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# Hilltopics: Volume 1, Issue 12

Hilltopics Staff

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# HILLTOPICS

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## The General Education Curriculum: Students' best friend and worst enemy

by Jared Dovers

The General Education Curriculum. We all are subject to it, and if you want your degree, you'd best make friends with it. Just because we're all stuck with it doesn't mean the GEC can't be improved, however. If every student who passes through SMU is going to have to wrestle with an administratively enforced liberal arts education, we should at least stack the odds in our favor, no?

We, the future educated of the nation, need liberal arts in our lives. Agreed. But, does the GEC do that the best way it can? I must admit that I have a few beefs with the thing. For one thing, who hasn't thought that the IT requirement isn't some sort of secret conspiracy to waste 3 hours of your life per week (plus "lab") to make you take part in a boredom study being run by the university? Maybe you're not as into conspiracy theory as I am, but the fact remains that that requirement could make a preacher cuss, or at the very least fall asleep.

I'm just going to go ahead and generalize here: most of us have worked with computers and don't need to have a formal lecture on "input devices" (a bloody mouse and keyboard) or on the particulars of how vacuum tubes work. Even if we didn't live in a house with 2-3 computers, we probably worked on them at school. I'm from rural Alabama, and even there we played Oregon Trail and eventually took a class on Microsoft Word. Even if you've never had one before, I'm betting the general populous of SMU could read "Office for Dummies." Please, Dean Cordell and the GEC task force, cut out this requirement. Or at the very least—let us show you we can type and print a document for you at AARO and be done with it!

And what's with Wellness I? Now, maybe

(maybe) this class would have changed my life had I taken it as a first-year, but, even as a first semester sophomore, I have to admit I saw this class as a waste of my life—and it was the same semester I took the IT requirement! I do applaud the efforts of the administration to make this a first-year only class because new students don't know the things they could be doing with their time instead of listening to pop psychology in a gym. Now, Wellness II—that's great stuff. We need three hours a week to relax and do some stress relieving activities. Do more of that.

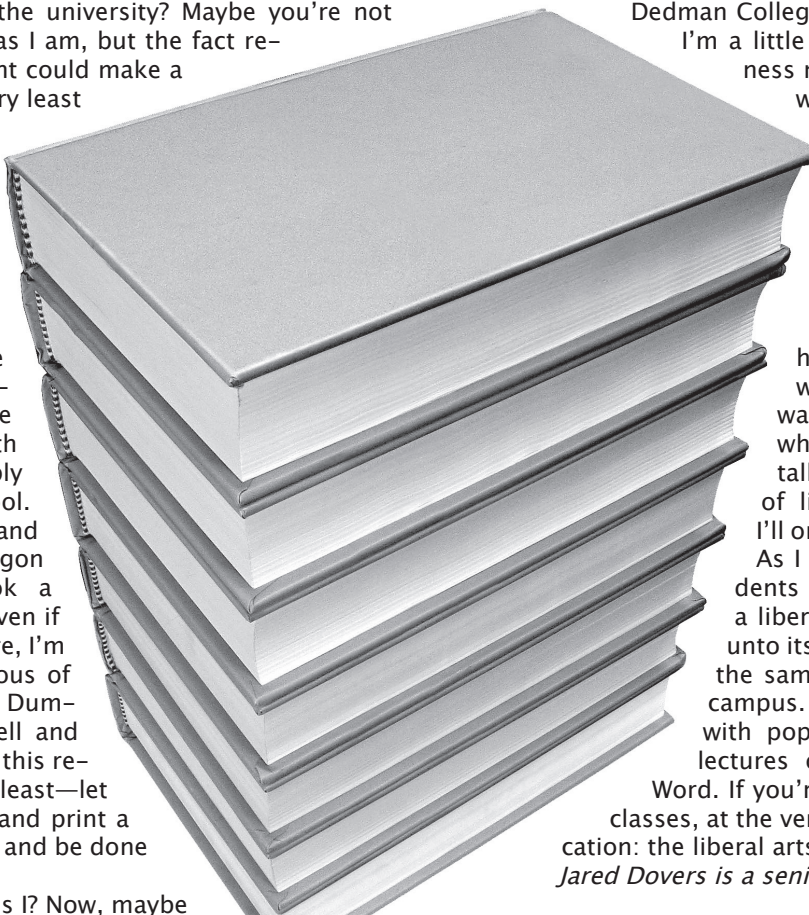
Don't get me wrong because despite all my bitching, I love the idea of the GEC. I have two majors, and both of them fall within Dedman College. Most my friends are Dedman College people, and to be honest

I'm a little weary of the strictly business major types. I believe in the well-balanced human who knows how to talk about Socrates as well as take a derivative. You, too, should understand basic science as well as be familiar with some of the Western canon.

