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HILLTOPICS

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Despite political polarity, independent gubernatorial candidates making race interesting

by James Longhofer and Amanda Wall

In a state where political polarity has reached previously unknown heights, we were surprised to find that some of the most interesting candidates for Texas governor this year are running as independents.

There is something romantic about bucking party politics and running on your own; however, actually getting on the ballot is almost impossible in Texas. An independent candidate needs 45,540 signatures from registered voters who don't vote in either primary in order to get on the ballot in November. That is a tall order, especially since the people who don't vote in the primaries are the voters who are the least interested in politics, and therefore the ones who are least likely to pay attention to an independent campaign.

One thing's for sure: between a man named Kinky and a woman with four last names, this won't be just any gubernatorial race.

Kinky Friedman: Richard "Kinky" Friedman certainly has the most diverse background of all the candidates running for governor. Kinky was born in Chicago and raised in the West University neighborhood of Houston. Kinky's nickname is not due to any unusual sexual tendencies. Instead, it comes from his unruly hair style. He attended the Plan II Honors Program at the University of Texas in Austin and then joined the Peace Corps, where he served in Borneo.

Kinky first gained fame in the '70s for his band, The Texas Jewboys, an irreverent country group. (This author possesses every one of its albums.) The lyrics of Kinky's songs swerve between social commentary and wildly funny and earnest songs in the great country tradition. "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore" is about a redneck who picks a fight with a Jew at a bar; "Rapid City, South Dakota" is one of the only country songs ever written about abortion; and "Ride'em Jewboy" uses the imagery of a cattle drive as an allegory for the Holocaust. "Get Your Biscuits in the Oven and Your Buns in the Bed" won Kinky the Male Chauvinist Pig of the Year Award in 1974 from the National Organization of Women. (In the Kinkster's defense, the song was a parody.)

Kinky's next source of fame is his career as a writer. His mystery novels feature Kinky as the protagonist in Texas and

New York City. He was also a writer for Texas Monthly, where he wrote the article on the last page of every issue during his tenure. However, he put that job on hold to follow his gubernatorial ambitions.

The only experience Kinky has campaigning comes from a half-serious run for Justice of the Peace in Kerrville, Texas. Kinky claimed that if he won, he would "declare peace on Fredericksburg." During his current campaign for governor, Kinky has been more focused on real issues by advocating greater education spending and the use of renewable energy sources. To run his campaign, Kinky brought in veterans of Jesse Ventura's successful campaign for Minnesota governor. They seem to be doing something right because Kinky has managed to raise \$1.5 million, which is more than three times the amount of money raised by both Democratic candidates, Chris Bell and Bob Gammage. No matter what, Kinky is making Texas politics even more interesting than usual.

Carole Keeton Strayhorn (formerly Rylander): If you're from Texas, you might remember her successful "One Tough Grandma" campaign for Texas Comptroller a few years ago. If you're not from Texas or missed her the first time around, keep your eyes open for Carole Keeton Strayhorn's next campaign: Governor of Texas.

The daughter of Page Keeton, the beloved former dean of UT's law school, and the mother of White House press secretary Scott McClellan, Strayhorn comes from a family of great talent and ambition. And in a field where women have to fight hard to be taken seriously, Strayhorn has used her gender to her advantage in her "One Tough Grandma" campaign and in press releases: "As a mama and a grandmama, I know that our Texas family must budget like any other family."

Another favorite strategy is quoting the last independent to be elected Governor of Texas: Sam Houston, before the Battle of San Jacinto. "We are nerved for the contest and must conquer or perish." Of course, battle is something with which Strayhorn is familiar. There's hardly a politician at the Capitol who hasn't clashed with her at some point. Because the Texas Constitution endows the comptroller with near-absol-

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Campus: Alicia Bullen sounds off on alcohol abuse at SMU, page 2.

Culture: There's an article about vaginas on page 4. No, really...there is.

