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## Hilltopics: Volume 6, Summer Issue

Hilltopics Staff

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# HILLTOPICS

## SUMMER EDITION

THOUGHTS

UPON

GRADUATION

By: Ashley Howe

As a graduating senior, and outgoing editor-in-chief of this publication, I wanted to write an article in which I could share my advice with those continuing their undergraduate studies. When I started SMU, I was as undecided as a student could be. I could not pick a major if someone had held a gun to my head. I wavered between cinema-television, economics, english, politics, and everything in between. Looking back, that indecision was just really excitement about all of the new things I would be learning in college. I toughed out 3 years of public high school "education," and university classes were the pinnacle of excitement to me—they still are.

When you first arrive at college, the amount of substantive discussion and learning can be overwhelming if you are trying to pick a major. It seems like every time someone says something interesting about a class they are taking, you feel ready to declare a major in whatever they talk about. I remember going to Tate lectures my first year, and each speaker would inspire me to change to a new favorite major. Looking back, I remember how miserable I was that I couldn't really connect with just one major in particular. I felt that no matter what major I chose, some of my interests or aspects of my personality weren't reflected completely. For instance, I loved history, but I didn't really have the liberal edge and interest in people that most historians had. **GREAT ADVICE continued on page 5**

WHAT'S IN YOUR BACKPACK

By: Jack Swearingen

This question is the central point of Ryan Bingham's lecture series in the movie *Up in the Air*. According to his no tie-down philosophy, Bingham tells us that all the stuff in our life is unnecessary baggage that weighs us down and inhibits our freedom of movement. He asks us to imagine putting all of the people we have relationships with into a backpack and feel the weight of it, the straps cutting into our shoulders and the sheer bulk weighing us down to the point of where we can barely walk. And then he asks us to set that backpack aside, ultimately to walk away from it a free man. "Imagine waking up tomorrow with nothing," Clooney's character asks us. "It's kinda exhilarating, isn't it?"

It is, in a way. Freedom always comes with a price, but if we think of our lives as it relates to all the people we meet, we really do live a trapped life. While our friendships are valuable and add meaning to our lives, they do come at the price of adding obligations outside of ourselves that can take its toll on our time and energy. Yet we live in a society where the more friends we have on Facebook, the more text messages we receive, and the more clubs and organizations we are a part of (even if we don't actually participate in them but use them to add more numbers to our resume), the better. In the midst of such a consumer society, the idea of keeping things below our maximum potential and, even further, below living outside our means seems taboo, but think of it for a second. Ryan Bingham is not an extremist in his philosophy- he observes his tight-knit schedule of flights and firing people like clockwork, and he loves it. He is not some hippy hobo down in Austin wandering around without a care, he is a very successful businessman that enjoys his way of life and believes it to have value. While some might argue that his asocial behavior is not advisable for all, we must still note the contrast to our modern life and admire his existence for its simplicity.

But Ryan Bingham is not real, and so how can we take his scripted and controlled belief and apply it to the real world? It is highly unlikely that such a person exists as Bingham, and if he does I would like to shake his hand when the people of my dorm are being loud at three in the morning. What I think we can gain from this character is the notion to examine what exactly we hold in the backpack of our lives and see if the weight they bring is truly worth it. Especially in college

**GOOD IDEAS continued on page 5**

### IN THIS ISSUE...

HONORS PROGRAM

EVENTS CALENDAR

WHO ARE THE MENTORS?

NEW CLASS: THE DALLAS EXPERIENCE

LETTER FROM DR. DAVID D. DOYLE

# HILLTOPICS

page 2

## GREAT ADVICE CONT...

liked CTV but there was no way I was willing to go through that starving artist-moving-to-LA stage a young filmmaker would have to. I knew that if I wasn't willing to go the extra mile to be successful in a field, then it wasn't the right field

for me.

Ultimately, I found an area of study (Geology) and it couldn't have worked out better. But along the journey, here is what I learned.

**Make the long run a priority.** I know plenty of kids who have enjoyed classes in their major, but aren't interested at all in a future career in that field. I hate seeing people graduate with a degree that they aren't going to do anything with. Don't fool yourself that your attitude will change. If you enjoy finance, but know that you couldn't stomach an office job, keep looking. If you know a job you would want to do, make it as easy as possible on yourself to succeed at that getting that job. Companies expect that you have the appropriate degree. It can be extremely hard to get an interview if your major is irrelevant to the job. It may not be a good hiring practice, but it happens all the time. You don't want to spend all your interviews explaining why your anthropology degree gives you insight into engineering. Any reason not to hire you could mean instant elimination in a round of interviews.