If anything, I think we have too few requirements in writing and literature. Hence, wasting my time talking about what a keyboard is instead of talking about the great works of literature (that, admittedly, I'll only read by force) is a crime.

As I was fond of yelling at students when I worked with AARO: a liberal arts education is an end unto itself. I don't know if I can say the same for all the majors at our campus. So—don't waste our time with pop psychology and sleeper-lectures on printers and Microsoft Word. If you're going to force us to take classes, at the very least stick to your justification: the liberal arts are important.

*Jared Dovers is a senior philosophy and religious studies major.*



**INSIDE**  
this issue

**Feedback:** A dissatisfied reader defends her religious views, page 2.

**Culture:** Does sexist language equal sexist thought? Page 3.

**Local:** The addition of a Wal-Mart uptown raises concerns, but why? Page 4.

**Campus:** Some feel we've lost the Boulevard, but basketball helps, page 3.

**On the web:** Go to [www.smu.edu/honors/hilltopics](http://www.smu.edu/honors/hilltopics) to read all of the stories in this issue and more. You can also submit your thoughts to [hilltopics@hotmail.com](mailto:hilltopics@hotmail.com).

## Dissatisfied students must speak out

by Michelle Wigianto

There was a time when students were gassed, beaten, arrested, and in one instance, killed for what they thought was right. Granted, this was during the sixties and seventies, an exceptionally volatile time in our country's history. But arguably, the civil rights movement, women's rights and protests against the Vietnam War would not have changed the climate had students peeking out from those ivory towers not been an integral force for change.

Student activism has (relative to most of our lives) a long history of being a way for the political left to mobilize its base and enact the changes it wants. However, in recent years, the conservative camp has been building its own student base. The Leadership Institute, for example, is an organization that since 1979 has "identified, recruited, trained and placed conservatives in politics, government, and media" ([www.leadershipinstitute.org](http://www.leadershipinstitute.org)). Organizations like the Protest Warriors and Young Conservatives of Texas have been extremely successful in training their own student activists.

It's clear that the tides have turned. Some speculate that the reason many college students are now right-of-center is in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, shattering the long held notion that the world loves us. Or, perhaps, that the so-called liberal values which promote loose moral living are the reason so many families are now "broken" families.

Maybe the right is the new left. But whatever the reason, the notion that colleges, and the media, for that matter, are still bastions of liberal thought is gravely wrong. Talk radio and affirmative action bake sales are the accepted norm and no longer the voice of dissent. Let's not kid ourselves; they are the voice of the "mandate".

So in exercising the same freedom of speech that the new left (i.e. the right) uses, those of you who dissent—let yourselves be heard. Do not succumb to the opiate of the mass—and I'm not talking about religion. I speak of apathy and laziness and cynicism. This is not the time to give up and talk of moving to Canada. We live in a country that allows us to voice our opinions (theoretically). And now we live in a time when those who disagree with the current climate need to be heard. Now, for the sake of what you care about, get up and do something.

*Michelle Wigianto is a sophomore political science and journalism major.*

## Tsunami article misses religious point

by Ashley Payne

Anger, sadness, and frustration flood my heart, mind, and soul. I am overwhelmed with emotion as the words of a January 17 *Hilltopics* article regarding the terrible tragedy in South Asia infiltrate my mind. As a Christian, I cannot sit idly and allow my God to be blasphemed as smiting and unloving, as the previous article about the tsunami suggested.

"...we're here to talk about why, or rather how, we happily profess an all-loving, all-powerful God, but we constantly witness these heinous events in no way caused by our fellow man...How is it that God who loves you, and is all-powerful will smite you with random acts of geological or biological violence?" Yes, I happily profess an all-loving, all-powerful God, but I also hold strong to the conviction of my less than perfect self. God created us to have a relationship with Him—that we may know Him on a personal level. We broke His trust; first with disobedience, then murder, followed by lust, and now with all of this and more. We continue to distance ourselves from our all-powerful creator. Our sin—which we commit so arrogantly and joyously—has a price. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). But, the same all-loving, all-powerful God that sentenced us to death also gives us a free gift "of eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Romans 6:23b). By breaking our union with God, we were removed from perfection, and we are now stuck in our less than perfect world.

Though we smite God, He loves us enough to provide us with a way out. I have no answers as to why the tsunami hit South Asia, and I am by no means saying it was due to their sinfulness. But, I can assure you this is not the way God created the world to be. In the beginning we lived in perfect harmony with God and Nature. We messed that up with our disobedience, and we are now faced with a world that has been won over by an evil that comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). We have no control or vision into the mind of God and why tragedies such as this occur and are therefore quick to make Him the culprit, when the truth lies in the deception of evil we choose not to see.