Academics: Two *Hilltopics* editors among students who participated in a colloquium on improving academics. Find out what was said and what you can do, page 3.

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.

Reader feedback: Alcohol abuse justifies strict drinking policy—underage drinking /sillegal.

by Alicia Bullen

While last week's article regarding alcohol violations on campus made for some entertaining reading and expressed some good points with which I'm sure some people agree, I offer a different view - the contradictory opinions shared by a more down-to-earth, yet possibly less "fun," campus.

To begin, I would like to point out that drinking underage isn't just illegal on the SMU campus, but in the entire US of A. While some may think that it's a good idea for the campus police to deny their jobs and ignore blatant alcohol abuse, I remind them that this is a college campus. We pay good money to have them protect us, and that includes protecting us from ourselves if necessary.

I am sure some students are afraid to call for help on campus (when they have rendered themselves incapacitated enough to require medical aid) in fear of a violation. However, the SMU police give these violations to discourage such behavior. Instead of continuing to abuse the laws of this campus (and this country, for that matter), perhaps students could solve the violation problem by actually moderating their irresponsible and sometimes dangerous behavior.

The relaxation of violations would encourage students to drink on campus; I don't see this as beneficial. The policy that a certain number of alcohol violations render a student unable to rush is, in my opinion, a good thing. If viewed in this way, instead of rebelled against, this policy might slow down the rampant alcohol consumption in some fraternities and sororities. Sororities and fraternities have many good aspects, and if alcohol consumption were decreased, maybe the students involved could get more out of their experience.

Now, I'm not naïve enough to think that underage drinking will ever stop, no matter how tight the restrictions, but I would like to make three suggestions:

1) If students are going to drink, do it off campus, although this would make them prey to the state laws instead of SMU police and could lead to much harsher consequences than a violation.

2) Last week's article argues that off-campus drinking leads to drunk driving, but I'd like to point out that one can consume alcohol in moderation without becoming drunk enough to drive. If you know you cannot drive, don't be foolish enough to get behind a wheel. Get a friend to drive or call a cab.

3) If you become drunk enough to be dizzy, disoriented, or nauseous, it takes your brain cells about a month to recover. If students want to spend college without operating at full brain capacity, that's their prerogative, but they shouldn't drag the integrity of the university down with them.

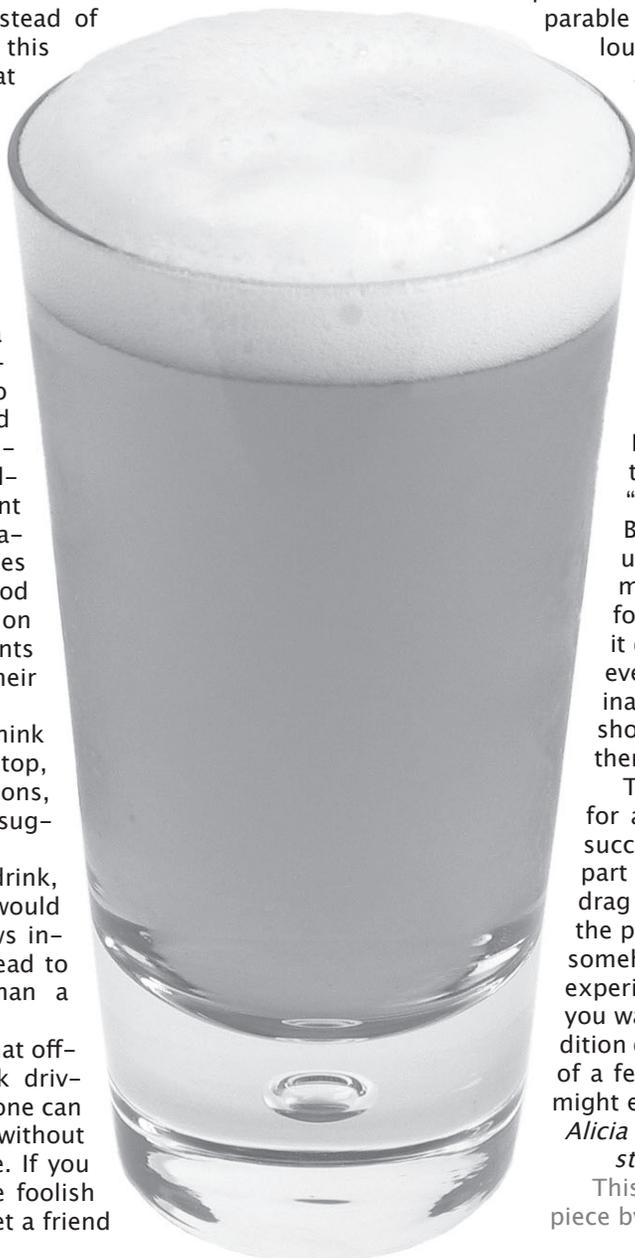
Crazy as it seems, our rules do have a purpose. Think about the message it would send to alumni, to other universities, to parents, and to students if SMU relaxed alcohol violations. Essentially, that would say, "We don't care if you break the law because we want you to 'have fun in college.'" It's an insult to the many opportunities our school offers us, both academically and socially, to assume that alcohol abuse is the only way to have fun. It's an insult to SMU students and their intellect to say that the only way they can have "the best four years of their life" is through excessive drinking. The implication that our dry campus policy is comparable to Prohibition is honestly ridiculous. Do you really think SMU students are brewing gin in their bathtubs?

