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Hilltopics Staff

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HILLTOPICS

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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.

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Rangers season is upon us, so take yourself out to the ball game

by Douglas Hill

Though you wouldn't know it by the weather, my calendar says that spring is officially here, and that means a lot of things to SMU students. It means finals. It means graduation. It means putting away the Uggs and getting out the Rainbows. It means Mavericks playoff basketball. But one thing it doesn't mean for nearly enough Mustangs: baseball season.

I suspect this has something to do with the fact that rather than being the Dallas Rangers, our baseball team is the "Texas" Rangers, and they represent the whole metroplex, which consequently means they play west of Dallas, somewhere between here and Los Angeles. There's no denying that the drive out to Ameritrust Field in Arlington is a long one, but the Rangers have a lot to offer sports fans and non-fans alike.

First and foremost, to enjoy a Rangers' game, one needs to stop thinking about it as a sporting event, and start thinking about it as a picnic. When one goes to a Cowboys game or a Mavs game, one is expected to pay fairly close attention to the game and at least to care what the score is. None of these burdening expectations accompany the experience of "watching" the Rangers play.

Baseball is a slow, undemanding game that is played out more over the course of a 162-game season than in a single night, so the time you spend at the ballpark should be

treated as a relaxing time to enjoy beautiful April and May evenings in Texas, to bond with friends away from the SMU bubble, to eat more junk food than is reasonable or healthful, and—only for those fans over 21 and who bring a designated driver, of course—perhaps a refreshing beverage or two.

Personally, I don't care about the Rangers. I couldn't name more than one or two of our starting pitchers, and the only things I really know about our team this year are that we aren't very good and that Sammy Sosa plays for us. But that doesn't mean I can't see the fun in an affordable night out at the ballpark. For the reasonable price of \$6, you can get a ticket to the game, and if you're willing to pay the somewhat-escalated price of ballpark food (say, roughly \$15 for a hot dog, nachos and a beer), you're in for a treat you'll never find at Umphrey Lee or Jimmy John's. That's \$21 for dinner and an evening's entertainment, and where else can \$21 get you so far? I know paying \$6 for a beer or \$2 extra for cheese with your pretzel seems like highway robbery, but when you consider as a whole the entertainment the Rangers can offer with the price of the evening, it seems like something we Mustangs should take advantage of more often.

Douglas Hill is a senior international studies major.



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Hilltopics is currently searching for members of next year's editorial staff. All are invited to apply. Find our application on page 4. Hilltopics editors are intelligent and hard-working, and no journalism, writing, or editing experience is necessary.

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 7:00 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.

Jesus Camp documentary goes up close with fearfully intriguing subculture

by Jenny Simon

In the critically acclaimed film *Jesus Camp*, directors Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady present an objective look into the world of Evangelical Christians. The film follows three kids, Levi, Rachael and Tory as they travel to Becky Fischer's "Kids on Fire Camp" in Devil's Lake, North Dakota.

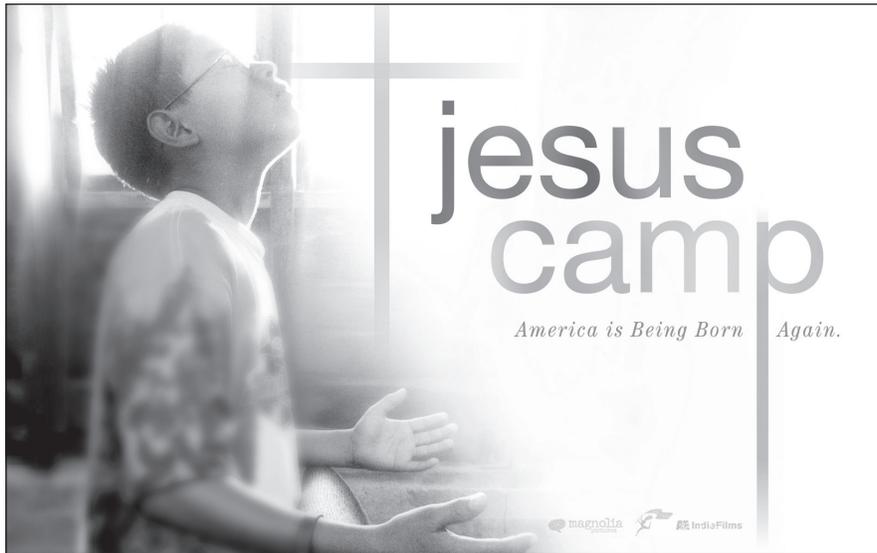
As I watched the film a strong theme arose that disturbed me; the idea of "taking back America for Christ." This movement of "taking back America for Christ" agitates me because it presents a growing acceptance among young Evangelicals that separation of church and state is hurting America.