**Join a professional organization.** This is the easiest way imaginable to get a job. Lots of professional conventions come through Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. By joining an organization, you will be kept up to date and have awesome opportunities to network. You will meet the most important people in your field—from all over—not just from Dallas. You can also put this on your resume and bring it up in interviews. Mainly though, it is invaluable to get a sense of the different directions you can take your chosen career.

**Don't confine your learning to the school.** Interesting classes that you don't have time for in your schedule can be distracting. Rather than taking 5 years to graduate and making your parents drop an extra forty grand, plan out your classes with consideration to what is necessary. Sometimes it is confusing where your academic interests end and your personal interests begin. Learning is learning—period. You can learn in school or you can learn from a book or you can learn from a conversation. Don't think that by not taking a class, you are foregoing your opportunity to learn about something. Don't force yourself to triple major if you don't need to. Make a promise to yourself that you will find time outside of school to pursue your interests. This way, you can get the most formal preparation possible for your future career, while still learning new and exciting things.

**Find people who are like you.** College is an exciting time partly because people are starting to branch off into the type of people they will be as adults. Use this to your advantage. If you can find a major where the other students and professors are just like you, you may have found the right discipline. Go to office hours and strike up a conversation with your professors. Just based on the types of things they ask or say, you can tell a lot about them. If you can imagine being a future colleague of your teachers, that is a sign. Being a geologist, I had the opportunity to go on extended camping trips with my professors. I got to know my professors, and in particular the way they thought—exactly like me. This was a sign to me that I had found my academic home.

**Know the difference between and good internship and a bad internship.** Use your interview to learn if the company is even worth while. I wasted six hours a week on an unpaid internship in publishing. It turned out to be a small office of just six people, and I ended up just stuffing envelopes with Amazon orders. The male boss was a total chauvinist, and no one even talked to me until they took me out to lunch at the end of the internship. I should have quit right away, because this was not the internship they had advertised. Many of the "internships" listed in Mustang Trak may not be valuable experiences. Companies want cheap or sometimes free temporary help. The truly good internships are those that pay well and offer an actual intern program or experience. Try to find a unique internship experience, rather than just an entry-level job type position. These will open your eyes to new career paths you maybe didn't think about. Don't be so desperate to have an internship that you accept anything—you go to SMU—hold out for the best.

*Ashley graduated this past May with a major in Earth Science. She can be reached at (amhowe@smu.edu).*

## STRENGTH OF SUCCESS

By: Sanaz Talaifar

It is no secret that a winning football does wonders for a university. SMU is no exception. According to a university sponsored study on the effects of the big Hawaii Bowl win, new student applications rose 35% and donations jumped 25%<sup>1</sup> after our winning football season last year. This is in addition to a 45% increase in traffic on SMU's website<sup>1</sup>, tons of free publicity for the school in the news, and the dollar value of ticket revenues. These sorts of effects are what have been called "The Flutie Effect," named after Boston College quarterback Doug Flutie. Two years after his 1984 end-of-game winning football pass, applications to Boston College rose 35%<sup>2</sup>.

A causal ambiguity does remain however. Do applications increase literally because people want to go to a school with a good football team and the social life that goes along with it? Or does the publicity just put the school on people's minds, causing them to investigate and decide that the school is the one for them, regardless of athletics? No one can say for sure, and it probably involves a combination of factors, but clearly this is a cultural phenomenon that can't be ignored.

As someone who is not a sports enthusiast, I am sometimes confounded by people's passion for sports, which is in part what drives the "Flutie Effect" and the big business of sports. In particular, I don't understand the loyalty many people feel for professional sports teams. I can understand enthusiasm for a specific player, his or her athleticism, personality, etc. But I don't understand how someone can feel so strongly about a team whose players and coaches are continuously traded with each other. In other words, what's so special about, say, the Dallas Mavericks if the people

*At the end of each academic year, Hilltopics hosts its Essay Contest. The contest is open to any current undergraduate or graduate student. Contestants will write one essay according to the prompt and guidelines below for a chance at \$750 worth of prizes—grand prize, \$500; two honorable mentions, \$125 each. The winning essay is then published in the final issue of the year.*

who make up the "Dallas Mavericks" might be playing for the Phoenix Suns next year if they pay a better price? If the players, coaches, and even owners are not constant, and in many cases the winning record is not constant, and the team doesn't really stand for any values per se that are different from other teams, then what is it about this team that makes them different from or better than the next team, other than geographic location?

