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Just because it's not a presidential election year doesn't mean these elections aren't important

by Amanda Wall

On November 8th, people across the state of Texas get to participate in the most fundamental of democratic rights: the right to vote. Texas voters have nine constitutional amendments on the ballot, but most of the propositions deal with technical economic or political issues that can seem incomprehensible to a layperson. Let's try to make some sense of the big ones:

Proposition 1: This amendment establishes a fund for Texas railroad relocation and improvement. Proponents say it will reduce trucks on highways and help the struggling but necessary railroad industry. Opponents say the private sector should take care of its own; the Department of Transportation has no place meddling in its affairs.

Proposition 2: The most-discussed issue on the ballot is without a doubt this constitutional amendment to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. What complicates an otherwise straightforward (pun intended) amendment is the language of the second sentence of the amendment: "This state or a political subdivision of this state may not create or recognize any legal status identical or similar to marriage." Some experts say that this rather vague language could be used by Texas judges to prohibit domestic partnerships because they are "similar to marriage," or by government employers (like Dallas County) to refuse domestic partner benefits. Many proponents of the amendment, though, say that the language is quite clear and will pose no harm to gay couples' existing rights.

Proposition 4: "The constitutional amendment authorizing the denial of bail to a criminal defendant who violates a condition of the defendant's release pending trial." In other words, if a person has gotten out on bail before and violated some rule of his or her release, he or she can be denied bail the next time around. Proponents say this measure protects the community from people who have proven they are a risk. Opponents say this can be used to unfairly detain people who have not yet been convicted of anything through due process.

Proposition 5: "The constitutional amendment allowing the legislature to define rates of interest for commercial loans." The laws that currently limit interest rates on loans

are meant to protect naïve borrowers or those without good bargaining positions from more powerful, bullying lenders, proponents say. This is not necessary for commercial loans where both parties know what they're doing, and it helps Texas lenders compete with out-of-state lenders. Opponents say that not all commercial lenders and borrowers—especially small businesses—have that kind of lending savvy, so this amendment would open them up to exploitation from big companies.

Registering: Registering to vote in Texas is fairly easy. If you are a first-time voter, or if you are from out-of-state or out-of-county and would like to register to vote in Dallas, all you need to do is fill out the registration form (you can find it at <http://www.dalcoelections.org/register.pdf>) and mail it to the Registrar of Voters at:

Registrar of Voters Dallas County, Texas
2377 N. Stemmons Frwy. Suite 820
Dallas, TX 75207.

They will mail you your voter registration certificate, which you should bring with you along with some kind of identification when you vote. If you have already registered to vote in Dallas County, but have lost your voter registration certificate, you can still vote; just bring along your driver's license or other identification to the polling place. If you are not from Dallas and do not want to re-register, you can vote in your home election by absentee ballot. You can request an application for an absentee ballot either directly from your county clerk or using an online request at your state Web site. They will send you an application, you'll send it back, and then they'll send you the actual ballot. The election is coming soon, so if you want to vote absentee, get to it!

For those of us voting in Dallas County, the closest voting location to campus is Highland Park Middle School (3555 Granada). For other voting locations, try <http://www.dalcoelections.org>. For more information on the propositions and their pros and cons, go to the Texas Legislative Council's report at <http://www.tlc.state.tx.us/pubsconamend/analyses05/analyses05.pdf>.

Amanda Wall is a sophomore English and Spanish major.

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Be Heard: Got an opinion? *Hilltopics* is always looking for good submissions and interesting feedback. Email your thoughts to hilltopics@hotmail.com.

We welcome submissions from all members of the SMU community. Letters to the editor should be up to 300 words in response to a previously published article. Contributions should be articles of up to 300–600 words on any topic or in response to another article. Please email your submission to hilltopics@hotmail.com by Wednesday at 8:00 PM to be included in the following week's publication. Special deadlines will be observed for breaking campus events. The opinions expressed in *Hilltopics* are those of the authors solely and do not reflect the beliefs of *Hilltopics* or any other entity. As such, *Hilltopics* does not publish anonymous articles.

