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Hilltopics Staff

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HILLTOPICS

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INSIDE this issue

Honors: The University is looking at the effectiveness of its honors-related programs, and Sterling Morriss gives a glimpse into what is being done. You can also make a difference. Read the story on page 2 to find out how.

Culture: Anyone else tired of having to hear “first year” instead of “freshman?” Monica Chavez gives her take on political correctness in a modern world, page 3.

School: Douglas Hill can't believe his eyes: the Mustangs are bowl eligible. Find out the full story on page 3.

Back Page: Todd Baty salutes SMU's faculty and staff in number 4 of his top 10 reasons to love (or love to hate) SMU. Read about it on page 4.

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

International Women's Peace Conference coming to Dallas this summer

by Amanda Wall

Last Wednesday, SMU students met with organizers of the Third International Women's Peace Conference. This year, the conference is looking ways to make itself attractive and accessible to the college-age group. This age group is especially important, organizers said, because they will become the next generation of peacemakers. With the present-day terrors of war, nuclear weapons, and human rights violations, vigorous action has to be taken now to create peace. And as one director said, peace is not just the absence of war.

The International Women's Peace Conference, to be held in Dallas in the summer of 2007, seeks to provide its participants with education and inspiration about peacemaking—most especially on the small scale. Peace is not something that can or should be left only to governments or NGOs, they say. The IWPC creates a network of people who can share information and ideas, and also make it easier to mobilize when more help is needed. For instance, if one member needed to build a school, she would have a world-wide network of friends to call on, many of whom have built schools and who can give her advice, information, and resources.

Why have a peace conference specifically for women? The conference gives one answer: “It is time for women, the traditional teachers and peacemakers in the private

world, to take responsibility for public peacemaking.” The conference's impressive list of

speakers provides testament that many women have been meeting this challenge for many years. This year's headlining speakers include three Nobel Peace Prize winners: Betty Williams (Northern Ireland), Rigoberta Menchú Tum (Guatemala), and Jody Williams (USA).

Other speakers this year include Merve Kavakci (Turkey), Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (South Africa), Noeleen Heyzer (Singapore), Sharan D. Welch (USA), Ruth-Gaby Vermont Mangold (Switzerland), and Dr. Jean Shinoda Bolen (USA).

The eight students at the meeting—half female, half male—gave a wide variety of suggestions, mostly centering on resources such as MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube. There were also ideas for local events, planning groups, and inter-collegiate councils—all likely made up of and run by students. They are currently in the process of forming a group at SMU that would advise the conference about our age group and promote the conference on campus. A free dinner is to be held December 3 for anyone who is interested in any kind of involvement. For more information, contact Cynthia Halatyn (chalatyn@smu.edu). The conference website is www.womenspeaceconference.com.

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



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.

'Life of the mind' under question by SMU's new Task Force on Honors Programming

by Sterling Morriss

We students at SMU are usually blissfully unaware of university initiatives that look to change the nature of the campus around us. However, I have recently been given the opportunity to learn what the university is thinking about and even to give my opinions as a member of the university's Task Force on Honors Programming. And I'm not the only one; last Friday a small student panel was able to share openly, without fear of reprisal, with faculty and administration in order to actually make some change.

What is the Task Force on Honors Programming and why does it matter to you? Our university's centennial plan for 2006 to 2015 states objectives like, "the enhancement of the university's ability to recruit, retain, and graduate academically and creatively gifted students," and "the enhancement of Honors Programs and Societies in graduate and undergraduate degree programs." Therefore, Interim Provost Tom Tunks gathered a group of roughly 20 students, administrators, and faculty members to form a task force. According to a charge given to the committee by Tunks, the purpose of the task force is to "develop a strategic plan for honors programming," which is comprised of all undergraduate honors-related curricula (including the University Honors Program, departmental distinctions, and undergraduate research), so-

cieties, and co-curricular and non-curricular activities.

In layman's terms, we're reviewing and assessing the current status of all things "honors" at SMU, from the UHP and the Hyer Society, to graduating with distinction in economics and living in VS. The purpose will be to make recommendations for any administrative changes then deemed necessary in order to enhance the function of these programs. The exciting thing is that the university sees a need and is working to address it. It is also important for all students, because the committee seeks to change the academic atmosphere on this campus. Just think if our honors programs were more successful, SMU would cultivate a higher culture of learning by recruiting and retaining higher quality students, and our degrees would be worth more. Therefore, the Task Force on Honors Programming is of the utmost importance for the future of SMU. And the university has thankfully given it appropriate support by looking to implement the task force's strategic plan, to be finished by April 2007.

