsh stressed the importance of adhering to the Aggie Core Value of respect while moving forward, of putting into practice the treatment of others as one wishes to be treated and enforcing equal treatment.

"I believe diversity is a strength," he said, "I believe inclusion of all

people, all ideas, voices is imperative for success in a large organization. And I believe equity is just the way we ought to live our lives."

As a necessary step to resolving instabilities within the university, Welsh related efforts for the gradual continuance of the organizational review. He announced the creation of a "quick look team," led by Joe Pettibon, who visited TAMUG on Aug. 29 to begin his team evaluation of the campus. The quick look team is charged with conducting reevaluation of the College Station and Galveston and their feedback to construct an analysis of the review.

Describing the Path Forward as an "ambitious" program in itself with the intent of reorganizing and improving every campus service and function in the best possible way, Welsh noted the crucial step of strengthening communication through the chaos such oncoming changes can cause, declaring, "We have got to...figure out which of these projects are on track and encourage them to continue, which ones need adjusting, and which ones maybe need to stop before we make it any worse." Welsh's underscored that his ultimate goal as Interim President is to be able to pass on the university as a successfully functioning, operating, and communicating organization to the next permanent president. (President Welsh's All Faculty and Staff meeting can be viewed at <https://president.tamu.edu/events-engagements/welsh-virtual-meeting.html>.)

On Aug. 17, Vice President Colonel Fossum announced in an email to campus that task force feedback concluded, "more time is needed to develop comprehensive recommendations and a timely evaluation of initiatives." The need for more time to reconstruct this evaluation puts all active efforts and changes related to TAMUG's Organizational Review on pause, and pushes back the deadline for a thorough analysis of the report, with the exception of one.

Colonel Fossum explained in the same message, "the diversity of feedback during our organizational review clearly exposed the need

to develop a team to address our campus culture. Grace Townsend with the Faculty Senate and Amanda Conley, incoming Staff Council President, have graciously agreed to co-chair the Campus Culture Task Force.” Feedback from this task force is expected Nov. 1, 2023.

Dr. Debbie Thomas, Executive Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Chief Academic Officer, confirmed in an interview with the *Nautilus* the extension of organizational report deadlines from Aug. 1 to September. Dr. Thomas explained that some changes and recommendations from the report had already begun affecting both campuses, such as the centralization of campus services like Technology Services and Human Resources, and that more changes and impact can be expected in the future.

She acknowledged the shared realization between faculty, as Interim President Welsh stepped into office, of the urgent need to “slow down ... to pause a second and take a step back so we can be more intentional and think through the potential impact of some of these proposed changes before they are implemented.”

“Everything is effectively on pause until our task forces can provide Colonel Fossum and President Welsh our recommendations,” said Dr. Thomas.

Confident that the university is in good hands as Interim President Welsh takes the lead, the main message Dr. Thomas wished to convey to the students of TAMUG this semester is to be hopeful. She affirmed that faculty are prioritizing doing what is best for student success.



Left to right: Vincent Garcia, '24, Tre Higgenbothom, '24, Morgan Millburn, '24, and Patrick Smith, '24
Photo by Sean Chavez, '24

MIDNIGHT YELL (CONT.)

the Yell leaders, and embodying the adage, “We are the Aggies and the Aggies are we,” a reminder of how there will always be our Aggie family to continue pushing us forward and uniting us as one.

As the night grew darker, Midnight Yell only grew louder and prouder, each Aggie giving their all for every “hump it,” “pass back,” and “farmers fight,” the Yell leaders recounting a story of how the Aggies hunted down the Lobos, skinning them into fine pelts and roasting their savory meat from a game well won.

After the Aggie War Hymn, students began dancing around the bleachers, roaring with the sound of Aggie pride.

The Yell leaders at last called up the class of '27 for a special yell, as this was many freshmen's first Midnight Yell. Upon finishing the Yell,

a cry could be heard throughout the room as people began racing each other to the Yell leaders. As the freshmen neared the Yell leaders, I could see each of the overall-wearing members being lifted into the air and getting carried out of the Rec Center.