Yes, too many Christians are sitting "all purty" in their church pews. Church is a part of the Christian life, but it should not be its entirety. This is where we have missed the mark and caused our living God to become nothing more than ritualistic religion. Christianity isn't a list what to do and what not to do, but rather Christianity is the fulfillment of the relationship for which we were created. As we grow to know God on a personal level, through prayer and reading His word, we become transformed and long to please Him. Just as you change behaviors to please your boyfriend/girlfriend because of the love you share, as you grow to love God, behaviors naturally change because you long to please Him.

Because of these changes in behavior we should naturally do more for the Tsunami relief efforts. The main point of the January 17 article was right on. But, I must disagree about putting the blame on God. Instead of sitting back and pointing fingers, let's accept what has happened and make a stand for those who are hurting around us. Let the love and power of an all-loving, all-powerful God seep through your pores—turn this tragedy into a love story of human compassion.

*Ashley Payne is a first-year religious studies and English Major.*

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## Was Harvard president's base remark a simple mistake or a serious sexism?

*Lawrence Summers is under fire for suggesting that women are innately inferior to men with regard to math and science skills.*

*by Courtney Underwood*

Earlier this month, Harvard University President Lawrence H. Summers got himself into trouble when he suggested that women are underrepresented in the field of mathematics because of innate differences in women's abilities when compared to men's.

Lawrence gave a luncheon speech at a conference meant to discuss diversification methods for bringing more women into the fields of science and engineering. Regardless of what Summers intended by his comments, he seemed shocked at the outrage and attention given to his "hypothesis."

Summers suggested the theory that women with children are unwilling to work the long hours required for success in these fields; he also suggested that the discrepancy in female representation may also be a result of women having different inherent abilities than men, abilities which were previously attributed to socialization.

Clearly Summers needs to take another look at the history of this issue. While his speech seems to suggest that we have always attributed the lack of female representation in the fields of math and science to socialization, he has it a bit backwards. The last few decades have been spent researching this issue because society viewed the tendency for men to go into math and engineering, and for women to go into English and other liberal arts careers, as a clear representation of differences in ability. However, research suggests that the distribution of different genders in specified fields is largely a result of socialization.

Furthermore, many individuals were angered by Summers illogical leap in inferring that the under-representation of women in these fields is a reflection of difference in ability. In reality, research has illustrated that at the highest level of mathematical achievement women are still less likely to pursue math and science careers. Research looking for innate differences among the sexes has yet to come to any staggering conclusions. Many researchers have found little if any sex differences, even in math and spatial skills. Additionally, researchers that are finding slight differences in female and male performance of different tasks have yet to illustrate that these exercises have anything to do with later math and science abilities.

On the other hand, research has illustrated that the attention teachers give to individual students is largely determined by their expectations of those students' abilities, and each student's performance is largely shaped by their teacher's expectations. In other words, elementary school girls who pick up on the fact that their teacher does not expect them to perform well in math don't perform well; instead, they show high achievement in areas where their teacher pays attention to them and expects high achievement, this phenomenon is known as the self-fulfilling prophecy. While I don't plan on giving you a lesson in psychology, this phenomenon and the research supporting it has been widely accepted among scholars. This theory also illustrates the danger of chalk-ing-up gender differences in representation to stereotypical assumptions of innate differences.

Regardless, it was incredibly irresponsible for the President of a university as prestigious and respected as Harvard to make these remarks. Additionally, while Summers issued three apologies and admitted that he has "learned a great deal" from what he has heard over the past few days, his behavior leaves his own bias about women in question. While tenured female professors have always been underrepresented at the Ivy League universities, Summers appears to have made things worse. The year before Summers took over 37% of the Harvard's tenure offers went to women. Last year, with Summers in charge, the number dropped to 11%. While Summers is typically accepted as a blunt and sometimes offensive president, who has alienated other minorities such as African-Americans and Muslims in the past, this incident may be more than his typical failure to think before he speaks.

*Courtney Underwood is a senior psychology major.*

### Basketball: Better than the boulevard

*by Gaines Greer*

I love SMU basketball games, but to be perfectly honest, the atmosphere in Moody Coliseum is more likely to draw me to the game than is the sport, itself. You see, I'm probably one of those fans that "real fans" love to hate.

I usually forget to wear red, and instead show up in green. I get distracted while chatting with an acquaintance that I haven't seen in months and miss a crucial three-pointer. Since I don't understand the game too well (at least not beyond the part where the ball goes through the hoop), I'm usually reduced to clapping and cheering when I see the other people around breaking into applause. But in spite of my complete ineptitude as a fan, and my busy schedule, I try to make as many of the home games as possible.