Let's not be racist: Debate over special interest seats is all about racism, not diversity

by Venus Yin

Sometimes I forget I'm Chinese. Sometimes I forget "Asian Pacific Islander" is one of my demographic descriptors until I see stake signs to abolish Senate's Special Interests seats, until I hear the term "racism" or "reverse discrimination," until I read the Daily Campus. Then it comes back to me - I don't look like you. But isn't that where it stops? You're Caucasian; I'm Asian. You know how to calculate the velocity of an accelerating car turning at a 90-degree angle, and I know how to design a marketing plan. If we're not racist, then a Chinese business major is no different than a Caucasian engineering major. The difference lies in the diversity of the population, and by diversity I don't mean ethnicity. A brunette dancer, a bilingual soccer player, a Catholic biology major - they are all descriptors of the people on this campus, in this world, so I don't start looking like you or thinking like you.

I'm not one to champion catering to the minority because in my ideal world there is no minority. Unfortunately, just as I don't think like the rest of the world, I can't expect the rest of the world to think like me. The minority population is a lot like the majority. It encompasses people of all majors, all classifications and different family backgrounds. So how are we different? Right, we get these Special Interests Seats. I guess that is racist.

Let's not be racist. Let's take them away.

But wait, if we're not racist, then these seats are just as important of a descriptor as are the Dedman, Cox, Meadows and engineering seats. All demographic descriptors that describe the population of this campus should have a voice in

Senate, so we don't end up with an unrepresentative, generic voice. By taking away the seats, we would lose a valuable aspect of this school's diversity. Surely, the minority can still run for other Senate seats, but that brings us to another similarity between the minority and majority of this campus - apathy.

Say there are 80 majority students and 20 minority students. If 75 percent of the majority students are clueless of their surroundings, and only a quarter are actively voicing their opinions, it still takes 100 percent of the minority students to be at least comparable to the majority.

If Senate seats had no descriptive labels, and there are 50 Cox students competing against 500 Meadows students, wouldn't Senate reflect a much more Meadowistic stance?

My theory is still flawed. There is still one descriptor that is not represented in Senate right now. I propose we add a Caucasian Senator, along the same ranks as the African American Senator, Asian American Senator and Hispanic American Senator. We all go to this school, and we all deserve to be represented in Senate.

Better yet, since we're on the road to abolishing racism, I also propose that we allow students of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds to run for these seats, with certain qualifications of course. Candidates will need to go through a screening process to prove his or her representative capabilities. A Caucasian student could know as much, if not more, about the Asian culture as an Asian student.

This is about ending racism, not diversity.

Venus Yin is a senior marketing and economics major.

How can SMU produce James Bond-like graduates if it restricts wellness opportunities?

by Courtney Hebb

This university wants to limit its students' wellness. The problem is not with our fitness facilities, because the new Dedman Center rocks just about as much as its climbing wall. The problem is not with the GEC requirement for every student to take two semesters of Wellness, because who wouldn't argue that wellness is important for the body and the mind? The problem is that after you have completed those two courses you can't take any additional Wellness II classes. Why? Can a person really have too much Wellness II? Oh well, maybe there is a condition when one is too well...

While some girls come to SMU to receive their MRS degree, I personally wanted to obtain what I deem the James Bond degree. It's not that I have planned a future in international intrigue and espionage, but I admire some of his indispensable skills to be successful in his over-the-top secret missions. For instance what if you were in a face-to-face challenge with an aggressor? En garde! Touché with an epée! Wouldn't it be helpful to know how to fence? What if you're low in funds or need to enhance your portfolio? How about the pursuit of sunken treasure? Unless you are naturally able to hold your breath for a freakishly long time, scuba diving would be a great skill. What if you needed to extract some high level information from another partner on the dance floor? To avoid missteps you might waltz around the issue and "slide in" some smooth skills from ballroom dancing. Without question, these are all invaluable elements of a proper education. Not to mention golf, badminton, life-guarding, swimming, self-defense, yoga...

I think it is great that wellness is included in our general education curriculum, and I'm thrilled with the selection we are given. The problem occurs when we are forced to limit our physical activity and our personal desires within the realm of a university mandate. Now, I realize that since everyone is required to participate in Wellness II there may be an accommodation problem. But even though we are required to take math or science classes, this doesn't stop students from taking more classes in that subject if they are interested. If there is enough demand in the wellness department, maybe the university needs to take a second look and increase the number of classes offered.

