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## Hilltopics: Volume 1, Issue 14

Hilltopics Staff

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# HILLTOPICS

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY

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## Alternative Spring Breaks let students experience break outside of SMU bubble

by Courtney Hebb

It seems as though most college students have difficulty remembering spring breaks of the past. Of course, many can recall where they went (typically a sunny beach with scantily clad bodies), and that they consumed large quantities of alcohol, but such facts are interlaced with hazy blotches of recollections and memory gaps.

I, on the other hand, can recall quite vividly both of my college spring break trips of the past two years. I can in no way attribute this to a fantastic memory, for I can barely remember my own phone number, but instead to how these adventures opened my eyes to a world that I had never seen. Here are a few memories from my past Alternative Spring Breaks.

I remember Spring Break 2003, trekking to Nashville, and within 4 hours learning the life story of the stranger that was seated next to me. I remember sitting in an art studio watching a homeless man concentrate with much precision and articulation as his paintbrush swept the canvas creating a beautiful landscape. I remember his smile. I remember meeting a musician in an empty bar who had left his life and belongings up north to follow his dream. I remember shaking the hands of two of the Lost Boys from Sudan whose eyes shone with pride for the new life they had found in America. I remember sorting through discarded/donated furniture which would later furnish the refugees' new homes, so far from the home that they fled. I remember playing Frisbee with some of the homeless, wondering "why can't they reestablish their lives?" and for the first time realizing why some of them can't.

I remember Spring Break 2004, caravanning to some remote town in northern Florida, with everyone belting oldies at the top of their lungs. I remember sowing thousands of

seeds, swinging a machete, and setting up hog traps. I remember the "hootenanny" thrown in our honor, complete with a banjo, Elvis impersonator and a small talent show that featured a beautiful Italian song (to which our camp host exclaimed with much gumption and twang, "Wow, was that Hebrew?"). I remember hiking through a forest, soaking in the beauty and understanding why the area was once believed to be the Garden of Eden. I remember appreciating why some people had dedicated their entire lives to preserving this special place and feeling proud that my small effort might have helped, if only in a small way.

All of these memories are courtesy of Alternative Spring Break, or what I like to call "Spring Break out of the SMU Bubble". ASB is a national program, and colleges from all around the country send students to various locations to interact with a social issue firsthand. I know that, at the sound of "community service," many students might quickly turn and retreat to their tropical destinations. However, these trips are infinitely more amazing than just a couple nice acts and gestures back to the community. They are filled with friendships, laughter, adventures, and stories to remember for the rest of your life. You don't have to be a Mother Teresa in order to participate; think of it as a one-time donation back to society, but it may just turn into a yearly contribution. For this spring break, try an alternative spring break, one that will not damage your liver, but instead touch your heart.

This year's trips cover a variety of issues, and the destinations range from Santa Fe to Florida. Contact Hillary Cliff at [hcliff@smu.edu](mailto:hcliff@smu.edu) for more information.

*Courtney Hebb is a junior marketing and political science major.*

## INSIDE this issue

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**Ooops!** Last week's article about the ITS Helpdesk was credited to Ashley Payne but was actually by Samantha Needham. Our sincerest apologies to Sam.

**Do you have an opinion about...** politics, music, class, television, football, shopping, intramurals, fraternities, movies, tests, the Mavs, sex, restaurants, religion, sororities, driving, study abroad, Umphrey Lee, fashion, news, the war, parking, technology, magazines, bars, baseball, the weather, professors, the Mustang Band, dating, books, nightclubs, Texas, the *Daily Campus*, pets, club sports, or anything else ?

**we're listening at [hilltopics@hotmail.com](mailto:hilltopics@hotmail.com)**

## In defense of Boaz: An honors floor in freshman residence hall makes sense

by Darci Spencer

In last week's article regarding the proposed first-year Honors Community in Boaz, Mr. Zieminski makes an excellent point. I also suspect RLSH of wishing to pad Boaz's GPA statistics with the above-average numbers of Honors students. RLSH is understandably acting in its own interest.

The Honors Program, however, is also acting in its best interest by considering this option. Despite much anecdotal evidence (in the form of non-Honors residents) to the contrary, RLSH insists that the demand for Honors housing has outstripped the supply offered by Virginia-Snider. Furthermore, Virginia-Snider is the second largest residence hall on campus, and creating a unified community within it proves challenging. Finally, RLSH is desperate to save Boaz from itself and is therefore willing to offer Honors many inducements to support an Honors floor.