Once outside, all the Aggies came together to dunk barrels of water onto the Yell leaders. The leaders led one final yell, the lights of the Rec Center illuminating them like in a shadowplay, casting grand silhouettes of each leader's powerful Aggie spirit, a tribute to the humble beginnings of this vital Aggie tradition.

First-Gen Student Lounge

By Gail Lonngi, '24

On Sept. 1, TAMUG's new first-generation student lounge opened in the Center for Academic Learning and Support (CALs). First-gen students can check themselves into the lounge where they will find a place to study and relax with free coffee, hot cocoa, and tea, study materials, stress-relief toys, and bean bags.

"I wanted a space where first gen students could see and feel that they belonged," said Krista McBrien, Assistant Director of Academic Coaching and First Gen student support programs, who oversaw the development of the first-gen student lounge. "That campus is for them, and college is for them... It was important to me that they have a space that really was theirs, where they felt a community could be built."

Approximately 26-29 percent of TAMUG's student population is composed of first-gen students.

Many may know that a "first-generation student" is defined as being the first person in their family to obtain a four-year degree. But what many people, both in and out of university settings, may be less aware of is that first-gen students experience some rather unique challenges in their academic careers.

First generation students often experience more intense feelings of alienation in their college environment, endure more pressure to excel in their studies, struggle with a lack of support from their families and college readiness, bear more financial responsibilities, and may feel guilty for being away from family or for investing in their education.

McBrien said, "It's important to me to see how proud a student becomes of their accomplishments, and seeing that change in their family. Getting to hear their stories and see their connections, it really makes me proud of a student. First gens have often overcome more challenges to get here and have those successes, so those celebrations feel even bigger."

The addition of the first generation student lounge is one of many prospective steps and initiatives to continue developing a stronger support system for first generation students on campus. Other resources incoming first generation students should keep in mind are their academic advisors, available first generation grants and scholarships (eligibility often determined by completed the FAFSA or TAFSA), and information that can be found on the CALs First Program page.

The first-gen student lounge is located in Main 206 and is open Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Emerging Band Spotlight: Opal in Sky

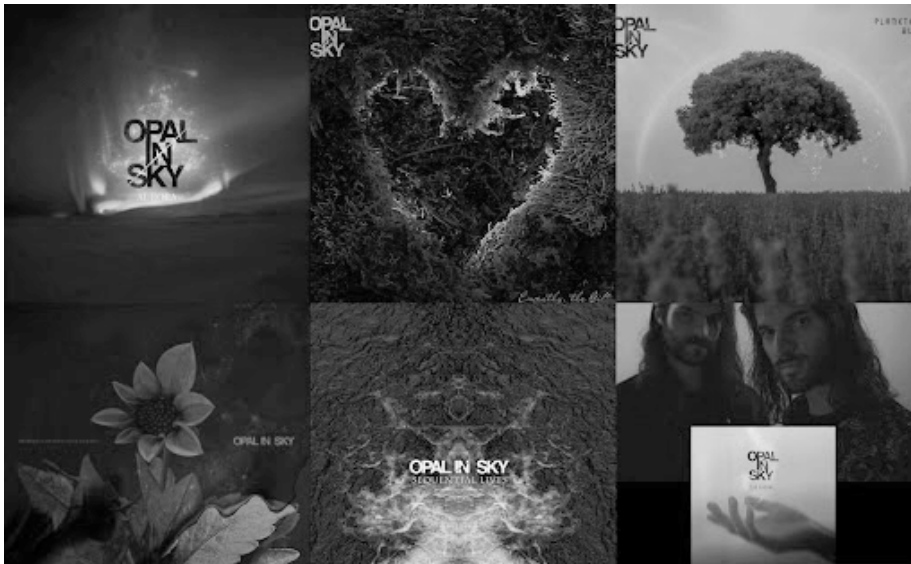


Photo credits to @opalinskyband

By Gail Lonngi, '24

The first things that come to mind for many people when they think about metal music and metal bands or artists are snarling and shrieking guitars, abused drum sets, filthy breakdowns, brutal riffs, and vocalists screaming into their mics. Another quality most often associated with the heavier subgenres of metal music (e.g. deathcore, doom metal, black metal, heavy metal) is the common stereotype of depressive, deeply angry, or downright gruesome lyrics to match the viciousness of their sound.

