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## Hilltopics: Volume 1, Issue 20

Hilltopics Staff

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# HILLTOPICS

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## Advice for the university: Half-way just won't cut it when it comes to academic advising

by Andrew Baker

Frantically looking up classes, praying that a seat is open for you in Professor McEasy's lecture, and cursing SMU for not offering *the* class you absolutely need this semester: this is the class enrollment process at our beloved alma mater. While we are very capable individuals and, hopefully, we can read class schedules, the University insists that we have our schedules for next semester given the all-clear from an academic advisor. Here is some advice for the University: either put up or shut up when it comes to academic advising.

As a political science major, I was very fortunate to have a dedicated advisor throughout my years here. Each time I had to register, I would meet with Dr. Carter, answer some questions, and have a nice chat about how my classes were going now and how the classes to come would fulfill the requirements for my major. Eventually, I began to look forward to the brief meetings: I felt reassured that I was doing the right things to get my degree, and I got to know one of our many outstanding professors.

In another department, I experienced the flip side of the process. Without the formalities present in the political science department, I rarely felt compelled to meet with my advisor. Honestly, I felt confident having visited already with my other advisor, and I did not see the necessity of another visit with another advisor who would simply read the same DPR that I had read several times before.

The University claims that not obtaining prior approval for classes from one's advisor is a violation of the Honor Code; however, I have been unable to confirm this. The Honor Code makes no mention of registration, advisors, or exactly why failing to get approval would constitute a violation of the Honor Code. Is it also a violation to give poor advice to a student? Why is the University perpetuating what appears to be a myth?

While getting the advice of at least one advisor is beneficial to students who have never been through the process, mandating meetings for all students is demeaning and suggests that we are not capable of monitoring our academic progress (or lack thereof). However, in my meetings with Dr. Carter, I have heard some horror stories of forgetful seniors who have failed to meet requirements for graduation (read:

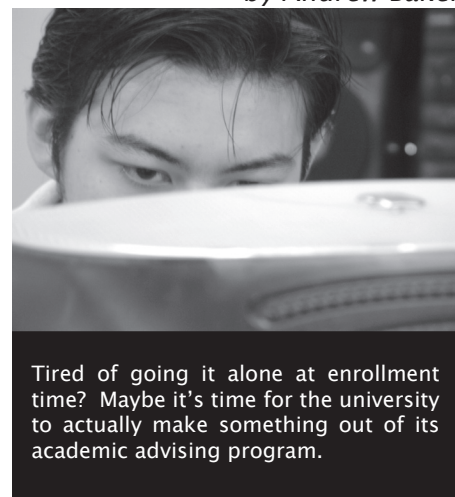
Wellness) and who find themselves desperate to enroll in a class sans vacancies.

So, here is my advice to the University: mandate that all departments establish formal rules for registration, and have pertinent penalties for slacker students and slacker advisors. By threatening students with non-existent Honor Code violations and by not requiring departments to account for their advising practices, the University invites students and faculty members to dismiss the advising process as nothing more than a waste of fifteen minutes. Either crack down on students and departments, or let us register without any monitoring and without threats.

As students, we need to have a guiding hand when it comes to course enrollment; moreover, we need more than harsh words and inefficient bureaucracy designed to save the University from the stupidity of some of its students. While I am certain many departments do wonderful jobs advising their students, word on the street is that advising is not really all that important—and it is not just the students who think this.

To those non-seniors out there, I encourage you to visit with your advisor to make sure you are doing the right things and that you will graduate on time. To those advisors out there, I encourage you to take your role seriously and not to develop a look of bewilderment when a student strolls into your office and asks you to look over a DPR. That's a Degree Progress Report, FYI.

*Andrew Baker is a senior political science and English major.*



Tired of going it alone at enrollment time? Maybe it's time for the university to actually make something out of its academic advising program.

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**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).

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## Just in time for study abroad: A backpacker's guide to European summer travel, abridged version

by Courtney Hebb

Some may call wandering alone in Europe with just a backpack, a rail pass and passport crazy; I call it exhilarating. It is a rite of passage for any young person, a chance to absorb other cultures, adapt and become flexible to a variety of situations, and realize that the world is very accessible.

During my various jaunts and journeys across the other side of the pond, I have visited 14 different countries, shopped with 9 different currencies and mastered 13 different public transportation systems. I have also gotten lost in countless cities, missed several trains and two flights and still managed to make it out alive. Therefore, here are a couple of tips I have gained from personal experience for all of you who are planning your own adventures abroad.