In keeping with SMU's great tradition of involving students in the decision-making process, the committee is utilizing student opinion. This past Friday, the task force invited five more students besides the standing two members to come share their thoughts on Honors at SMU. The committee purposefully picked an Honors-diverse group - we had both students in the Honors Program, and students who chose to abstain. The main topics of discussion included why students choose to be a part of the UHP and why students choose to abstain when invited. The usual culprits of lack of courses and real incentives to join were present, but so were new ideas about the nature of the Honors Program being purely for liberal arts. For example, the committee is actively questioning why the UHP doesn't have any math or science requirements and what the result would be if these were added. The task force is also looking at the relationship between UHP students and individual departmental distinctions, and the residential life component of honors programming.

Overall, a lot of exciting things are in the works. And the committee is interested in your opinions, too. If you have any opinions you'd like to share concerning "the life of the mind" at SMU, email me at smorriss@smu.edu, or Associate Provost Ellen Pryor at epryor@smu.edu. We will be sure to pass on the information to the task force. Also, feel free to check out the website at www.smu.edu/provost/honors_task_force.asp for more information. SMU is right at the grasp of attaining the status of an academically top-tier school. You can help.

Sterling Morriss is a senior art history major.



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Moving past political correctness

by Monica Chavez

Of late a vastly different kind of humor has made heavy inroads in comedy; that irreverent, purposefully controversial type whose number-one rule is not to adhere to any notion of political correctness whatsoever. That kind of humor is visible among comedians like Dave Chapelle and Russell Peters, and most notably, Sacha Baron Cohen's explosive new hit movie *Borat*. Their coarse jokes, often employing blatant stereotypes, offend many, but make more double over in laughter—why is that? I could be wrong, but I think it speaks to a basic urge to get over restrictions in language, down to the real prejudices people hold about each other, that fail to vanish no matter how diplomatically they try to speak.

This comes as a response to decades of linguistic straight lacing after the civil rights movements of the '60s. We have to be so damn careful about what we say that I wonder if we even consider the real, damaging prejudices we hold.

Political correctness today has become so out of hand that the terms we are obliged to use often aren't even honest descriptions of the people they refer to. How many "African-Americans" retain a close connection to Africa? If we must label each other, what's so wrong with being called "black"? Or "white", for that matter? As it happens, my linguistic anthropology textbook refers to white Americans as "European-American". That is absurd.

SMU has a policy of calling first-year students... first-year students. Not freshmen. I'd initially thought it had something to do with "freshman" having a pejorative connotation, but evidently it's categorized as "sexist" language, because it refers to university students of both sexes as "freshmen". Actresses now want to be called "actors", which I find odd since to me that suggests the feminine form is less desirable, but what's even odder is that in Spanish you see just the opposite phenomenon, also in the name of feminism. Rather than using "la presidente" ("the [female] president"), the preferred term now is "la presidenta" (also "the [female] president"), thus creating an exclusively feminine term for women heads of state. If the feminization of language is purely arbitrary, then, what's the point? I don't think calling actresses "actors" is going to garner them more respect in their profession, nor are there going to be more female presidents if we make up a new word just for them.

The fact is, prejudice and discrimination continue even as we change terminology. I know people who meticulously employ the most careful PC labels to refer to people, then turn around and mutter racial slurs about the Mexican construction workers building their McMansions. (True story.)

What comedians like Sacha Baron Cohen are attempting is to address our prejudices and stereotypes head-on, with humor, rather than skirting the issues in pretty language. It may make you squirm in your seat, but it certainly makes you cognizant of those problems, and public recognition of such problems is necessary before we can solve them. If we could just talk frankly about the way things really are, we could bridge communicative gaps and avoid the illusion of the need for politically correct speech in the first place. Open dialogue, not political niceties, is what's necessary to reach a better understanding and respect for all people.

Monica Chavez is a junior political science and foreign languages major.

The Mustangs are bowl eligible. Finally.

by Douglas Hill

We Mustangs do a lot of things right. Our men's soccer team spent most of the season ranked first in the nation. We have a strong law school, and even better schools of the arts and of business. Our campus is almost as beautiful as our students, and we're located in one of the most fun and successful parts of Dallas. For years, we even had a great football team, and our students actually went to the games and often stayed past halftime.

Then came the 1980s. Then came the Death Penalty. Then came years of bad—no, terrible, actually—football.

But now that all seems to be changing.

Last week's loss to Houston was difficult to recover from, and at halftime this week, with the Ponies trailing Tulsa 24-7, it looked like we were in for yet another disappointing season—another year of almost getting it done. But the Mustangs, led by Freshman QB Justin Willis, came out looking like a new team in the second half. They scored 27 straight points, made Tulsa look really bad, and emerged with a win and the first season of bowl eligibility for SMU since 1997.