The last point I will argue is school spirit. When last week's article said that relaxing the alcohol violations on campus would bring the school together, and that prevalent alcohol use would boost the attendance of football games, I was insulted. The insinuation is that school spirit is directly linked to alcohol consumption. If the statement that most of the fraternities are at bars instead of the Boulevard is true, then they are not the structure to rely upon for spirit. "School spirit" is not about alcohol. Belief in and excitement about this university shouldn't depend on some mind-altering substance. Even if our football team lost every game (which it did in the not-so-distant past), and even if the on-campus events seem inane, it is our responsibility (and should be our privilege) to support them.

This university stands for integrity, for academic excellence, for pride, for success. We are all fortunate to be a part of it. Students, I entreat you, don't drag down our standards and goals for the pursuit of 24-hour partying that you somehow identify with the ideal college experience. Attend the games because you want to. Become part of the SMU tradition on your own steam, not on the buzz of a few Jaeger-bombs. Who knows—you might even enjoy yourself.

Alicia Bullen is a sophomore international studies and foreign languages major.

This article is a response to last week's piece by Mark McDowell, which is available at www.smu.edu/honors/hilltopics.



GTE's "Raising the Bar" colloquium aims to reinvigorate the life of the mind at SMU

by Rebekah Hurt

Friday afternoon at the Faculty Club, SMU students Michael Hogenmiller, Jessica Erwin, Katie Wright, Lauren Cook, Susan Hamilton, and myself sat on an intense discussion panel at the "Raising the Bar: Strengthening the Academic Challenge" colloquium organized by the Center for Teaching Excellence. The aim of this session was to bring together concerned faculty and administrators to discuss how to best combat the deterioration of academic standards that grads and current students have observed taking place at our university.

The Background: Associate Provost Tom Tunks and Director of the LEC Vicki Hill presented statistics demonstrating that since 1999, SMU has gone from an 80-something percent acceptance rate to one in the mid-50 percents and that, over the past decade and a half, the average SAT score of incoming students has risen roughly 200 points to last year's 1220. Over the same period, they emphasized, the average overall admissions rating has risen from something like 4 to a decidedly more desirable 7. Yet, in spite of these encouraging trends, Hill explained that in recent years, focus groups with graduating SMU seniors have consistently revealed that students are finding their extracurricular activities and leadership roles on campus more holistically challenging than any of their classes. On the one hand, this has a great deal to say about the strength of student life resources and programs. On the other hand, these kinds of statements obviate the fact that something is seriously amiss with the level of faculty expectations for student work and, moreover, with the resoluteness of faculty members to enforce those academic expectations in the face of griping from some segments of the student population.

