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HILLTOPICS

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This year's unique senior class gift is a personalized present everyone can be proud to give.

by Kasi DeLaPorte

As graduation finally approaches, I am happy to learn that the class of 2006 will actually donate a meaningful gift.

"This year, rather than purchasing a statue or another seal, our class has chosen to designate our individual gifts to the areas of the university that mean the most to each of us – for example: our individual school or department, scholarships, student programs or athletics," reads the Web site.

As beautiful as the SMU campus is, the last thing we need is another decorative statue or commemorative seal. The only benefit these gifts really have is the opportunity for people to come back and point to a tangible item to which they contributed.

But what does that hunk of metal really accomplish? What does it do?

It doesn't renovate run-down facilities or get students involved in campus activities. It doesn't strengthen academic departments or allow students to attend a school when they are otherwise financially unable.

If not for the Dean's scholarship and additional financial aid at SMU, I would be one of 30,000 students at a state school back home, along with half my high school. I'm sure I would have been fine; I probably would have enjoyed myself (I'd have gone to more football games, that's for sure), but I doubt I would have as many of the opportunities I received here.

Then, when I considered transferring to a higher ranked (and higher dollar) East Coast university, which would have plunged me some \$80,000 in debt, I was able to apply again for the President's scholarship, and,

fortunately, I got it. For many reasons, aside from minimized debt, I'm glad I stayed.

I can play the "what if?" game all day, but I can't help but think about all the things I probably would have missed had I not had the opportunity to attend SMU. In my nearly four years here, for example, I've been to the 2004 Democratic Convention, interned at one of the largest advertising agencies in the country, worked with faculty and staff who have truly made a difference in my life, traveled abroad in Ireland and England, met some of our nation's leaders, and, if I can be lovey-dovey for a moment, met my future husband.

My point is that these experiences are, in my opinion, a direct result of the scholarships I received at SMU. Now, in the waning of my college days, do you think I'm more likely to give my hard-earned money to a hunk of metal, or to a scholarship fund that just might change another student's life like it changed mine?

I know, after four years of pouring tuition dollars into this school, it's hard to think about shelling out even more. SMU is not without its flaws, but the class of 2006 is in a unique position to actually make a positive difference. Think about the ways your college experiences made you a better person—and return the favor.

Kasi DeLaPorte is a senior advertising and journalism major.



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Be Heard: *Hilltopics* is always looking for good submissions on virtually any topic. Email your ideas, feedback, or articles 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.

Oscar meets the Grouch: This year's Academy Awards were predictable and boring

by Courtney Hebb

Last night the Oscars were predicable and lack luster. The little gilded statues were brightly polished and pristine, but the over all evening was dull and boring. As I mourn the hours of time I lost watching the awards, I wonder "Why do people watch the Oscars?"

1) To find out who won: This is the whole point, for those special few to be honored and take the spotlight. But one can easily just follow along with the frequently updated online publications to get the same information in just a fraction of the time. This really isn't worth the hours of time committed to watching it live verses reading the list of winners in two seconds.

2) To listen to the acceptance speeches: There are the occasional few winners that really inspire but most are just long winded lists of names. Somewhere between thanking the dry cleaner and the long lost cousin a million times removed, the speeches all start sounding the same. And then there are the speeches that never occur. For example, what happened to the other screenwriter of "Crash"? The music came on and the cameras shifted away before he had a chance to mutter a word. Oops.

3) To see what the stars are wearing: This is probably the most important part of the whole event, the red carpet. But analyzing couture always gets so much more amusing when

the stars are later sorted into the best/worst dress by the fashion experts. And it's not like those dresses won't be plastered all over the magazines for weeks to come.

4) To laugh at Billy Crystal: Oh wait, scratch this one off the list. C'mon, Stewart, really?

This marquee event for the Hollywood elite has evolved into a trite episode for the entertainers that isn't actually entertaining. It is important to recognize and award the talent in the industry, but is the actual event really worth all the hype? For those who missed the Academy Awards last night, here's all you need to know...

- Best Picture: "Crash"
- Director: Ang Lee, "Brokeback Mountain"
- Actor: Philip Seymour Hoffman, "Capote"
- Actress: Reese Witherspoon, "Walk the Line"
- Actor, Supporting: George Clooney, "Syriana"
- Actress, Supporting: Rachel Weisz, "The Constant Gardener"
- Original Screenplay: "Crash"
- Adapted Screenplay: "Brokeback"

See how easy and time efferent that was compared to a 3-hour ceremony?

Courtney Hebb is a senior political science and marketing major.

Does your boyfriend think you're going to Hell? Religion is important in all relationships.

by Amanda Wall

The advent of Lent last week has gotten many students thinking about religion and what it means to be religious. For a lot of us, being religious means having to worry about who you date.

Growing up, I was a member of a church of Christ, and though I was never told outright that I could not date a member of a different sect or religion, it was fairly well understood that straying over those lines meant trouble. "What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" they would quote (2 Corinthians 6:15). This concern can make things somewhat awkward in a small town with limited choices. The small number of families meant that you could easily end up dating your sibling's ex or your ex's sibling. This small town was also overwhelmingly Protestant, so the main transgression for our group was to date a Baptist. My sister and I made up a song: "B-A-P-T-I-S-T. I like him and he likes me, but he's a B-A-P-T-I-S-T." Of course, we inter-dated anyway, but it was understood for many couples that these relationships would not end in marriage.