If the plan is adopted, approximately 36 first-year Honors students would occupy the fourth floor of Boaz. The floor's lounge would be refurnished to double as a classroom, the hallways and rooms would be repainted, and various fixtures would be repaired. Pragmatically, living in the humbler halls

of Boaz costs significantly less than the renovated Virginia-Snider. Most importantly, students would choose to live in Boaz; it would not be just the random "overflow" from V-S.

The University Honors Program has no desire to throw students to the wolves of all-night partying and soaring blood-alcohol levels. The Honors Program plans to support its Boaz students with special events and swipe card access to V-S.

If anything, a smaller, all first-year Honors community would be significantly more attractive than the large, four-class community of V-S to many incoming students. An added bonus is the varied company offered by the other residents of the hall. Despite criticism, Boaz inspires an abiding loyalty and unity in its residents—from the maligned t-shirts to buttons proudly proclaiming its females to be Boaz Hos. Perhaps the residents of V-S will consider Boaz to be the seedy underbelly of the Honors Program, but I'd guess that many will pay the Honors floor a few social visits.

*Darci Spencer is the University Honors Program Coordinator. She is a senior English and marketing major.*

## To the editors: The General Education Curriculum is crucial to the liberal arts

from Dennis D. Cordell

This letter is longer than the recommended 300 words, but given that it addresses an important topic raised by your major article on the GEC in *Hilltopics* on 31 January, I would be grateful if you would print all of it.

As the administrator and professor charged with administration of the GEC, I was very pleased to read in Jared Dovers' article in *Hilltopics* that he "love[s] the idea of the GEC." The faculty committees that formulated this curriculum in 1995-1996 devoted a lot of time and effort to this very demanding task. However, I also appreciate Jared's frustrations with aspects of the IT and Wellness I requirements, which he fulfilled several semesters ago. Indeed the Council on General Education, the faculty body that oversees the GEC, and the IT Committee of the Council, have initiated changes to both requirements that respond—at least to some degree—to Jared's concerns.

In the case of GEC IT courses, it has always been possible for students to take an exam, which, if passed, waives the requirement. In the past, however, the exam was offered only at the beginning of the fall and spring terms; this year, the IT Committee has added an opportunity to take the exam in the middle of each term, so that students can have the results of the test available when they meet with their Academic Advisors to plan their next term's courses. In addition, the IT Committee is revisiting the components of the IT requirement itself this year. Recommendations will be made to the Council later this spring. We would also like to encourage the development of some IT courses that grow out of individual fields. IT is an area that changes very rapidly; the Council, IT Committee, and I are sincerely committed to on-going re-evaluation of the requirement.

As for Wellness I, the course has always emphasized themes and offered knowledge related to the transition from secondary school to University. It has been directed primarily to first-year students. Each fall, SMU does not welcome a new class of college students, but rather a new class of secondary school students who face a daunting variety of per-

sonal and academic challenges to become successful college students. Over the past several years, the Wellness faculty and the Council have worked together to reorder and revise some topics and activities in Wellness I. In recent semesters, as Jared implies, we and the advisors have strongly encouraged first-year students to take the course in their first year, which should make the experience more relevant and useful. Last fall 850 students in the in-coming class took Wellness I. This spring many of the others are enrolled in it. Jared did not identify his specific concerns with Wellness I, but I suspect that they had to do with issues that I have mentioned here.

In closing, let me remind us all that the composition of a liberal arts education has changed over time. 2400 years ago, for example, SMU students would have been taking a lot more rhetoric than they do now, along with courses combining mathematics and music, and a much larger dose of physical exercise (probably Wellness I and II combined in the same course along with religious ritual and philosophy). And the courses would, of course, have all been in Greek. 125 years ago, several of the Meadows divisions included in the Arts Perspective group would not have existed; and there would simply not have been a Behavioral Science Perspective category. To be sure, critical thinking, reading, and writing have been the mainstays of a liberal arts education for a very long time. However, the specific components of such an education have changed over time with the needs of both individuals and society. To assure that this change occurs in ways that are best, SMU counts on its faculty, but also on students like Jared, student representatives on academic councils and committees, and students in all of our classes who care enough to devote thought to what and how they are learning. Such continuing exchange and dialog is vital in SMU's quest to become an even better institution, and I thank Jared for his article.