The Discussion: With Dr. Melissa Dowling as moderator and Honors Program Director Dr. David Doyle on hand for comments, faculty and the student panel discussed the role of alcohol and social life in forcing the general "watering-down" of academic discourse. We examined the facets of student leadership positions and other "extracurricular" but nevertheless intellectually engaging activities (some with faculty support or participation) that often make them more challenging than the classroom experience. We questioned what techniques or insight professors can borrow from the student affairs division to put to use in class. And we debated issues of grade inflation, the effects of students' course-evaluations, and the role of student complaints in guiding academic policy. We talked over the difficulties and possible solutions to teaching students of varied academic preparation and ability, some perceived differences between SMU's schools (i.e. Dedman, Meadows, Cox, Engineering) in terms of academic challenge and competition for best students, as well as the responsibility of the LEC and first-year academic advisors in directing students toward balanced levels of classes that will challenge but not overwhelm their particular advisees. Following are some of the recommendations that were voiced by faculty and the student panel members (these represent the varying views of many colloquium attendees and are not all, strictly speaking, my own suggestions).

What Faculty Can Do (PLEAS from your students and fellow faculty): Insist on starting "real" class work and lectures on the first days of the semester and surrounding holidays. Do not underestimate the abilities and potential of the average SMU student. Refuse to lower your standards for oral

and written work in so far as quality and length of assignments, time commitment required to complete those assignments, and deadlines are concerned! Familiarize yourselves with the SMU Honor Code, ensure your students' awareness of its existence, and enforce its requirements of academic honesty. Make clear your attendance expectations at the outset of the semester along with the penalties which will befall those who choose not to abide by these attendance policies; then stand by those guidelines (with exception for *truly* worthy aberrations, to be determined on a case-by-case basis). If your students refuse to attend class regularly, drop them! If your students are expected to have prepared reading ahead of time and report to class unable to recall basic information points, send them home and refuse to allow them back into your class until they are adequately prepared. To discover which of your students have adequately prepared for the class period and to encourage participation in discussion, begin class by calling upon students at random rather than taking "hands." Create lectures that are not simply summaries or reminders of the work/research that you assigned students to do outside of class. Require students to "check-in" with you frequently throughout the semester and especially in the midst of paper-writing or project-completion so that, at each stage, evidence of a "working paper" or other such draft can be produced and opportunities for professor feedback are made available. This mechanism also ensures that you will be able to distinguish students who simply don't do/turn in the final product on time and deserve penalties from those who have been working in earnest and may have encountered veritable personal emergencies. Refuse to respond to badgering for grade changes. Make an effort to establish a personal rapport with each of your students - we do better when we think you "care" about our performance! And, where possible, create opportunities for your students to come together with you at least once a semester for social-but-intellectual activities outside of class to model for them what exactly these "lives of the mind" and "intellectual communities" we talk about are, exactly, and why they're exciting and really, genuinely fun things to be part of.

What Students Can Do: Speak up (in class or privately to your professor) when you see assignments or other class expectations being watered down! Don't be afraid to praise your prof for especially provocative or challenging assignments or discussions you enjoy. Prepare for every class ahead of time. Take advantage of the Honors Program events and services the LEC and ARAs have to offer. Keep your fellow students honest by reporting violations of the Honor Code (i.e. cheating, blatant plagiarism, or sharing of work).

What Student Life Can Do: Continue assisting with freshman-orientation activities that expose incoming students to the academic side of SMU and follow-up with residence hall propaganda that makes new students aware that taking classes seriously and balancing a solid dose of studying with the numerous social opportunities puts them in the norm, rather than making them the exception. Enforce GPA restrictions on Greek and other extracurricular participation.