**Map out a plan:** I have met travelers who will randomly get on trains/buses without any knowledge of where they are going or where they are staying. Though I sometimes envy this disregard for reason, I highly suggest that you map out where you want to go and how you will get there. Preferably you will also have a reservation for a bed at your destination. (Finding out that the only hostel in town has no vacancies after traveling for two hours on a train and walking up a steep hill for 40 minutes can be slightly unsettling). Of course this initial plan can and will change as you go along, but at least know you have a warm and safe place to stay each night. Also determine how ambitious you want to be in your travels. There are two schools of thought when it comes to backpacking. The first is to go to as many cities and countries as you can. If you do this, pick a couple of things you want to see in each location, but don't try to do it all. This can be tiring because you are constantly on the move, sometimes spending more time on trains than in your destination. The other option is to choose a couple of places and thoroughly explore the surroundings. This can be more relaxing; however you will be missing out on some other really cool cities and sights. Find the balance that works best for you.

**Hostels aren't really hostile:** For a young traveler, hostels can be better than a hotel. Most are vibrant, fun, sociable

with a party every night (actually quite similar to the Paris Hilton) and also very economical. Here you can meet backpackers from all around the world and swap stories and travel tales. The hostels range in size, cleanliness and amenities, so do some research before to find out which ones best fit your needs. My favorite website is [www.hostelworld.com](http://www.hostelworld.com) which rates each hostel on several factors. Pay particular attention to location and safety. (Note: Don't forget shower shoes and a towel. Also, always lock your stuff. Many times hostels will provide a locker for you, but bring your own lock.)

**Don't assume everyone speaks English:** Remember that you are a guest in each country that you visit, so respect its traditions and language. Many people can speak English (especially in larger cities or at tourist sites) but if you encounter a communication meltdown, never hesitate to point or gesture. Also, don't broadcast the fact that you are an American or draw too much attention to yourself (i.e. wearing a sequined American flag on your shirt). First of all, this attracts pickpockets and many Europeans have negative assumptions about Americans. Nevertheless, do not fear, for typically most are genuinely interested in learning about you and are willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. However, be prepared to talk about politics and accept the fact that most passionately hate Bush. So if you are a fan of "W," either bite your tongue or provide some really strong evidence to support your political beliefs. In general, keep an open mind and learn from what others have to share.

These are just a few suggestions to help you get started and when in doubt, just use common sense. Remember that the world is your oyster, so don't clam up. There are countless places to discover and memories to create. Backpacking in Europe not only provides opportunities to meet fascinating people and participate in multiple adventures, but it is also a chance to gain confidence and inspire personal growth. So explore, get lost, and find yourself.

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

## The United States' trade deficit: Is it enough to halt our era of global free trade?

by Graham Radler

President Bush, being the free trader that he is, recently appointed Congressman Rob Portman to the position of U.S. Trade Representative. As a longtime supporter of opening new duty-free markets, Portman appears ready to uphold the "free" part of free trade theory amidst rather staunch criticism from some of his former counterparts in the House and Senate - namely Democrats. On the table in the near future for the new trade czar is the Central American Free

Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which would remove barriers to trade with five Central American countries in the services, agricultural, and industrial sectors.

But, even with the benefits of free trade having been proven over decades of active practice, criticism has recently proliferated the realm of trade policy over concerns of a spiraling trade deficit and more free trade agreements to come. Is this just more of Ross Perot's "sucking sound" propaganda that was used in response to NAFTA, or should we consider altering course in trade policy?

For fiscal year 2004 the U.S. trade deficit settled at \$617 billion. In trade terms, this is a very significant number, as it represents 5 percent of our GDP. To remedy this account deficit, either the United States will have to dramatically increase its exports to foreign markets or begin placing artificial trade barriers, such as quotas, on foreign goods. The former is unlikely since the dollar is already unattractive to foreign consumers of U.S. products, whereas the latter would likely trigger retaliation by the exporting country with which we assign the import barrier.

Should the U.S. revert back to protectionist trade practices to get our trade and account deficits under control? Democratic Senator Russ Feingold agrees that the U.S. needs to begin questioning the implementation of more free trade agreements, such as CAFTA. Bad trade policy, he contends, has left domestic producers and workers in the cold. Similarly, with predictions for March's trade deficit at a record-high of \$62 billion (10 percent of last year's deficit for one

see TRADE, page 3

## Don't blame the victims of violence: Senator Cornyn's comments are distasteful and disgraceful

by James Longhofer

As the child of two lawyers, I was raised to have a certain reverence for the judiciary. My parents taught me that judges, along with other officers of the court, are due an incredible amount of respect because they have a unique place in our government: they are our independent arbiters and interpreters of the law.

As such, our judges are meant to be above politics. Of course, my naïve view of judges as apolitical do-gooders has faded a bit (thanks, *Bush v. Gore*), but I still have an incredible respect for our judiciary. It's too bad that certain members of Congress don't share these feelings.