Throughout the documentary Pastor Fischer preaches that the children of her congregation need to be Christian soldiers in "God's Army." Fischer grooms these children to become active participants in American politics by preaching on issues such as abortion and gay marriage. Fischer and other Evangelical Christians interviewed in this film repeatedly intertwine religious beliefs with politics, making it difficult for children to distinguish a separation between the two.

I personally have no problem with uber-religious individuals (as long as they don't try to convert me). In fact, I have a lot of respect for the ability to rely solely on faith. The problem I have with this new generation of "God's Army" is that these children are taught that religious morals need to be re-embedded in our government so America will become a better place. Correct me if I wrong, but I thought one of America's most significantly exclusive accomplishments is

separation of church and state. Leaving religious morals out of governing allows leaders to objectively run our country with ethical procedures rather than force religious morals on citizens.

The goal of Pastor Fischer is not to help young children find faith but to mold these children into uber-religious-right-winged-conservative "soldiers" for the American government. I believe religion and government are two separate entities that should avoid overlap as much as possible. Fischer should foster strong faith in these children rather than condition them to



drag separation of church and state through the mud.

I believe the children in this film are being brainwashed by this Evangelical belief. Rather than preaching messages about good ethics and community service, two things I'm sure Jesus was a huge fan of, these children are learning to disassociate themselves with anyone in disagreement of their religion.

This new generation of Evangelicals frightens me because they consider their religion superior to all others. I believe Evangelicals are more concerned with infiltrating the government than exemplifying their faith through the community. Although I'm not religious, if I were to ever join a church I would chose a sect that demonstrates compassion amongst the community, not one fixated on restructuring the American government.

The film *Jesus Camp* objectively observes young Evangelicals at a summer camp but also gives a glimpse into a narrow-minded, religious-right powerhouse. In the film, Becky Fischer comments that "liberals" should be afraid of what this new generation of "God's Army" will do. She's definitely right, because I am afraid. I'm not afraid of the power these kids may possess, but I'm afraid of people so narrow-minded that they'd sacrifice an American freedom to broaden their religious agenda.

I am a huge fan of the documentary *Jesus Camp* because it illustrates a fearfully intriguing subculture. On the other hand this subculture and its methods of fixating on re-establishing Christianity in our government is harmful. Praise who you want, just don't disturb my freedom not to.

Jenny Simon is a junior sociology major.

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Revolution in collegiate competition: Schools fighting back against *U.S. News* rankings

by Todd Baty

As members of an information-driven society defined by an overabundance of data, we have grown accustomed to lists, statistical summaries, and rankings. We use such short-cuts in our daily lives for purposes of efficiency, giving little second thought to their underlying facts or data. Indeed, as denizens of a world that values PowerPoint presentations and bullet-point resumes, we do not have time to consider that which is absent from the information in front of our eyes—we do not have (or do not take) time to consider the validity or comprehensiveness of the data that represents a subject or idea.

Thus, when *U.S. News & World Report* began to rank our nation's colleges and universities in 1983, we quickly adopted its stratification of high education as truth. Seemingly giving method and structure to the stresses and confusion of the college admission process, the *U.S. News'* annual college rankings, at first glance, are a lifesaver for anyone attempting to find his or her "perfect fit." After all, who would want to go to a school ranked 105th (TCU's ranking), when one could go to a school ranked 70th (SMU's ranking), or even first (Princeton's ranking)? But like any statistical summary, the *U.S. News'* rankings are only as good as the facts and data that are gathered to create them. Since most readers do not bother to devote themselves to understanding how the magazine creates its arbitrary rankings, the *U.S. News'* rankings have become the industry standard in college admissions. What was originally intended to be a quick reference guide for high school students considering college has quickly turned into the greatest rat-race high education has ever experienced. Today, colleges (including SMU) compete fiercely over potential students in order to improve their admissions statistics and thus receive a higher ranking amongst their peers.