This may seem ridiculous; anyone familiar with those religions knows that they coincide on most of the main beliefs. It seems to get more complicated when you're crossing bigger boundaries: Protestant-Catholic, Christian-Jewish, Muslim-Hindi, or any combination of these. My Muslim and Hindi friends agree that dating each other would be a *serious* problem, and not just for religious reasons. These groups have centuries of complex ethnic, historical, and political boundaries lying between them, and it is hard to forget these when you have well-meaning parents looking over your shoulder.

Even for those who are not devoutly religious themselves, many of us feel the pressure to marry someone from the

right religion. I've heard it from people of all faiths: "My dad wants me to convert him," "My Catholic grandma cannot know I'm dating a Methodist," "When mom realized my fiancé wasn't Jewish, she freaked," "If my parents ever find out that I dated a Muslim, I am *dead*."

Of course, our parents may have a point. It probably strengthens a relationship if both parties agree on the cosmic order of things, on a code of conduct, on a way of understanding the world. When having spiritual difficulties, you can seek advice, comfort, and support from your partner. And when it becomes time to think about marriage, preparation can be much simpler when there is a shared understanding of where and how the marriage will go forth. Children often come up in discussions of inter-religious dating: in which religion will they be raised? While this question may not come up in a same-religion union, inter-religious couples have thought up some creative solutions. One family I know attends both Methodist services and Church of Christ services on alternating weeks; when their children are old enough, they will choose how they want to worship.

In this article, I have only addressed Hinduism and the "religions of the book" (Islam, Judaism, Christianity). I have no doubt that problems with inter-religious dating can extend to many other religions, and also to relationships between religious people and agnostic or atheistic people. In the words of one woman, "It just makes things difficult if your boyfriend thinks you're going to hell."

Amanda Wall is a sophomore English, Spanish, and women's studies major.

When it comes to the Dubai Ports World acquisition, Bush should stick to his free trade guns

by Douglas Hill

Say what you wish about President Bush, but there's no denying he is a capitalist at heart. He's an oil man from Texas who used to own a major league baseball team. He's been criticized for his numerous connections to and his high-powered friends in the American business community. How, then, could anyone expect him to oppose a free market sale of six American ports, especially if the buying party is an Arab nation showing legitimate interest in participation in global capitalism?

If the United States is serious about promoting Western values like democracy, free trade, and market capitalism in the Middle East, then President Bush needs to rely on his conscience, not his political or security fears, and put substantial political capital behind authorization of the Dubai Ports World port acquisition deal.

The controversy started last month when the stockholders of Peninsular and Oriental, a British firm, agreed to sell their company to Dubai Ports World, a company owned by the Government of the United Arab Emirates and under the direct control of the nation's prime minister. The sale would mean that six American ports (in Baltimore, Miami, New Orleans, New Jersey, New York, and Philadelphia) would come under the control of DPW. In addition, DPW would have management control, but would not assume the leases, of 16 other U.S. ports.

Controversy arose, presumably, when one group in Washington realized that they could use the issue to make Bush look soft on security and when another group realized that these U.A.E. leaders weren't Christian. Thus, the strangest political marriage in history features Sean Hannity and Bill Frist arguing right alongside Hillary Clinton and the editorial board of the New York Times. Both groups are claiming that the deal would jeopardize American national security, but they are doing so with very different motivations.

The opposition from the left views the issue as a soft spot for Bush politically. They know that, despite his falling popularity, Bush is still stronger than the Democrats on national security, and they believe that they can use this issue to break down support for Bush, both from moderates and his conservative base. Their claim is ludicrous. In fact, there exists a committee to investigate the very issues they are questioning. It is called the Committee on Foreign Investments in the United States, and it is headed by the United States Treasury Department. It includes representatives from various other agencies, including the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Homeland Security. The committee approved the sale as both legal and safe for the United States, but Bush's opponents are ignoring the facts in favor of politics. Their opposition has little to do with real concerns about security and much to do with political opportunism. Many of these people are the same people who supported last year's failed acquisition of Union Oil by the Chinese government. The political strategy on this type of issue is becoming clear: wait and see what W does, and then do the opposite.

The second type of opposition is a little more dubious. The radical right is pushing for Congress to block the sale on the grounds that...well, you see, it's because...it's just that...well, it's because these people are Arab. And they're not

even Christians, either. That's basically it. They're scared that a Ports Management company is going to blow us all up, and their only real reason for believing this is that the company is run by a bunch of Muslims. This claim is preposterous, and even offensive. The U.A.E. has not been our enemy. They haven't even been vague about their support for the United States. The Dubai government allowed the U.S. to use their country as a staging ground for both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The U.A.E. has lent monetary, logistical, and political support to Bush's War on Terror. Additionally, the U.A.E. has a sterling record, as far as Middle Eastern countries go, for participation in the global economy. If France and Germany can say the things they say about American foreign policy and still be considered some of our closest allies, what does a country full of non-whites have to do to get a little respect? Americans should be thankful that the firm buying management rights to our ports belongs to a government with such strong alliances to our own. To experience honest apprehension about selling this company to Arabs ignores years of good relations and is discriminatory, plain and simple.

