

HILLTOPICS

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

Like Money?

Hilltopics is sponsoring an essay contest, and we're offering over \$1,000 in prizes. More info on page 3.

Diversity is recognizing our differences: that's kind of the point

by Aaron Ketrow

The most recent issue of the *Mustang Post* (March 22, 2007, edition 11, see <http://smumustangpost.com/archives.html> for the full article) featured an article about diversity at SMU. While the effort comes off as more of an "I-sounded-like-a-mis-informed-asshole-in-my-Wellness-class-and-I-want-people-to-think-that-it's-not-my-fault" back-pedal than as a legitimate, well thought out or even researched piece on the "problem" of diversity at SMU, it did raise some interesting points for me. I would like to address these points in a more, perhaps, legitimate medium.

The aforementioned author decided that she does not like the many organizations on campus nor how they do not promote diversity. To illustrate this point, she cited such groups as the Society of Hispanic Engineers and the National Society of Black Engineers. To be honest, this little critique probably never would have been written were it not for the following gem of a sentence the author penned. "Basically, we need to question the effectiveness of these diversity programs and let the people mingle on their own, and I believe people will." I would like to take this opportunity to point out that which is apparently unclear to the author. THESE ARE NOT DIVERSITY PROGRAMS. These are largely referred to as fraternities and sororities, and those that aren't are generally called societies. Their entire purpose is to collect people with similar backgrounds, beliefs, even race.

I'd like to give a shout-out to this Civil Engineer-turned-author for explaining to us the merits of certain so called diversity groups and using, as her poster-child, the American Society of Civil Engineering. I suppose I need only point out that if the society is of civil engineers then *everyone* would be a

civil engineer. Wait for it. Let it come slowly. Don't hurt yourself. Eureka! If *everyone* is a civil engineer, then *no* diversity exists!

As a side note, *Mustang Post*, I believe that you've finally revealed your true colors. Earlier you called out the Society of Hispanic Engineers and the National Society of Black Engineers (much in the same way that *Mustang Post* staff complained about the unfair favoritism that the Association of Black Students received from the Senate Finance Committee ... surely there's no coincidence there) for not being diverse enough. I say your claim betrays your true feelings that all Hispanic and Black engineers are the same. Clearly these "diversity groups" (I'm so glad you called them diversity groups) don't have people with diverse interests or skills or you wouldn't have called them out on their lack of diversity. I can envision the *Mustang Post's* view of a Society of Hispanic Engineers now. Piñatas and tacos, presumably with a mariachi band. And surely the Society of Black Engineers sits around eating fried chicken and putting each others' hair in corn rows while listening to R&B or rap. Congratulations, *Mustang Post*, you have officially made me break my own "don't get involved" rule, a sin for which I, now and forever, will loathe you.

As a final note, I would like it to be known that I am holding the *Mustang Post*, not the author, responsible for the content of this article, as the publication puts its stamp of approval on anything it prints. If I were holding the author responsible, I would mention that she herself is associated with no fewer than 7 politically based (read: non-diverse) and 4 religiously based (again, non-diverse) organizations or groups. God bless you, Facebook, for yet again showing us the way.

Aaron Ketrow is a senior mechanical engineering and math 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.

***The Namesake* gives you an window into the life of immigrants in America, if only for two hours**

by Carter Twitty

The Namesake, as the press release from Fox Searchlight said when they sent me my screening ticket, is the story of the Ganguli family whose move from Calcutta to New York evokes a lifelong balancing act to meld to a new world without forgetting the old. The parents Ashoke and Ashima (Irfan Khan, Tabu) long for the family and culture that enveloped them in India, and take great pride in the opportunities their sacrifices have afforded their children. Paradoxically, their son Gogol (Kal Penn) is torn between finding his own unique identity without losing his heritage. Even Gogol's name represents the family's journey into the unknown.

The film, itself, is visually stunning, giving an oft-told story of displaced immigrants searching for upward mobility and a better life for their children.

Mira Nair, the film's Indian-born director, capably transports us from the streets and homes of bustling Calcutta to the isolation and intimidation of New York. The story moves from Ashoke and Ashima in the first half to their son, Gogol, in the second. Kal

Penn (most famous for his turn as Van Wilder's understudy and one half of Harold and Kumar) has a stirring performance as the namesake of his father's favorite author, Nikolai Gogol. Always hating his name and, through it, his cultural heritage, Gogol moves through life in the American dream: graduating from Yale, working as an architect in New York, meeting a pretty WASP girl with a house in Oyster Bay (for all that love deep ironies, she calls him Nicky), all to have it come crashing to a halt, forcing him to look at his family, his heritage, and his name in an entirely new way.