There have been students who have found ways around this barrier. A certain editor-in-chief of this publication, who shall remain nameless, is currently taking his third wellness course. How does he do it? By dropping out of the course right before the withdrawal date. But for those who don't want their transcript sprinkled with Ws, I have heard tales of people who have just signed up for more classes without their advisor's knowledge. Obviously this is a breach of the honor code, and neither *Hilltopics* nor I condone or endorse this behavior. It just illustrates the extent to which students will go to add some more wellness to their lives.

As you can see this is an issue that addresses the overall health of the student body. Let's allow students to continue to expand and exercise life skills besides pure academics.

Courtney Hebb is a senior marketing and political science major.

Misconceptions about sexual assault common on Hilltop

by Alexander Miller

Think of six women you know; statistically one of them has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape. Your girlfriend, mom, sister, best friend, that girl you took to homecoming freshman year of high school, your grandmother. Out of the roughly 5,000 female students we have at SMU, over 800 women have been or will be victimized by this crime. And it's not just the stranger in the dark alley who rapes: Two-thirds of the victims know their attacker before they are assaulted. The guy beside you in Calc, the guy down the hall in your dorm, the guy you had lunch with.

As prevalent as rape is, most victims never report it to the police. I honestly don't blame them: the rape victim is almost immediately put on trial by the police and even close friends. "What were you wearing? Had you been drinking? But you were making out with him, right? What did you expect would happen when you went into his bedroom?" This rationale makes victims feel like they should have had control.

"If she didn't wear short skirts and low cut tops she wouldn't have gotten raped." The three outfits most often worn during the time of assault are jeans and a t-shirt, a nightgown, and overalls. No one asks to be raped by wearing skirts, overalls, or even nothing.

"If she was sober she wouldn't have gotten raped." So what? She was drunk; maybe she deserved to crouch over a toilet for 6 hours, but rape? What if everyone that had ever been drunk got raped? It's not a pretty picture, but that is where victim-blaming logic leads.

"She went back there with him; she knew what was going to happen." Maybe she did think they were going to have sex, or maybe she just wanted to make-out. Either way she has an absolute right to withdraw consent at any time.

I do not mean to alienate or invalidate the male victims by using almost exclusively female examples. I simply use female examples because most victims of these crimes are female. On a final note I'd like to address all the victims of domestic violence, rape, and sexual harassment: What happened to you is not your fault, and you are not alone. It's confusing, frightening, and painful, but it wasn't your choice.

Violence is a choice of the perpetrator, and there is nothing you did to cause your attack. When and if you are ready to talk there are people who will listen. The SMU Women's Center is an amazing resource on campus for both male and female victims. Also, the National Sexual Assault Hotline can be reached at 1-800-656-4673; it's free and confidential. If you know someone who is a victim of sexual assault, the best thing you can do is listen. Don't make them do anything they don't want to do (even if they don't want to get professional help), because that's doing the same thing as their attacker - taking choices away from them.

You might wonder why, particularly as a man, I'm aware of and writing about an issue that mainly affects women. I have volunteered with the S.T.A.R.T. program, which is part of the Youth Education and Prevention Services division of The Family Place, for over three years. Through my training to be a peer counselor with the S.T.A.R.T. program and my subsequent application of that training, I have seen the deep pain that is caused by sexual assault, dating violence, and sexual harassment, and quite simply I want to help alleviate some the harm caused by these problems through education.

Alexander Miller is a sophomore political science and philosophy major.

THANK YOU, SENATE!

Last Tuesday, SMU's Student Senate voted to fund Hilltopics 100% of our requested budget for the rest of this school year. That means we can keep bringing you great commentary!

Hilltopics recommends:

CFA 3312 (Honors) - Making History - Tom Stone

In this course, you will critically reconsider your position on the John F. Kennedy assassination, learning how the facts and fictional interpretations converge in various novels and films about the historic event. Frequent trips downtown to the Sixth Floor Museum transport you from the classroom to Dealey Plaza, back into the turbulent era filled with controversies that continue today.