I think college sports solve this problem to a certain extent, which could be a reason why they are so successful and so important, and perhaps a little bit less superficial than professional sports. For alumni, college sports represent a way to revisit a certain period in life that was critical to their development as people and to the paths of their lives. In the case of college sports, you are loyal to a certain team because you might believe in that school's education (which you experienced first hand), what it does for its students, and its contribution to the community and the world, which are values much less subject to change than who will be the lead wide receiver for the Dallas Cowboys next year. You went to that school, and like the players on the team and the other people in the stands, you had a common four years there. And the students are in the process of experiencing that common

## 2010 HILLTOPICS ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

1. Sanaz Talaifar
2. Katie Stroud
3. Josh DeVinney

four years when they are bonding at the games, and in our case, on the boulevard.

My initial reaction to school's emphasis on sports and the fervor people feel about them is to roll my eyes. I might say that this is a reflection of the American obsession with shallow pastimes that detract from all the things of substance that are going on in the world. And after all, school should be about school, not about sports. But it seems like this strand of sports obsession has a deeper foundation, and it makes the academic part of school stronger by increasing applications and school funds. This a sentiment well articulated by our athletic director Steve Orsini when he said in an interview, "We're an auxiliary... The core function on this campus is academics. It's important that we show the results of how we can help them." As long as the athletic department remembers this, and the benefits and profits of the football team outweigh the costs (including June's \$1.3 million salary<sup>3</sup>), I can't help but to support SMU's continued strengthening of the football team, even if I didn't go to a singly football game this year.

*Sanaz Talaifar is a junior International Studies and French double major with a minor in Psychology. She can be reached at (stalaifar@smu.edu)*

## A WELCOME LETTER TO

From David D. Doyle, Jr.

New students often ask me: "What does it mean to be an Honors student at SMU?" Perhaps surprisingly, there is no easy answer to this question. In fact, there are multiple honors here—they range from membership in an Honors Academic Community such as the University Honors Program, the first year Hilltop Scholars, or New Century Scholars programs; other academic Honors (sometimes called "Distinction") through one's major—this often involves a thesis or senior honors project; Honors scholarships such as the President's, the Hunt's, Meadows, Embrey Engineering, or Dedman College Scholars; Honors societies such as Phi Beta Kappa, The Golden Key, or SMU's Hyer Society; and last but not least, recognition of exemplary academic achievement (high grades) through

+ We have almost 50 continuing UHP students signed up for our **Student Mentoring Program**. All first year UHP students who request one will be assigned an upper class mentor. The mentors will be available to help bring you into the Honors community through such activities as our common reading discussion, Opening Day Assembly and Barbeque, lectures, and in May the end of year dinner.



+ As with every year since 1999, the UHP has awarded a number of **independent research grants** to our students through the **Paul K. Richter and Evalyn E. Cook Richter Memorial Trusts**. This summer our Richter Fellows will travel to such countries as China, Spain, France, Australia, New Zealand, and El Salvador. The Richter Fellows will present their research in formal presentations to the SMU community in late October.



+ The UHP moves student experiences outside the traditional classroom in some really unique ways: from independent research for those studying at our Taos, New Mexico campus during the June (or Honors) term, to Honors Cultural Formations course involving travel. This year we ran two seminars: one **"The World of Henry James" that traveled to London over spring break**, and another, **"The Italian City during the Renaissance," that traveled to Venice and Florence that same week**. The plans for Spring 2011 include an **Honors Seminar on the Supreme Court that will take professor and students to Washington to view and study the papers of Supreme Court justices**, and another seminar on the

**Southwest that will involve traveling throughout New Mexico to study gender roles and behaviors in this multicultural society. The UHP will also sponsor 15 spaces in SMU's "Civil Rights Pilgrimage" that travels throughout the American South in an effort to recapture the Civil Rights experience.**