What Administrators Can Do: Continue to support the first-year universal reading initiative and other suggestions of the First-Year Experience Task Force. Aim to generate the

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Not sure what to do for her this Valentine's Day? Pamper her with some vaginal entertainment.

by Michael Hogenmiller

This February 14th, when students across campus will be scurrying to exchange valentines, make dinner dates, or deliver flowers, an adventurous group will make its way to the downstairs auditorium in Hughes-Trigg to take in this year's estrogen extravaganza: *Vagina Monologues*. The play casts 11 women and one cross-dressing man in a production that celebrates femininity, demands awareness for women's issues like domestic violence, rape, and other gender-driven crime, and in the end, encourages women to become comfortable and satisfied with their vaginas.

What is the value of a play that asks women to become intimate with their most intimate body part? Consider the stigma surrounding the vagina...the mystery, the complications, how incredibly unsexy the word "vagina" is. Also consider how uncomfortable men get at the mere mention of the word. The play strikes at the heart of all of these sentiments, simultaneously casting off the social stigma and embracing the starkest symbol of femininity, the vagina itself. One character in the play admits, "We don't talk about down there," while another yells about how feminine products have stolen away the true identity of her vagina, masking its scent in "summer rain" or similarly ridiculous aromas. The play speaks to social inhibitions, taboo, and the unspoken confu-

sion about the vagina, and it does all of this without crossing the line into fem-Nazi man-hating.

The play's author, Eve Ensler, donates all of the ticket proceeds to women's charities, and the production has been performed nationwide with huge success. Vagina-inspired merchandise is available for purchase at the show. Vagina-shaped soap on a rope? You've got it, in all of its innuendo-glory, and vagina-shaped chocolates are available, if only to confound all on the appropriate way to actually eat one.

So prepare yourself to be challenged, embarrassed, perhaps made uncomfortable, because this production isn't G-rated or for the faint of heart. But worry not, all are welcome, men and women alike, and the monologues themselves are startlingly funny.

Nix the Russell Stover's for something more risqué; side-step Bath & Body Works and buy her something for the bath she'll remember; and above all, show her you're comfortable with your manhood by celebrating her vagina.

For more information about SMU's *Vagina Monologues*, visit <http://people.smu.edu/win/v-day.html>, or go to www.vday.org for information on the global movement.

Michael Hogenmiller is a senior political science and music major.

Candidates without major-party backing look to stir things up. continued from page 1

lute power over spending, Strayhorn gets to decide whether there is money enough to spend and whether the budget will balance. Legislators can't buy pencils without her permission. Strayhorn has wielded this power aggressively, chastising Governor Perry, Lt. Gov. Dewhurst, and many others for reckless spending and borrowing from the Rainy Day Fund.

Though it was known that Strayhorn would run for Governor, few believed she would be able to challenge Rick Perry in the Republican primary this spring. Perry can amass far more campaign contributions and has the support of the Republican Party base. Strayhorn evidently realized this and surprised the state when she announced that she would run as an independent. As yet, she has about 4,500 signatures. In the words of a Texas Monthly article, "Is Carole Keeton Strayhorn crazy like a fox? Or is she just plain crazy?" In any case, she's definitely not just another suit and tie.

James Longhofer is a sophomore political science, economics and public policy major. Amanda Wall is a sophomore English, Spanish, and women's studies major.

Standards for academic achievement should be raised, and you can help. continued from page 3

funds necessary to support the teaching of required first-year-seminars in each department that will further help to acclimate first-years to the academic expectations of SMU. Reward and/or create incentives for professors who create honors courses or who redesign "regular" courses along the honors model. Continue recruiting larger and more highly qualified applicant pools. Increase focus on national post-graduate fellowships and prizes; take students seriously who aspire to obtain these awards. Recognize the AMAZING work that David Doyle and Dennis Cordell, et al. have done with UHP over the past three years and then *give us a University Honors Program that is a REAL, fully-functional, FUNDED honors program!*

Rebekah Hurt is a senior English major.

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