HIST 3392/CF 3349 - The African Diaspora - Dennis Cordell and Bill Beauchamp

This amazing course uses film, history, and literature to examine topics such as: the beginnings of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Negritude (and "Black is beautiful") movements, the winning of independence by many African nations in the 1960s-70s, standards of living in Africa today, and the nature of African and African-American identities being self-constructed by members of the diaspora now and throughout the last century. One of the only classes dealing with the African continent at SMU—it's not to be missed.

PLSC 3363 - American Political Thought - Joseph Kobyłka

A course that will pull you through all of the main currents of political thought, from the Puritans, to Thomas Paine and the revolutionaries, to Thoreau, the American Communists, feminism, anarchism, and eventually to the state of modern-day liberalism. You'll discuss and argue points on human nature, liberty, equality, and the place each of these should have in American government.

ENGL 2308 - Doing Things With Poems - John Lewis

This class counts for an Honors Literature Perspective and is a fun one to take even if you're not very familiar with poetry. You'll learn technical aspects of poetry like meter and rhyme, but you'll also get to talk about the big questions: What does it imply? Who is its audience? Why does it use the language it does? Most importantly, though, what does it do?

THEA 4373 - Creative Dramatics - Charles Helfert

This class satisfies the arts perspective requirement, and is a great chance to release your inner actor or your inner child. Students take part in improvisational activities designed to hone creative problem-solving skills, which means that this class gives you an excuse to make a fool of yourself without caring. And who knows—you might just develop a sense of humor, too.

Can we be too politically correct? Debate over NCAA mascots seems to indicate that we can.

by Mark McDowell

Bad news for sports fans: if you have been rooting for the Indians, Braves, Redskins, or Seminoles, prepare to be cheering for a more politically correct team, if the National Collegiate Athletic Association has its way. The NCAA believes that all Native American sports mascots discriminate against the people they are meant to honor. The NCAA is taking the effort to be politically correct so far that it is damaging society more than it is helping. That's funny - I never knew that driving a Jeep Grand Cherokees was racist against Native Americans, but I guess the NCAA feels differently.

I believe that many mascots today bring our society together more than they keep us apart. However, many 80-year-old mascot names that symbolize school and city spirit are being attacked as derogatory toward groups of people. Mascot names are symbols that can be rallied around and that let student bodies feel the community inherent in college life. While these names might be controversial, their age has given them greater meaning than what their names reference. These mascots represent the undying vitality and spirit of the institution that upholds them.

Two mascots that fill this role are the Florida State Seminoles and the Ole Miss Rebels. The names themselves are not derogatory to a certain group of people; however, not everyone sees the issue this way.

The NCAA has declared FSU's Seminoles to be derogatory to the Seminole tribe and all Native Americans. Surprisingly, this opinion is not shared in the least by the native Seminoles of Florida, who fully support FSU's use of their tribe's name as the mascot. As long as FSU maintains historical accuracy of the names and traditions of the Seminoles and doesn't generalize the mascot into the stereotypical "Redskin" shouting war

calls and waving tomahawks, then the school should be allowed to keep this name.

Ole Miss's Rebels are also getting bad press. If the term "rebels" outright supported the institution of slavery, I would be against it too. However, the purpose of this mascot cannot be further from that. Is it so wrong to recognize cultural heritage in a place where many of us had relatives generations ago?

Calling the Rebels politically incorrect depends on your outlook of what the name "Rebel" represents. Those knowledgeable of Southern history would know that many leaders of the South did not support slavery at all. Robert E. Lee openly criticized slavery and eventually emancipated all his slaves before the Civil War began. He recognized that slavery was on a natural path to be abolished in Virginia even without war. He and many others were not fighting to keep slavery, but rather to protect states' rights. If one looks at the mascot Rebels as champions of protecting states' rights, then this one no longer seems so politically incorrect.

Those who consider the use of the word "rebel" to condone slavery are making the same mistake that the NCAA is making by generalizing the FSU Seminoles to be an attack on Native American culture. Jeb Bush recently voiced his opinion that the NCAA is disrespecting the Seminole tribe by trying to tell them what they must do with their name: "I think they [the NCAA] insult those people [native Seminoles] by telling them, 'No, no, you're not smart enough to understand this. You should be feeling really horrible about this.' It's ridiculous." I can only wonder who the NCAA thinks it's protecting when the alleged "victims" of prejudice are fighting back against the ban.

Mark McDowell is a sophomore accounting and economics major.



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