Senator John Cornyn, who represents my home state of Texas and is one of the more conservative members of the Senate, said something that managed to be both moronic and deeply disturbing. Cornyn offered an unusual explanation for some recent acts of violence against judges last Monday. Cornyn said, "We seem to have run through a spate of courthouse violence recently that's been on the news, and I wonder whether there may be some connection between the perception in some quarters on some occasions where judges are making political decisions yet are unaccountable to the public, that it builds up and builds up and builds up to the point where some people engage in – engage in violence." Senator Cornyn is referring to two cases that made the news lately. In one case, a man who lost a medical malpractice case killed the mother and husband of an Illinois federal judge. In the second incident, a man on trial for rape and murder in Atlanta killed four people, including the judge presiding over his trial before surrendering himself to the police.

The sheer idiocy of Cornyn's remarks on the floor of the Senate is obvious: these murders had nothing to do with any kind of resentment over "political decisions." While the men who committed these murders were upset over the judges' decisions, those decisions had nothing to do with politics. The relevant cases were apolitical trials. One was a civil malpractice case while the other was a criminal matter. There were no great constitutional interpretations or political questions involved. I would think that if anyone would be able to understand this difference, it would be a former Texas Supreme Court justice and Texas Attorney General.

The most disturbing aspect of Cornyn's comments is subtler, but it is also the most important part of what the senator was saying. Cornyn basically said that these two judges had

it coming and that other judges need to watch their backs, lest they be seen as "making political decisions." According to Cornyn's line of thought, judges who make these decisions are like a woman who wears something a little too revealing at a party: while what happened is wrong, they were "asking" for it. According to the senator, judicial activism (defined as making decisions that conservatives don't like) made two deranged men act violently against the judiciary. Cornyn seems to be excusing the behavior of these murderers just because their victims happen to do things with which he disagrees. It is hard not to think that Cornyn is trying to intimidate judges from making decisions that would displease social conservatives.

When Democratic senators pointed out the absurdity of what Senator Cornyn said, he issued the typical Washington non-apology apology: "I regret that my remarks have been taken out of context to create a wrong impression about my position, and possibly be construed to contribute to the problem rather than to a solution." Here is the translation: if you have a problem with what I said, it's your fault.

As if Senator Cornyn's comments weren't disgusting enough, his remarks gain a new context when placed with what House Majority Tom DeLay said after the judiciary refused to replace Terry Schiavo's feeding tube: "The time will come for the men responsible for this to answer for their behavior." While DeLay has never been known for his delicacy, these comments are still shocking. At best, the Republican Majority Leader is trying to destroy the independence of the judiciary by threatening impeachment for judges who make unfavorable decisions. At worst, DeLay is encouraging more acts of violence against judges. It doesn't matter that the judges who came to the same decisions in the Schiavo case were both Republicans and Democrats. As long as they return decisions that DeLay disagrees with, they are "judicial activists" who must be held responsible for doing their jobs. The remarks from both Senator Cornyn and Majority Leader DeLay show that social conservatives are doing everything they can to tear down the judiciary and intimidate judges from doing their job of interpreting the law as neutrally as possible. Maybe Representative DeLay and Senator Cornyn could use a lesson from my parents about the respect that the judiciary deserves.

*James Longhofer is a first-year political science, economics, and public policy major.*

## Trade agreement in Central America forces some to question future of American trade policy

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month alone), more voices are being raised. Representative Ben Cardin (D-MD) says he would push for action to limit the amount of textiles imported from China. Soon, 70 percent of all textiles in the U.S. will have been imported from China.

However, the time is not ripe for a reversion to protectionism. As fundamental trade theory posits, a country must efficiently produce and export what it can. If the U.S. cannot make t-shirts cheaply, then let's let China make them for us. Additionally, because this country has a rich history in ingenuity, we can find a way to cure this seemingly endemic trade deficit—but not at the cost of free trade itself. The good news is that no one understands the costs of free trade

more than Trade Rep. Portman, as his home state of Ohio has lost 200,000 jobs alone due to free trade.

Thus, instead of supporting anti-globalists like many in Congress, Americans must be bold and realize that we stand in a unique position to extol the virtues of economic freedom. The trade deficit should be viewed not as an unfixable chasm, but as a challenge to the cunning of the American people. So, to U.S. manufacturers and producers of exportable goods, it's time to turn up the heat, find new markets abroad, and show the world how truly dynamic we are.