This yearly cycle is not only costly and cutthroat, but misleading and disenfranchising, as a recent article in the April 2, 2007 issue of *Time* entitled "The Rankings Revolt" indicates (www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1601839,00.html). The article explains just how obsessed college administrations have become with *U.S. News'* annual reports. For example, it explains that per-pupil spending accounts for ten percent of a university's overall score. It seems logical that schools that spend more money per student should be rewarded with a high ranking, but this statistic hurts institutions that try to keep tuition costs down (NB: such information makes me question SMU's own tuition increases over the past few years). Additionally, the largest single component of a college's ranking is its peer assessment score, a number that is derived from a survey of

presidents, provosts and admissions directors. These upper level administrators then rank America's top universities according to their academic reputation. However, many schools complain that this statistic only rewards institutions with long-standing histories and does not actually evaluate a university's current educational quality. Furthermore, according to the article, "the rankings' formula overemphasizes selective admissions data like low acceptance rates and high SAT scores for incoming freshmen while giving short shrift to what really matters but is much harder to measure: the education students receive once they get on campus." Thus, the rankings suppose that a university's education is necessarily better if its students have performed better in high school and on the SAT, a fact that seems to discount that vast differences between a high school and collegiate education, not to mention the unreliability of the SAT in determining intelligence and performance.

However, *Time* also explains a growing sentiment within higher education to loosen the current death-grip the *U.S. News'* numbers have on American universities. According to the *Time* article, a growing group of universities hope to fight back. Led in large part by Drew University in New Jersey, many American colleges are now attempting to band together to withhold information that they feel is unfairly used by *U.S. News*. However, there is danger in such tactics; according to *Time*, *U.S. News* has arbitrarily assigned missing information to a university's rankings calculations before. In 1995, Reed College stopped complying with *U.S. News* and the magazine responded by assigning the lowest possible value to all missing statistics. But the president of Drew University, Robert Weisbuch, hopes that if enough universities withhold information, *U.S. News* will have no choice but to change—or at the very least, its flaws will be exposed.

However, the challenge of fighting the influence of the *U.S. News* rankings is largely a product of a growing societal trend. In an age of high-speed internet and wireless global broadband, we have become accustomed to data at lightning fast speeds and with little required analysis. The *U.S. News* should be blamed in part for the disgusting state of today's college admissions process, but the magazine's rankings are largely an indication of the nature of the times we live in. Indeed, the responsibility is largely placed on the individual to decipher for himself the truth or falsehood of the statistics presented to him. Hopefully all universities, regardless of ranking, are providing students the capacity to do at least that.

Todd Baty is a junior history and music major.

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Hilltopics 2006-2007 Editor Application

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Name: _____ Email: _____

Phone Number: _____ Year: _____

Major(s) and Minor(s): _____

Preference of Position: (please rank 1-6, 1 being your first choice; note that actual positions filled may vary from those on application)

____ **Editor-in-Chief** (conducts weekly meetings of editorial staff, directs overall management of publication)

____ **Business Manager** (spokesperson for *Hilltopics* to the SMU community, facilitates the logistics of keeping *Hilltopics* in good standing with the University)

____ **Copy Editor** (responsible for editing articles for length, grammar, and content)

____ **Distribution Manager** (designs and implements the *Hilltopics* distributions strategy)

____ **Graphics Editor** (designs each edition of *Hilltopics* and advertisements, as needed; responsible for generating and submitting PDF to printer each week; requires experience with Adobe Photoshop and Adobe InDesign)

____ **Managing Editor** (directs the content of each issue and, in the case of controversy, has the final say as to what articles are or are not included)

Please note that every editor, regardless of their particular position, will be responsible for distributing Hilltopics each week, and will also write articles as needed.

Application Questions:

Please briefly answer each of the following questions on a separate sheet and submit your responses with your application.

1. Why are you applying to be a *Hilltopics* editor?
2. What do you think are the biggest strengths and biggest weaknesses of *Hilltopics*?
3. What is a political, social, or cultural issue about which you care deeply? That is, what kinds of topics would you be most interested in writing about for *Hilltopics*? Why is this issue important to you?
4. Do you have any journalism/writing/design experience (lack of experience in no way disqualifies any applicant from consideration)?