*Dennis D. Cordell is Associate Vice Provost for General Education and a professor of history*

## READER *feedback*

### 'Pushing back' at closed-mindedness: Ward Churchill deserves free speech

by Yasmin Awad

"Men in authority will always think that criticism of their policies is dangerous. They will always equate their policies with patriotism and find criticism subversive."

—Henry Steele Commager

In the article "Pushing Back," I found that Andrew Baker was overly opinionated and close-minded concerning the case of Ward Churchill, the professor who wrote a controversial paper concerning the September 11 attacks.

Over 200 years ago, the founding fathers wrote the Constitution to prevent episodes such as the backlash to Ward Churchill's ideas. We Americans pride ourselves on what distinguishes us from all the countries that have ever existed— not money, power, or leadership— but principles like the Freedom of Speech.

But, as impossible as it is to imagine, is there a slight possibility that American people are not angels and that we are guilty of not practicing what we preach?

Why is it that we suppress any views that don't correspond to ours? Why are we afraid of anything that is different? Why do we find it preposterous for our principles to be challenged?

Even if the ideas being challenged are correct, not accepting contradictory ideas is still oppressive and close-minded. After all, you can't appreciate the light if you can't compare it to the dark.

We all know that two people can't agree on everything, and you certainly can't expect a whole nation to share the same beliefs. It's only healthy to have conflicting ideas. That's what makes America the great country that it is— the activists, the free thinkers, the rebels.

If you really love your country, don't bash other Ameri-

cans' opinions. We fought for hundreds of years to establish a place where ideas are expressed without fear, no matter how bizarre they may be. If we start losing that on which our nation was based—freedom, rather than control—we are yet another country doomed to destruction.

Don't make creativity extinct. Creativity only appears when it challenges the norm. History has shown that the most rebellious and shunned persons have proven to be the greatest, most revolutionary leaders: Jesus, Civil Rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, and the founding fathers themselves.

So I ask one last question: What's wrong with Ward Churchill voicing his opinion? He is not holding a gun to our heads and forcing us to pledge allegiance to his ideas. He hasn't put anybody in danger or even threatened anybody, unlike the thousands of people who have threatened him and his university's faculty. Remember, we have two ears to let things go through one ear and out the other.

If you disagree with Churchill's ideas, criticize them. Don't stoop to Churchill's name-calling, such as Andrew Baker who called Churchill a "nut-case," a "madman," or even an American loather. Otherwise, you will be no better than he is. Kill the message, not the messenger. But don't suppress Churchill. Don't remove him from the position he has worked to achieve. Don't cancel his lectures. You might not be killing a man for expressing his beliefs, but you are certainly destroying his livelihood and ambitions.

So for those of you who call Churchill an American-hater, you are the true American-haters because you are stealing his right of free speech, one of the main ingredients on which this country was based.

*Yasmin Awad is a first-year journalism major.*

### *Hilltopics'* Valentine to SMU: The top ten reasons why we heart the Hilltop

by The Editors

In honor of Valentine's Day, the *Hilltopics* editors compiled a list of the top ten reasons we love SMU.

**10. Aesthetic beauty** – have you looked around lately? Our campus is gorgeous, from the grounds and buildings to the people. Springtime is just around the corner!

**9. Not being the "Harvard of the South," and not caring** – just because *U.S. News & World Report* never strokes our ego, we are still quite proud of what we accomplish.

**8. Baton Twirling Girl** – few people can even throw a baton as high as Kelli Montgomery, let alone catch it without having to take a step in either direction. Remarkable!

**7. Rotunda Passage** – although a logistical nightmare to end graduation in the blacktop behind Dallas Hall, Rotunda Passage is a genuine, hallowed tradition. December grads get the added benefit of walking under the holiday lights.

**6. Student Foundation** – whenever the SMU community gets together, SF is probably responsible. These leaders work hard and

don't always get the credit they deserve.

**5. Honors Program** – small classes, top professors, and an environment for intellectual growth. Plus, *Hilltopics* would not be around without its support, which would be quite a shame.

**4. Great professors** – they're provocative, entertaining, and affable. SMU is constantly improved by the efforts of professors who make us think. The list of legends is too long to print here.

**3. Student Senate** – they work hard, want to improve our university, and – best of all – funded us for the entire year.