I love the excitement of SMU basketball games so much that I actually prefer the student section of Moody Coliseum to Ford Stadium and the Boulevard (especially with the new restrictions on alcohol at tailgating). As mentioned above, the social aspect of the game does have a certain appeal; but the commitment of the other students to the game, when we all cheer together, in our small, courtside student section, is what really impresses me.

Unfortunately, I haven't gotten to as many games this year as in the past. In fact, Saturday's 63-57 victory against Boise State was the first one I attended all season. And I truly regret that, because even though I may not be the most avid basketball fan, supporting SMU basketball really is a great way to spend a Thursday or Saturday night. And if someone like me, who will never really appreciate basketball, can have fun cheering on the team with her fellow Mustangs, then surely every other student on this campus could as well.

The remainder of this season's schedule is online at <http://www.smumustangs.com>. Find a date between now and March that works for you, and go spend a few hours in Moody Coliseum supporting the Mustangs. If you don't go, you're not just letting down a great team, you're missing out on a really fun time.

*Gaines Greer is a senior English and German major.*



## In shutting out competitors, Wal-Mart gives customers exactly what they want

by Craig Zieminski

Seemingly overnight, a Wal-Mart springs up near a downtown shopping center in Smalltown, USA. Local shopkeepers are abuzz with fear. "This store is going to make mine go out of business," they all worry.

Seemingly overnight, a Wal-Mart springs up near an uptown shopping center in Dallas, TX. Local shopkeepers are abuzz with fear. "This store is going to make mine look so ugly," they all worry.

West Village proprietors and local Uptown residents do not represent the typical concerns associated with the Bentonville behemoth. Boutique regulars stand little chance of switching allegiances to Wal-Mart, and our entrepreneurs know it. Besides, the Hall Ave. Wal-Mart location features only groceries, and thanks to its upscale décor and real estate, prices resemble Central Market more than Fiesta.

While local condo owners continue to fear property value declines, the Heartland of America continues to perceive Wal-Mart as an unwelcome invasion to its sole-proprietor economy. Announcing a new Wal-Mart is the equivalent of giving Mom-and-Pop the pink slip, since small business owners cannot easily compete with a \$245 billion giant. Elsewhere, Wal-Mart is blamed for exacerbating income inequality, cutting healthcare benefits across the retail industry, bullying suppliers, and worsening the trade deficit.

Indeed, Wal-Mart is accelerating the extinction of the individual-owned grocery and general store. However, consumers always demand the lowest possible price, which Wal-Mart has delivered through shrewd business practices and inspirational efficiency. It seems hypocritical to now complain that small-town shopkeepers are losing in a highly competitive, free-market economy. America can't have her cake and eat it, too – either pay \$5.00 for a gallon of milk or help Pop find a new job. Given that 138,000,000 shoppers visit Wal-Mart every week, it appears that Americans are voting with their feet.

Whenever a shop owner loses his livelihood and dreams, everyone feels sorrow. Unfortunately, like a healthy organism, a healthy economy is continuously shedding dead cells and growing new ones. The Uptown boutiques and even dis-

count retailer Target Stores are still thriving by recognizing that Wal-Mart, like any other store, serves specific market segments. By, well, targeting the upscale market, Target has not met the same fate as K-Mart. In the *Harvard Business Review*, Darrell Rigby notes, "The Wal-Mart threat shrinks into proper perspective when you segment the market along the lines of quality, service, convenience, selection and price and then look closely at where the retail giant really dominates [price]." Customers looking for fifteen styles of broccoli still head to Central Market, and those buying an opulent purse shop at the Galleria.

The other primary complaint against Wal-Mart revolves around the low pay and lack of benefits given to employees. Yes, the average Wal-Mart associate earns \$8.23, which falls well under \$20,000 a year even with some overtime. Healthcare benefits are fairly dismal, too. However, since when has grocery bagging been a job of the middle class? If America decides that the low-skilled labor force should have comprehensive benefits and a higher standard of living, then changes are necessary in Washington D.C., not Bentonville.

Also, Wal-Mart is simply learning from the past. America's previous top dog, General Motors, is currently drowning in a vast ocean of retirement benefits, frantically selling vehicles to cover the overly optimistic promises it made former employees.

The primary objective at Wal-Mart is to provide goods at the lowest possible cost – not to support the existence of competitors, ensure that only American goods are sold, or provide full medical benefits to stock boys. America has no right to complain...we asked for it.

*Craig Zieminski is a senior accounting and economics major.*

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## FYI

### An ode to the bells

After last week's article wondering about where the sound of the bells in Fondren Science Building had gone, the bells began their old familiar tune every quarter hour. We're not sure how or why they are back, but we sure are pleased to hear their melodious sounds again.

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](mailto: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.