However, in more recent decades, some genres of metal have started emphasizing healing and resolution in their lyrics and capitalizing on complexity in musical composition.

One such band is Opal in Sky. The band consists of two main members, twin brothers Dylan and Tyson, who derived the name of their project from their Polish surname, Opalinsky. They have been rapidly amassing social media fame and regular listens on multiple music streaming apps following the releases of their 2022 debut single "Aurora" and their song "The Blight" off their 2022 EP of the same title.

Opal in Sky uses traditional aspects of the deathcore metal

subgenre, such as challenging riffs, elaborate weeping melodies, down-tuned instruments, echoing breakdowns, high-speed and heavy rhythms, and a range of growling, screaming, and other vocal techniques, which are clear and familiar to metal and hardcore audiences.

But their most defining quality is the positive and uplifting lyrics they compose to resound over their heavy, powerful music.

Opal in Sky utters cathartic and elegantly written cries for healing, hope, optimism, and making peace with one's past, often using nature as the basis for analogies and symbolism for growth.

While art coming from a place of pain can be highly therapeutic for both creators and audiences, Opal in Sky stands out with their goal to plant seeds of positivity through deathcore metal.

"Aurora" uses empyrean phenomenon to describe growth through hardship, and in "The Blight," the primary theme is overcoming challenges and becoming a stronger version of

yourself, using lyrical symbolism and metaphors heavily drawn from plant life, decay, and night skies.

Throughout 2023, Opal in Sky has released four singles, with the hope of creating an album and growing their musical career. The band released the fast-paced "Sequential Lives" in January, which describes how all lives across time are connected. Soon after, in February, the duo released the impassioned "Planetary Bliss," in which the musicians share their dream of a blissful world where more people see and appreciate the beauty of being alive. This single was later followed on by the raging "The Sacral" in May, which implores listeners to let go of pain and forgive. Finally, their most recent single is "Empathy, the Gift," released in August, in which the artists describe recognizing empathy as a strength.

Opal in Sky has thus far demonstrated an outstanding amount of potential. Their passion and capability as artists is evinced in each of their releases, and it can be said with confidence that they are a rising pioneer of major lyrical and compositional innovation in the subgenre of deathcore metal with their elaborate, brutal sound intertwined with their passionate messages of optimism, dreams, empathy, healing, and embracing life to the best of one's abilities.

Dear Aggie

How to get unstuck

Dear Aggie, I have writer's block. Help! Gig 'em, Scribe by the Sea.

Howdy, Scribe by the Sea. "I'm stuck." A place nearly every writer finds themselves all too often, whether it's once every other week, once every other year, once in a lifetime. Writer's block is an obstacle every kind of writer can experience. The novel writer, the journalist, the poet, the student, even seasoned academics may find themselves, quite simply and completely, stuck.

They can all struggle at any point with where to go next on a project, where to start a piece, committing ample time to their work, even what words to put down on paper to express what they're thinking or feeling, or finding the inspiration and motivation to write at all. All these problems can be encountered in creative writing, essayistic or academic writing, journalistic writing, and so on. And often, this state of mind is deeply frustrating and can be highly stressful, especially when writing on a deadline.

Writer's block is part of what makes writing an exhausting craft for the mind and the body, and distinguishes it from other careers. It's one more reminder of how writing well and competently is anything but simple. Writing to the best of your ability is hard work. It demands inspiration from a writer and often the organization. It can leave your confidence shaken and cause you to feel exhausted only by smashing keys or scratching words onto paper. Writing forces you to organize your thoughts and face your emotions. It rends your soul, challenges your self-confidence. "Getting stuck" is the very last thing a writer needs, or wants.

Writer's block can leave you feeling helpless, empty, unproductive, imprisoned in your own head, tied down to your workspace. But how can you overcome and get rid of your writer's block altogether? Luckily, there's plenty you can do to get yourself "unstuck," to hit your stagnated thoughts right where it hurts, and break free from the bonds

of that frustrating writer's block. Below, you will find tips and advice this columnist offers their readers for putting an end to their struggle against writer's block.