**2. Tate Lecture Series** – we are so fortunate to have a steady stream of influential leaders and thinkers visit our campus. Between the afternoon Q&A session and the "fill-the-empty-seats" policy, students have exceptional access to these rare opportunities.

**1. R. Gerald Turner** – if SMU ever publishes a dictionary, this man's face will be printed next to the definition of "role model." He's turned our university around with a Texas-sized dose of class, intelligence, and southern charm.

## Save the date: Valentine's Day means more than you, the guys, and some girl

by Kylie Slater

Falling behind Atlanta and New York City, Dallas was recently ranked fifth on the list of the Best Dating Cities in America, according to a nationwide survey sponsored by America Online. To an outsider, this may prove to be a reality with such attractions as the West End, Deep Ellum, and the thousands of restaurants dotting this city. Yet, anyone who sets foot onto the Hilltop will find a different opinion on the dating scene in Dallas.

Welcome to the evolution in courtship and dating at SMU. The age of picking up the phone and asking a girl to dinner and a movie seems primordial, leaving dating on campus close to extinction. This begs the question, what in the world has happened to the date?

After taking a consensus from students, it seems unanimous that dates and relationships at SMU are like the marble steps of Fondren Science in the rain: they're tricky.

"All the girls I know want to be taken on your traditional date," says junior Katie Klein. "But it just doesn't seem to happen a lot."

A bonafide date includes a phone call, some sort of public jaunt, maybe a meal, and a little hand-holding. These responsibilities conventionally fall onto the male's shoulders, along with the nagging fear that this date could bomb out. According to these terms, "hanging out" is not a date.

Yet, in lieu of the one-on-one dating experience, a group setting has become commonplace at SMU. This change could be attributed to the small size, yet enormous social scene, of SMU, according to senior Chris Iconos.

"People are just more comfortable around their friends," Iconos says. "You are more likely to be yourself, whereas dates can oftentimes be fake." Being in the comforts of Home Bar, Jack's Pub, or any other spot inside "The Bubble" provides an atmosphere that relieves both parties of those awkward conversations, long moments of silence, or the arduous task of having to focus on this person that you hardly know.

The culture of non-dating at SMU has even extended to those in a relationship. The group atmosphere seems to linger, even if you have a declared boyfriend or girlfriend. "It's hard to be romantic in a fraternity house," says Klein. Could

it be that it is not merely Greek life putting a damper on customary dating, but social norms in general?

"The society in which we live has forced new dating habits," says senior Margaret Sawyer. "It's hard to know who is a nice guy and who could be potentially dangerous."

Whether it is societal conventions or just the new custom at SMU, the time-honored ways of traditional dating are on their way to nonexistence, and to this die-hard romantic, that is tragic. Sure, going out to a bar is a fantastic way to get to meet and talk to someone for twenty minutes or a couple hours. But, trust me, if a guy were to muster up the courage to pick up the phone and call a girl, only to invite her to join his friends at a bar that she was probably headed to anyway—it would be a letdown. In a crowded bar or frat house, you lose that valuable conversation that clues you in to whether or not there is a potential future. If you can't hear your date over the booming booty music, or are too busy blotting spilled Cape Cod off your shirt, how are you going to get to know the person you took out?

In a last, perhaps futile, attempt to save the date, I offer this Valentine's Day challenge to the men of the Hilltop: Leave your wingmen at home, and take that girl you've been eyeing out on a real date.

*Kylie Slater is a junior political science major.*

## Holiday Poetry: A SMU Valentine

by Gaines Greer

Just can't find a guy at SMU,  
And don't tell me that I haven't looked.  
I've searched the campus from Dallas to Dedman,  
But not a single good guy have I hooked.  
I checked out Cox for a businessman,  
But that scheme accounted to naught,  
And I tried the law school for a legal beau,  
But they're not interested in what I've got.  
I hit the God quad for a religious type,  
A man who was quiet and meek,  
However, they all made it quite clear to me  
That I am not what they seek.  
I ventured to Boaz when I got desperate,  
But well, we won't go into that.  
Then I tried Greeks, but quickly discovered  
That I just couldn't date in a frat.  
Cupid's shot all my schemes straight to the ground,  
And by now I'm not really surprised.  
I'll be single again, but I won't care,  
As long as you have a great Valentine's!

*Gaines Greer is a senior English and German major who promises she will never again subject the readers of Hilltopics to her doggerel poetry.*

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