## ALL INCOMING STUDENTS

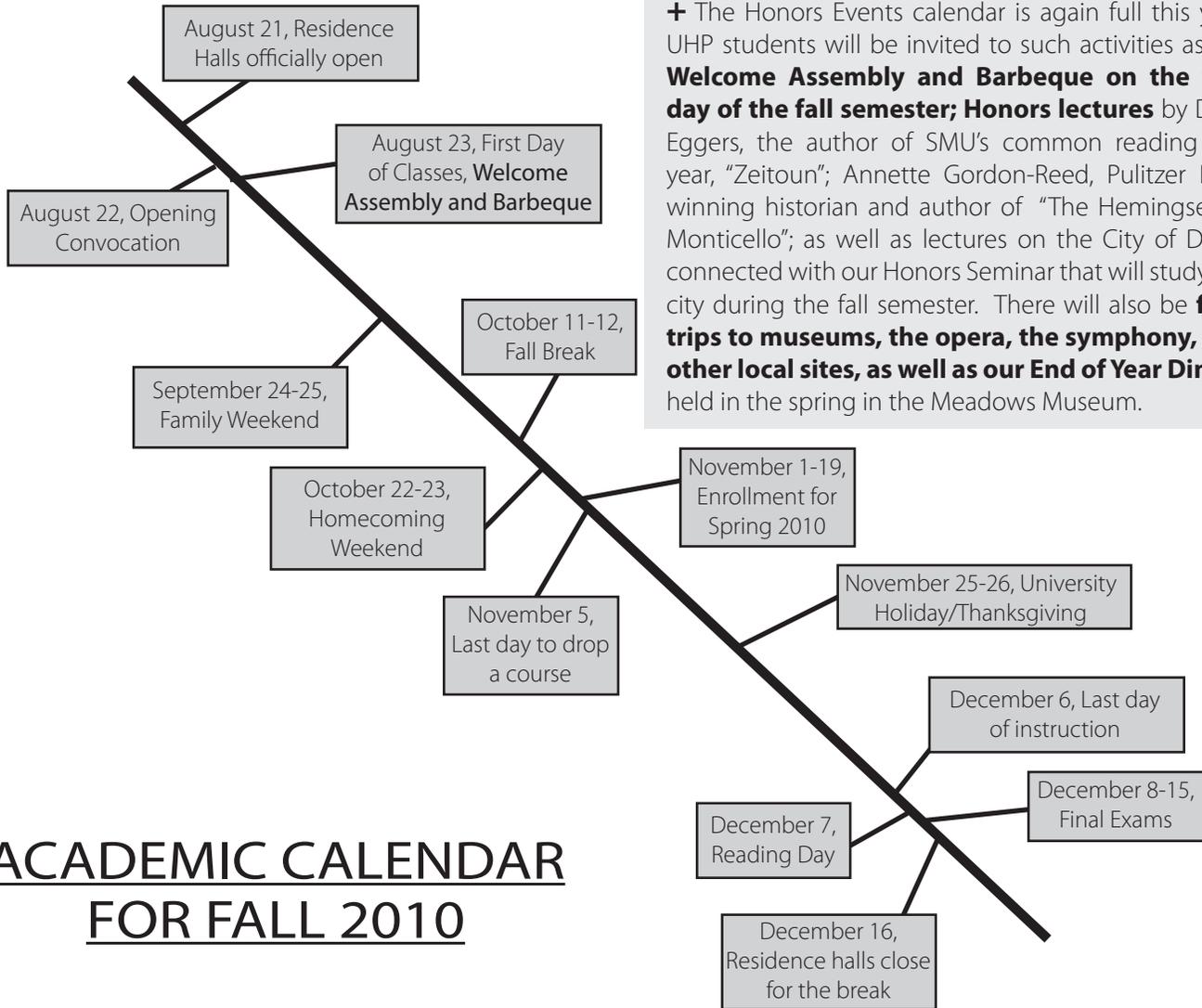
Director of the University Honors Program

Latin Honors—ie: Summa, Magna—determined at the time of graduation.

For those top students who are invited to join and participate in the University Honors Program a two-part commitment is asked: first, taking the 7 required challenging and provocative seminars; and second, becoming part of the UHP community that involves involvement with

our lectures, discussions, dinners, field trips, and other extracurricular events. The goal frankly is to blur the lines between “in class” and “out of class.” So often, learning takes place in both places. Toward this end, students in the UHP should note the many exciting things we have going on over the coming academic year. Here are just a few of the highlights,

+ The Honors Events calendar is again full this year: UHP students will be invited to such activities as our **Welcome Assembly and Barbeque on the first day of the fall semester; Honors lectures** by Dave Eggers, the author of SMU’s common reading this year, “Zeitoun”; Annette Gordon-Reed, Pulitzer Prize winning historian and author of “The Hemingeses of Monticello”; as well as lectures on the City of Dallas connected with our Honors Seminar that will study the city during the fall semester. There will also be **field trips to museums, the opera, the symphony, and other local sites, as well as our End of Year Dinner** held in the spring in the Meadows Museum.