However, in spite of the film's many strengths it never loses the self-consciousness of being an adaptation. Taken from the Pulitzer Prizewinning novel of the same name by Jhumpa Lahiri, certain scenes feel compressed and abrupt in order to move the plot forward by sacrificing character motivation, believability, and unfortunately, emotional resonance with the audience. A good example of this would be the end of Gogol's marriage, played out in a train station where the actors seem like they have to get everything out in the open before the train pulls into the station.

That being said, the script, written by Sooni Taraporevala, does an excellent job of adapting a story that encompasses thirty years and two generations of a dynamic family. This is a family saga and, therefore, as episodic as any story could be. I would have loved to have seen this movie as a mini-series, but I thoroughly enjoyed it as a film. This is both a testament to the strength of Lahiri's original work and the ability of Nair and Taraporevala to condense it and still capture its essence.

It was amazing to watch the film with a predominantly Indian-American audience (unlike one of the characters in the film who ignorantly asks Gogol "when" he moved to America, I'll make no assumptions about where my fellow audience members were born). It was both entertaining and informative as their laughs highlighted parts of the film where the specific coloring of Indian and Indian-American culture was too subtle. There were certain scenes where I did not catch a joke because they lacked subtitles, but the audience reaction was not necessarily needed due to the excellent job the director and actors were able to do in creating the visual emotion that the uncultured, like myself, could comprehend. There were parts of the film that poked fun both at American culture, Indian culture, and the precarious places where they meet, mix, and manage to both survive.

The strength of this audience reaction, and my own, leads me to believe that *The Namesake* is a story that is both specifically accurate yet poignantly universal. Searching for one's identity is something everyone struggles through. And, though the Gangulis did, you do not need to travel far to understand that.

Carter Twitty is a senior English major.



Faculty biography: Sociology professor Sheri Kunovich brings own perspective to department

by Jenny Simon

When asked why she wanted to become a sociologist, Sheri Kunovich, Professor of Sociology at Southern Methodist University, gave one simple answer, "I read Marx!"

Now, about 13 years after starting college, she has successfully racked up two masters, one in Sociology and one in Slavic and East European Studies, and a Ph. D in Sociology from Ohio State University.

Kunovich started her scholarly career at Texas A&M, where she obtained her undergraduate education. Kunovich stated that she belonged to one organization throughout her schooling: "The organization of financing my education."

By pure fate, Kunovich accidentally ended up in a social theory class at Texas A&M. After reading *The Communist Manifesto*, she was hooked and knew she wanted to study sociology. "I remember the exact day when I thought, Holy shit, this is what I want to learn," she said.

Kunovich was born in Baytown, near Pasadena, California. At 18 months her family moved to Houston, Texas, where she lived for the next 17 years. She describes her family, especially her parents, as strong conservatives, which isn't how she describes herself. Instead of becoming estranged from her family because of opposing views, she discovered her passion for sociology through her complicated situation.

Kunovich looked to her family to generate her dissertation topic. She was interested in observing and accounting for how and why parents transfer wealth to their children, or "the intergenerational transfer of wealth," as she explains.

Up for her three-year review next fall, this petite brunette with lightweight wire glasses is determined to receive positive feedback for her teaching excellence. She has raised the bar in her classes, insisting on high standards from students and providing thought-provoking topics of discussion. Kunovich's classes, which include "Research Methods," "Social Inequality," and "Gender Inequality," are, in her mind, developed to give the student a better understanding of the problems in the social world and the realistic inequalities people face daily. Kunovich wants her students to question social norms and how they create different levels of equality. "I hope they start questioning some of the black-and-white situations in the social world," she says. "Gender Inequality," a subject she holds dear to her heart, is her favorite class to teach. "Because I grew up in Texas and I still live in Texas, I want women to feel empowered," says Kunovich.

The décor and belongings in her office exemplify her passion for the ongoing issue of inequality between the genders. Graphs of female political representation hang from her walls. Feminist writings occupy her bookshelves.

Kristyn Cobstall, a senior sociology major and former research assistant to Kunovich, explains her greatest strength as a professor: "She's very good at teaching in different styles to accommodate different learning styles." Cobstall believes Kunovich is a dedicated professor who wants to make a difference in students' education. "Her passion makes students passionate about what she's teaching," says Cobstall.

Although this mid-thirties feminist academic is dedicated to her scholarly profession, she also has been happily married since 1998, to another sociologist named Bob Kunovich. She is also a mother of a two-year-old daughter named Zoe, and is currently pregnant with her first son.

Since Kunovich and her husband are very aware of gender stereotypes in our society, they constantly make an effort to divide household and child-rearing work equally based on practicality rather than gender. Kunovich does explain that it's difficult being an ambitious career woman and a mother: "It's a struggle because I love my job."

One way Kunovich balances her role as a mother and a scholar is by working with her husband to provide Zoe with an open-minded learning environment. "I feel like I have my priorities straight with my career and family. We want to expose our children to a variety of ideas and places," she says.