*Graham Radler is a junior political science and international studies major.*



## Baseball season has officially started, but who cares? What happened to America's pastime?

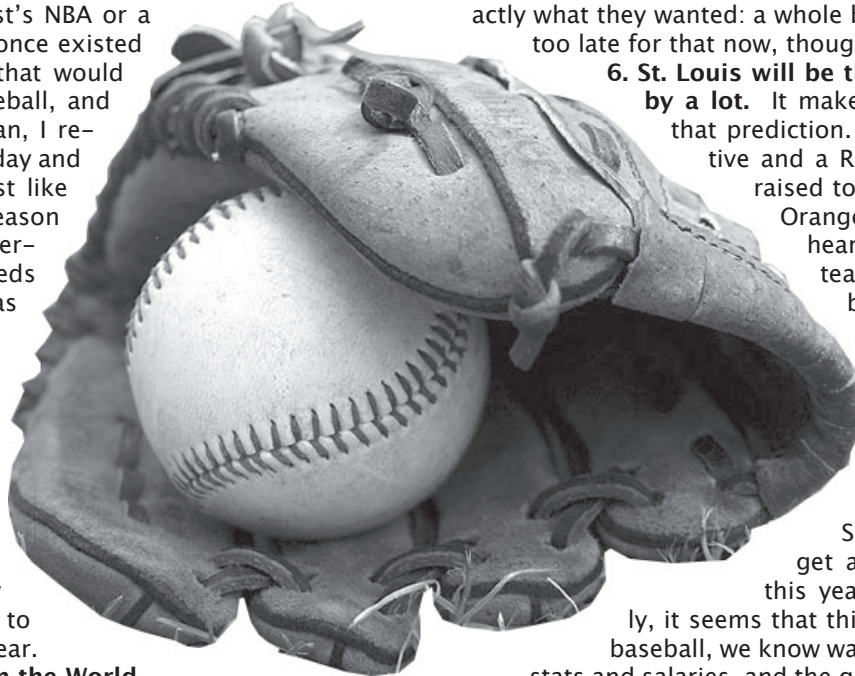
by Douglas Hill

I won't lie: I've had a hard time getting excited about baseball this year. I've been decidedly *un*-excited about BALCO, steroids, and "the cream and the clear," and I guess that scandal has left me jaded.

But even Boston and New York in the first series of the season left me unsatisfied. With the curse dead, Pedro playing on the other side of the big apple, and both teams likely to make the playoffs, I found myself asking, "Who cares?"

Enter civic duty. If I, as a sports fan, felt this way about Ron Artest's NBA or a hockey league I am told once existed on this continent, then that would be fine. But this is baseball, and because I am an American, I resolved to watch opening day and to damn well like it! Just like we saw after the strike season of 1994, Americans understand that America needs baseball just as much as baseball needs America.

So I watched opening day—I even skipped class to do it. And now, I feel like I can be done watching, because thanks to an unfair salary system and a really, really good magic eight-ball, I already know everything that's going to happen in baseball this year.



**1. The Cubs won't win the World Series.** Duh.

**2. The Yankees and Red Sox will both make the playoffs.** The American League is nothing compared to the NFL's NFC, but it still lacks the kind of parity needed to make for any sort of a real playoff race. The Angels will probably win the West, and the Twins will surely win the Central. Whoever is second in the West will fall short to either Boston or New York in an over-hyped non-race to the playoffs.

**3. Neither the Rangers nor the Astros will make the playoffs.** Sorry, Texas. The Rangers weren't talented enough last year, and haven't changed enough, and

Houston's all-or-nothing Carlos Beltran strategy paid off last fall, but now it's time for the nothing part.

**4. Atlanta will win the NL East. Again.** It's more predictable than an Eric Gange save.

**5. Barry Bonds will pout too much to break Hank Aaron's record.** Maybe if Jose Canseco and Jason Giambi would have kept their mouths shut, this steroids business would never have started and Barry could have kept using whatever he was using to help him give baseball fans exactly what they wanted: a whole bunch of home runs. It's too late for that now, though.

**6. St. Louis will be the best team in the NL, by a lot.** It makes me sick even to write that prediction. I am a Kansas City native and a Royals fan, and I've been

raised to hate two things: Bronco Orange and Cardinal Red. I've heard legends of these two teams being competitive back when I was an infant. What happened?

What's left, then?

A semi-interesting NL wild card race, maybe? Ichiro's batting average? Cheering for the Nationals?

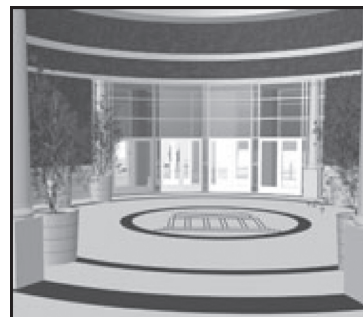
Sure, there's a little bit to get a little bit excited about this year in the MLB. But sadly, it seems that this year, like every year in baseball, we know way too much by looking at stats and salaries, and the games just aren't going to be that interesting. One more prediction: it's all going to be the same again next year.

*Douglas Hill is a sophomore international studies major.*

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