Amid swirling controversy, DPW agreed to hold off on the sale to allow further review of the security concerns, a kind gesture, though wholly unnecessary. Bush has threatened to veto any legislation blocking the sale, though, which would be the first veto for a president who has enjoyed years of Republican control of Congress. Let's hope he sticks to his guns and stands up for a fair, secure, and strongly capitalist sale.

Douglas Hill is a junior international studies major.

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(if so, ignore this ad)

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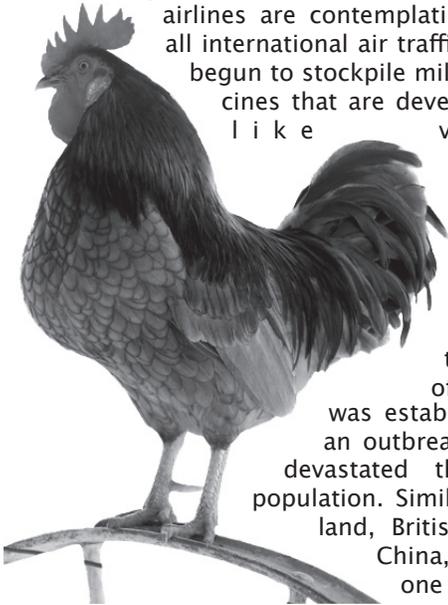
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As the media hype about avian flu grows to panic, the public just wonders what the hype's about

by Michael Hogenmiller

Now, I've never been a fan of epidemics, particularly ones of worldwide proportions. Plagues, ever since the Biblical days, have been a notable downer for the people unlucky enough to fall victim to them. Communism, Nazism, evangelicalism, the Spice Girls, all very disturbing global movements, but they pale in comparison to the Black Death or AIDS. Smallpox? Just ask the few Native Americans who are left. Polio? Now you know why FDR was such a fan of the radio, and thank God we have vaccines for these diseases now. But bird flu? What the hell is with bird flu?

First of all, how many people, worldwide, have died from bird flu so far? You'd think at least a million or so, right? Especially considering how much attention it's been given by the media. Three chickens die in the Philippines from a flu that specifically targets birds, and CNN is running 24-hour, round-the-clock coverage of the impending apocalyptic implications of poultry plague. The World Health Organization is funneling millions of dollars into forming contingency plans in case there's an outbreak, international airlines are contemplating the shut-down of all international air traffic, and countries have begun to stockpile millions of doses of vaccines that are developed to counter flu-like viral strains.



Officially known as "avian flu," this disease has killed million of horses, pigs, chickens, and turkeys worldwide since the early twentieth century, and an official death count was established in 1953, when an outbreak of the H5N1 strain devastated the Scottish chicken population. Similar tragedies hit England, British Columbia, Mexico, China, and even the U.S. In one particularly heart-

wrenching outbreak in 1979, 400 harbor seals, most of them still pups, died along the New England coast from an acute pneumonia associated with the influenza strain.

Honestly, who gives a shit? Even better, why does the media? When coverage could be aimed at humanitarian crisis worldwide, especially in Africa, the Middle East, or Asia, we are instead finding ourselves neurotically infatuated with a bird disease and the obsessive paranoia that it could one day find its way into our supermarkets. Prevent genocide, crimes against women, world poverty, religious and political persecution, torture, rape, or techno music, but give bird flu a rest.

If anything, pathogens have been the historical equalizer, blind to economic status, race, religion or creed, and regardless of the technology, money, or fixation we aim at bird flu, we'll never secure our well-being the way we could if we aimed our efforts at actual world problems.

Michael Hogenmiller is a senior political science and music major.

Hilltopics Election Guide

You're not having *deja vu*; the first student body election was too close to call, so now Taylor Russ and Michelle Wigianto are in a two-person run-off election for the office of Student Body President. With the special run-off election for coming up this Tuesday and Wednesday, *Hilltopics* is here to help. While we won't endorse any candidate, we can give you a few reasons to justify your own decision.

Top 5 reasons to vote for Michelle Wigianto:

1. She'd be the first female, minority president at SMU.
2. She'd be the first nongreek president in a long time.
3. Trust Russ was a lame slogan the first time around.
4. She started her own student organization.
5. She's a Hunt Scholar.

Top 5 reasons to vote for Taylor Russ:

1. He's greek.
2. He's ultra-experienced in Student Senate.
3. What does "Wig Out" mean, anyway?
4. He won the plurality in the first election.
5. He has two first names.

Top 5 reasons not to vote at all:

1. Nobody follows their "platform"
2. What does the President do, exactly?
3. Give up voting for Lent.
4. You voted for Jace the first time. Your man's out.
5. The five minutes you spent voting in the first election was more time than you should ever spend thinking about student body elections.

Hope it helps,
-The *Hilltopics* Editorial Staff

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