Even though Kunovich is at a stable place in her life, professionally and socially she still has future goals. In five years she hopes to be a tenured professor. "My big goal is to get tenure, and I hope to be at SMU," she exclaims. To fulfill her goal of tenure, Kunovich continually contributes to the academic field of sociology by striving to publish as much scholarly research as possible.

Kunovich is currently constructing a content analysis research project on parenting magazines and parenting norms. Although she is still in the beginning stages of the research progress, her proposal focuses on finding a connection between the advice and readership of parenting magazines and how it may affect social class. She has a large collection of parenting magazines stored in her office that comes in handy for this research. She explains that she first subscribed to these magazines when she got pregnant with her first child, but became very intrigued with their content and decided to research them more closely.

Throughout Kunovich's entire career, she has engaged in every personal challenge with determination. She wants to spend her career educating students and providing them with a lucrative academic experience. She says, "I want to be available to students as a resource. That is what my career is about."

Jenny Simon is a junior sociology major.

HILLTOPICS
First Annual Campus Essay Contest

Win \$750 for 750 words!

This spring, *Hilltopics* is sponsoring its first annual essay campus essay contest, and you're invited to participate for your chance at \$1,000 in prizes. Turn your 600 to 750 word essay in before 5:00 on April 13 at Clements Hall room 108.

Prompt: SMU is well known for its vibrant Greek life and party culture and less well known for its academic excellence and "life of the mind." What, if anything, should SMU do to change this perception?

This is your chance to speak out and get paid for it!

Essays should be double-spaced, 12 point font and should include a title page with name, email address, telephone number, and ID number.

Questions? Contact Todd Baty (tbaty@smu.edu)

Something to consider as registration approaches: Think about taking an Asian language!

by Monica Chavez

You've been told a million times why you should learn "nontraditional" foreign languages (read: Hindi, Japanese, Russian, Chinese). You'll have linguistic access to the bustling economies of Asia. The Department of State will love you. You'll get to lord your knowledge of fancy foreign scripts over your classmates' bare grasp of the Latin alphabet. Besides that, you may even have personal reasons why one of these languages appeals to you, like a love for movies or music made in those languages. But there is also an *intellectual* reason why learning languages utterly foreign to your own (not just across the pond but around the world) would be infinitely more beneficial than you might have imagined.

Arguments persist about whether language shapes culture, but one indisputable fact is that culture shapes language. Given that attitudes and histories differ from culture to culture, you can see why looking at a particular language, either in its spoken form or sometimes its written, might give you an idea as to the fundamentals behind that language's original society of speakers. This gives you a deeper understanding of the culture and history behind the language, never a bad thing in today's globalizing environment.

Let's look at a simple example from both Chinese and Japanese. The written character for "male" is composed of a character for "rice field" positioned over another that represents a human figure. The idea is that in ancient China, men carried loads of rice on their backs in from the fields; that was their station in life within an agricultural society. What does this tell you about early East Asian culture? Number one, unlike in early European cultures, rice was a staple food.

Number two, and *like* European cultures, men were the primary source of heavy labor. (Incidentally, the character for "female" portrays a figure contorted in a submissive position; sound familiar?) Further, the general word in Chinese and Japanese for "meal" is the same as the word for "rice." It's a simple example of how you can find cultural relevance in everyday written and spoken vocabulary, and many more complex examples exist of this sort.

Learning Hindi can give you cultural insight of a different kind. Students of the language have the unique responsibility of often having to learn not one, but two Hindi equivalents for every English word in their vocabulary. This occurs because during the Muslim invasion of South Asia, a large Perso-Arabic vocabulary swept into the languages of northern India, with the result that numerous indigenous words now have Persian or Arabic synonyms to compete with. The (sometimes frustrating) result for a student of Hindi



is that both the indigenous and the Perso-Arabic term must be learned in order to have the proper vocabulary for different linguistic and social contexts. Hindi wears its history on its sleeve.

Obviously I didn't learn all this by delving into linguistic references and archives of ancient texts. This is the kind of passive knowledge you gain just through exposure to the written and spoken aspects of a new language, the kind of stuff you ponder while you're not memorizing verb forms or practicing your characters.

Why the emphasis on non-Western languages? Because if you study a language close to home, in our case European languages, you're not going to find much different from English. Since we still live in a Eurocentric society, to really see the differences as well as the commonalities among world cultures, it is essential to study languages with roots sometimes radically different from your own.

So consider this when you register for fall semester classes: if you take an Asian language, not only will you diversify your CV, impress your future employers, and meet the demands of a shrinking global environment, you will also find a new source of intellectual stimulation that broadens your cultural outlook, and makes you smarter all around.

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

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