## ACADEMIC CALENDAR FOR FALL 2010

## **SMU COMES TO DALLAS: UHP & 'THE DALLAS EXPERIENCE' A NEW CLASS ON THE CITY TO BE LAUNCHED FALL 2010**

David D. Doyle, Jr.

Director, University Honors Program

For many Dallas natives SMU seems a remote gilded tower—far, far removed from the grit and grime of America's 9th largest city. Indeed, a long tradition exists of our university as a place where the elite of the South is prepared to assume the reigns of power. Still, look around our campus and many signs indicate that this venerable tradition is on its way out: increasingly SMU is connected to, integrating with, and educating the myriad populations that altogether constitute our city. Provost Ludden's Big iDeas Program is only one example of many. In this vein, the University Honors Program launches "The Dallas Experience," an interdisciplinary course that places the city of Dallas at its center, next semester—in the fall of 2010. Using the city as its laboratory, the class will study history, race, gender, and class relations, immigration, the natural environment, governance, high and popular culture, architecture, and literature—all through the lens of Dallas.

The class's central purpose is not only to introduce students to our Dallas environment, but also to teach them how to understand and think about a city from multiple perspectives. How is it that this city came to be in the middle of the Texas prairie, so far from a viable port? Using the idea of the myriad "landscapes" found in Dallas—from the Trinity River (and its recent bridge and park project), to the cultural scene, to the ever evolving ethnic composition—the class will emphasize the relationships among people, institutions, and places.

The readings are going to be exciting—ranging from David Kaiser's study of the Kennedy assassination (one of the defining moments in the city's history), *The Road to Dallas* (2008), to Thomas Alexander's new book on the owner of Dallas's most famous department store, *Stanley Marcus: The Relentless Reign of a Merchant Prince* (2009). Other readings include Michael Philip's *The White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Dallas, 1841-2001* (2006), Rachel Adler's *Yucatecans in Dallas, Texas: Breaching the Border, Bridging the Distance* (2004), Don DeLillo's novel, *Libra* (1988), and Harvey Graff's recent study, *The Dallas Myth: the Birth and Death of an American City* (2008)—along with selected articles, book chapters, and primary documents. In order to engage students directly with the city in which they

live, invited speakers, such as the authors of some of the readings, and those who have made a contribution to the development and understanding of the city, will be brought in to address the class. A panel of Dallas Business leaders, for example, is planned. Also toward that direct engagement, students will be sent out to participate in the city through historical and architectural tours, attendance at local museums, performances, and political events. Each student will keep a field journal through which they will report on and react to these events. In addition, the Dallas Morning News will be required reading—keeping us all current on what is happening now.

The class will meet three times per week with lectures on Monday and Wednesday with everyone meeting together, and small discussion groups of 15 students led by Honors Professors on Friday. Each discussion section will focus on a single Dallas neighborhood and its various "landscapes." Each section will then report on their neighborhood at the end of the semester and collectively the class will produce a Dallas neighborhood website.

The class is an effort at a common experience for all University Honors and Hilltop students—and the goal is that the majority of students take it during their second year—continuing the sense of community fostered by the first year Honors Rhetoric classes. Overall, "The Dallas Experience" is another sign that the University Honors Program is not a static entity—but one that is always seeking to improve and evolve. We want to hear what you the students think, so please contact me with your feedback. And do not be surprised if I e-mail you one day asking for your presence at a focus group—this class is only one idea that the UHP has on the table.



## WORTH THE READ: ZEITOUN

By: Zohra Samji

This year's common reading, *Zeitoun*, gave the impression that it might just be another Katrina story. In fact, it is just that and much more. This true-story novel encompasses a Syrian-American family's journey. The story while primarily focused on the events leading to Katrina, also brings the background of these individuals into play. They include things such as Kathy's (*Zeitoun's* wife) early decision in life to convert to Islam as well to wear a hijab and the prejudice she feels from her own mother.

This novel seems to accomplish many things by educating the world about not just Hurricane Katrina, but the aftermath of 9/11, and the slap across the face that many Muslims received after that and still continue to do so. In addition to these semi-political goals achieved, it also shows that your friends can be your family, no matter what their ethnicity; if you keep an open mind, good things will come to you in an unexpected surprise.