Change your environment. This can be as simple as cleaning your room, which will improve your frame of mind. Or, you can switch workspaces entirely to suit your needs. Do you write better with background noise? Consider taking your work to your favorite cafe. Do you write best while listening to music? By all means blast your most inspiring tunes. Do you feel inspired in the outdoors or near streetlife? You might want to take your writing outside to get in your zone. Do you feel at peace in silence? Your ideal workspace might be alone in your room, or in a room away from any distractions. The possibilities here are flexible and can certainly improve your mentality so you can better focus on what you want to write.

Exercise or go for a walk. This leads to another great tip for demolishing that annoying writer's block. Get moving. Movement, as opposed to sedentariness, is never bad for your mental health. Exercise is one of the best and most reliable ways to release frustration and stress. This doesn't always have to be strenuous exercise, however. It can be as simple as going for a walk. This can help you refresh and reorganize your thoughts, and alleviate anxiety that commonly accompanies writer's block. You can do yourself a big favor by working up a sweat or by just stepping out from between four walls and moving about for a few minutes

Engage in another creative hobby. If you are particularly artistically inclined or have another creative interest, there are a number of other activities you can engage in to mitigate the imposing opponent of writer's block. Reading, listening to music, painting, journaling, playing an instrument, even cooking, all these activities and more can get your creativity flowing, take your mind off your profound frustration, boost your confidence, open up a goldmine of inspiration, jog your ideas, and help you break the shackles writer's block has tried to keep you.

DEAR AGGIE on pg. 6



Photo by Dear Aggie Columnist

DEAR AGGIE (CONT.)

Talk to a friend ... Or a pet, or a plant, if you're like some of us writers who talk to plants and animals much more easily than to people. Talking to a friend (or your companion of choice) can help you relieve pent-up emotions from your battle against writer's block, and can help you shake off fatigue. Your friend can also offer a fresh set of eyes on the project or piece. And, arguably most importantly, talking to your friend encourages you to think out loud about your work. You might even answer your own questions.

Meditate. Sometimes you just need to sit still for a moment in some quiet, or perhaps deeper inside your own headspace. And that's perfectly okay. Meditation, with or without some form of consistent background noise, in or outdoors, is another helpful remedy for getting unstuck. Among other things, meditation can help you detox from the chaos of life and its distractions, help you accept a struggle you might be undertaking, help you become more familiar with how your own mind works. Ultimately meditating for a few moments can be an effective way of finding clarity and redirecting yourself to a path free of writer's block.

Coffee, Water, and Sleep. It's hard to write when you're cranky, sleepy, and/or dehydrated.

Just sit down and write. This is our final and possibly most important tip for breaking the stubborn bonds keeping you stuck in your writer's block. Just write. Often the hardest part of writer's block is facing that it's not so much a lack of inspiration preventing a

writer from writing, but a lack of commitment. It's hard sometimes to set aside ample time for putting a little extra thought and effort into writing something you haven't completely put together in your head yet, so you put it off instead. And while it'd be really nice for ideas to write themselves just by a writer thinking about them, that doesn't really happen.

The best thing to do is deny your writer's block. Don't put yourself down or tell yourself you're stuck constantly. To utterly destroy your writer's block, choose a time of your day to devote completely to just writing, and stick to it. This will also encourage you to be disciplined about your writing. Write anything if you're struggling with what to write at all. Sit down and put any words on a page, written or typed.

And if there is a specific project you're working on, more so if it's one with an intimidating deadline, start anywhere at all. Begin with the part you're surest about writing. Don't even worry about a title, although it's still good to set the direction of what you want to write. You can start in the middle part of your work. You can start at the beginning or the conclusion. You can start with just writing out your main idea and building around it. If all else fails, outlining what you want to write--even just listing your ideas--is never unhelpful. And just for laughs, you can certainly also write about your writer's block.

The Dear Aggie column will answer questions on all matters of interest to students at TAMUG. If you wish to submit a query, email it to tamugnautilus@gmail.com. Names will be kept confidential.

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