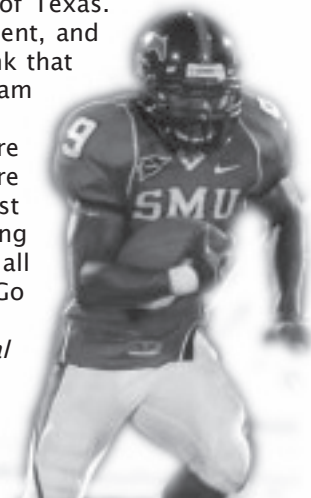
While the loss to Houston—not to mention disappointing early-season losses to North Texas and UTEP—means that we may still end up falling short of post-season play, a bowl is still possible for the Mustangs. A win next week at Rice would make a bowl trip very likely indeed.

But that win won't come easily. Rice has won five straight and is fighting for a bowl bid of its own. Perhaps they even have more to fight for than we do. Rice has never been a football powerhouse, and in the golden days of SMU football we used to beat up on the Owls, a former Southwest Conference rival, consistently and mercilessly. And they've been waiting longer than we have. Our last bowl was in 1984, which means we've waited 22 years. Rice has waited more than twice as long; their last bowl was 45 years ago, in 1961.

Watching this season and comparing it to my previous three years of experience with Mustang football, though, I can't help but believe that the Ponies are going to make a bowl trip a reality this season. Certainly if we play as well next week at Rice, on both offense and defense, as we did in the second half this week, we can expect a win. We also have a talented core group of running backs and receivers, and Willis's statistics are comparable to (or, dare I say, better than) those of Colt McCoy of Texas. After years of waiting and disappointment, and as hard as it is for me to believe, I think that SMU actually has a legitimately good team this year.

It finally seems like the Mustangs are not just doing some things right—they're doing almost everything right. The test comes this week, though, as we are going to be forced to prove we can do what all good teams do: win when it counts. Go Stangs!

Douglas Hill is a senior international studies major.



Todd Baty presents number 3 of the top 10 things I love about SMU. This week: faculty and staff

by Todd Baty

#3: The SMU Faculty and Staff

At any university there is a certain degree of turnover; students are always coming and going, entering fresh from high school and graduating with degrees just four (to six) years later. And due to this consistent and necessary stream of people in and out of SMU, the legacy of the institution is largely a result of those individuals that stay behind—the faculty and academic staff of the university. Thus, whether students like to admit it or not, it is our professors and teachers that have more connection to our alma mater, for they will greatly surpass our time at the university.

Indeed, many faculty members spend their entire careers at a single university. Obviously, these tenured members directly influence and shape the core of the university—its students—and thus have an enormous impact on the futures of not only individuals, but also the student profile and reputation of the university.

While I whole-heartedly believe that the educational experience at any university is ultimately the product of a combination of many individual student decisions, it is important for students to understand that there are people on this campus (although, a minority) that are much more influential in the greater historical narrative of the university than themselves.

I mention this fact not to belittle the importance of student participation in education, but to emphasize the importance for this university to support the people that are truly in the “drivers seat.” If SMU ever hopes to achieve serious advances in its academic reputation and undergraduate experience, the needs and desires of the SMU faculty and staff must be a critical component to university policy and administration. This is no attempt to brown-nose before finals (although at this point in the semester, I could use any help I can get!),

but a genuine effort to persuade others to support the future of SMU by supporting our professors.

However, in exchange for such support, the faculty and staff of SMU are charged with a high responsibility: to use their knowledge and skill to approach each class and every student as an opportunity to shape the future of SMU. As the chief custodians of the future of this university, the academic faculty must actively inject themselves into the effort to encourage intellectual curiosity among students. And while preparing for future freshman classes is important, the faculty cannot “give up” on its current students. Often, more energy is devoted to attracting a better entering class than to developing the current one. Additionally, as per my personal experience, professors pigeonhole students (especially upperclassmen) as “lost causes” in their educations too quickly—professors assume some students have already made up their minds intellectually. Obviously, how are students to challenge their intellects if professors have already concluded the capacity of their minds?

Therefore, the purpose of this article is two fold: to respectfully ask for the SMU faculty and staff to rise to its challenge, and to strongly urge that the rest of us give them the means to accomplish this task. In May of 2008, I will graduate from this great university and then move into a different chapter in my relationship with SMU. And I am confident, that if I return for my tenth, twentieth, or maybe even thirtieth class reunion, the members of the SMU community will not be talking about or remember my experiences as a student here. But they will remember the service of my professors; in fact, some of those professors may still even be here!

The academic faculty and staff of this university is the only medium through which to advance the goals of SMU. Let us quickly recognize this fact, and invest in the future of this great university.

Next week:.....#2 the History and #1 the Future of SMU.

Todd Baty is a junior music and history major.



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Miss one of the other parts?

You can still check out the last three installments of Todd's "Things I Love About SMU" column online: www.smu.edu/honors/hilltopics.