As we all begin a new year, let us take away some of the lessons learned from

this novel:

*Understand the different cultures around you or aim to do so.*

*Don't be afraid to say hi to that classmate sitting next to you in this new and, for some, foreign environment.*

*The most clichéd and yet the most overlooked: Do not judge book by its cover (literally and/or figuratively).*

Our first-years have a literary jewel in their hands, no matter the ill preconceived notions of non-fiction literature; this book is bound to change your view on non-fiction literature if not to shake your world up with its content. It seems that as my years at SMU have gone by, the Common Readings seem to get better every year. In fact, it's one of the few class-assigned books that I have actually completely read on my own time.

*Zohra Samji is a pre-law and psychology double major, with a minor in human rights and Latin. She can be reached at (zsamji@smu.edu)*

## GOOD IDEAS CONT...

dorm life, we fill our lives with so much stuff that we can barely move, so many people that we have no alone time, and so many things to do that we spend our time thinking we have no time. Years before the movie *Up in the Air* came out, I considered Bingham's philosophy. Growing up in Houston, I turned 16 and 18 years old in a car evacuating due to hurricanes. Packing up your life after filling it with so much junk is stressful and impossible, or at least so I thought the first time. The second evacuation, I filled a small box and took my cat. Moral of the story: 99% of the stuff you stress and fret and worry and strive and pursue doesn't matter. I'm not arguing nihilism, I'm arguing that as a society we need to clean out our closet and throw away the skeletons and the shoes we no longer wear, that we spend way too much effort bogged down because being alone, and being free, scares us, so we cling to the material to prove that we actually exist and have a place in the world. We essentially choose slavery to the material and the relationships that don't go anywhere or serve any purpose above realizing and actualizing our own free will and maximizing our humanity by minimizing the stuff in our life.

As you lay this paper down or look on to another article, please consider this- consider whether the people you talk to in passing, the stuff you carry around, and the things you do to pass your time really matter. I would never argue to forgo meaningful relationships or sentimental attachment to material things, but simply consider what is in your backpack and what shouldn't be there. Then leave it behind and be free. It is exhilarating.

*Jack Swearingen is a sophomore year political science and philosophy double major. He can be reached at (jswearinge@smu.edu)*



“  
In the history of the world it might even be that there was  
”  
more punishment than crime.”

“In “*Zeitoun*,” what Dave Eggers has found in the Katrina mud is the full-fledged story of a single family, and in telling that story he hits larger targets with more punch than those who have already attacked the thematic and historic giants of this disaster. It's the stuff of great narrative nonfiction.” - Timothy Egan, *New York Times*

# HILLTOPICS

page 8

## HONORS STUDENT MENTORS PROGRAM

Sally Spaniolo

Academic Advisor, University Honors Program

The transition from high school to college, even for high achieving students, can be daunting. It is not uncommon for entering students to entertain questions like these:

*Will I succeed?*

*Is the Honors Program going to be too difficult?*

*How do I study for this test? --The professor didn't give clear guidelines.*

*I didn't get an A on my honors English paper. Am I really cut out for Honors?*

*Where do I go for \_\_\_\_\_? (Fill in the blank)*

The University Honors Program wants to help by coming along side first year students to offer support and community through the Mentor Program. Honors mentors desire to build relationships with small groups of new students by providing insight and guidance on college and academic life in the Honors Program.

Beginning with the Common Reading discussion and the

Honors Welcome Assembly, new students and their mentors will have opportunities to meet and get to know each other. As the semester progresses, mentors will be an available resource for information and will also plan several activities for their small groups to help students become immersed in campus life. These activities might vary from a field trip to a Dallas landmark, to a coffee break, to a lecture by a noted speaker, to an Ultimate Frisbee tournament, or to a Trivia Challenge night. The group and their mentor will help shape the focus of their activities. In the past, this averaged two to three activities per semester.

Current Honors students are so enthusiastic about this program that forty eight have volunteered to become mentors. During the summer new Honors students will be given the opportunity to request a mentor and then we will begin pairing them with their mentor. The goal for the year will be to build relationships between upper-class and first year students and ultimately strengthen the entire University Honors community. A dinner at the end of the year will bring students and mentors together to celebrate the successful completion of "Freshman Year".



## HILLTOPICS IS RECRUITING

### Do you have an opinion about...

politics? music? class? television?  
football? shopping? intramurals?  
fraternities? movies? tests? the  
Mavs? club sports? religion? driving?  
technology? the weather? dating?  
books? nightclubs? pets? Texas? study  
abroad? sororities? news?

**or anything else?**

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