Hilltopics

University Honors Program | Volume 10 | Edition 4 | May 8, 2014

The Transition to the Residential Commons

Jeff Grim, Associate Director of RLSH, comments on the move to the RC system

by Jeff Grim, contributing writer for Hilltopics

The Residential Commons, while new at SMU, is one of the oldest concepts in the history of higher education. Originating in Oxford in Cambridge, migrating to different forms of houses or 'colleges' at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton - the interaction between faculty and student has been the crux of the learning process in college. American colleges and universities have evolved from homogeneous medical doctor and pastoral training institutions to large, complex research engines that fuel the ever-changing, flat world. In response, so too, changed the faculty role. No longer could faculty be a groundbreaking researcher, excellent teacher, involved mentor, and politically astute administrator (although we see a few examples of these people still existing and your Director is one of them). As universities, administrative positions, and academic disciplines became more professionalized and specialized the professoriate became ever distant from developing and being in mentorship with the student. At SMU: we seek to change that.

The creation of one of the first public universities, the University of Virginia, actually was designed physically and intellectually on this concept of the 'academical village.' Taken from UVA's website, "For Thomas Jefferson learning was an integral part of life. The 'academical village' is based on the assumption that life of the mind is a pursuit of all participants in the University, that learning is a lifelong and shared process, and that interaction between scholars and students enliven the pursuit of knowledge" (www.virginia.edu/academicalvillage). At SMU: We seek to be that. SMU has embarked on the largest transformation of university housing in contemporary history at ANY university in the country. Similar institutions such as Vanderbilt, Washington University in St. Louis, and Duke University have built new buildings or have transitioned into a Residential College system, but no other university has

See the full story on page 2

In *this* issue:

Leaving the Honors Community Behind **page 3**

Summertime Single Life **page 4**

President Turner on the RC System **page 7**

A Year of Hilltopics **page 8**

continued from page 1...

built and transitioned the entire system as we will in a few short months. At SMU: We go big, or we don't go.

Change is hard. As an institution, SMU has changed dramatically over the past 15 years. The academic profile of the student has been enhanced exponentially (with thanks to the honors program), the faculty profile of international-acclaimed scholars has risen, the amount of research dollars and private donations have allowed SMU to create programs and buildings that transformed SMU from a regional institution to an international powerhouse. With an academic experience that rivals the elite institutions of the country, it is only natural for the co-curriculum to be as equally intellectually rigorous. At SMU: We are not afraid of change and embrace hurdles knowing that it will have a positive end result.

The Residential Commons seeks to give all students an opportunity to interact with faculty, feel a part of multiple communities on campus, take on leadership and mentorship roles with underclassmen, and feel valued as an individual. These are not new concepts for Honors students because your program provides this! For the rest of campus we want to provide opportunities for all students to experience what a true community consists of: a diverse group of leaders and followers chasing after a similar goal, together. At SMU: We want all students to be in community, not just a select few.

The Residential Commons seeks to be the 'Home Base' for students before they step foot on campus, as they become upperclass students, and as engaged alumni. The new housing experience will be complementary to programs like Honors, Hilltop New Century, student organizations, and academic departments. Students will engage with as little or as much as they want; but they will always have the opportunity. They will be living and eating amongst the Director of the Maguire Ethics Center, an economist, Chemist, playwright, and Assistant Dean of the Dedman School of Law. Residents will get to interact with fellow students who share and have completely different interests. In your first year you will be introduced socially and intellectually to the university through Mustang Corral and University Convocation, respectively. SMU's traditions will continue to exist, but students in their Residential Commons will partake together.

This is a new adventure for SMU. It will not be perfect or seamless. It won't solve all issues of SMU around inclusivity, academic engagement, alumni giving, binge drinking, or student involvement; but it may. The Residential Commons gives us, as a university community, the opportunity to reinvent ourselves. These opportunities don't exist in higher education often, or many times, at all. I hope as Honors students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, and friends you will join the university in helping create and re-create the way community is formed SMU.

If you have any questions, comments, or ideas please email Jeff Grim, Associate Director of Residence Life & Student Housing at jgirm@smu.edu.

Say Goodbye in Italian

by Matthew Anderson, contributing writer for Hilltopics

There is schmaltzy love duet that Sarah Brightman and Andrea Bocelli sing called "Time to Say Goodbye" that I've been obsessed with since high school. It's mostly in Italian, and the only English words they sing are from the title: "it's time to say goodbye." Every time I hear it, I imagine an Italian Cinderella running away from her Prince Charming at the ball. Like any good fairytale, the song is dramatic and clichéd, and unashamedly delightful.

After living in Virginia Snider Hall my first year, and being an RA in VS as a sophomore, it's hard to shake the feeling that maybe the University Honors Program's own sweet fairytale is ending: next year, Virginia Snider will no longer be the "Honors Community." I constantly hear students ask why such a successful community would be going away. Why would we want to get rid of a community with such a strong identity and shared values? And from the RA perspective, wouldn't it be counterproductive to do away with a residence hall whose students, year after year, build such a strong sense of community? Will you still be able to study in VS next year?

Anxieties buzz through VS, from the basement to the ominous attic door, and rightly so. SMU is making a risky transition by moving away from themed communities, like the Honors Community, which have been known across campus to be quite successful. And in its final year, the Honors Community has been as vibrant as ever. We opened with the Order of the Elephant Knighting Ceremony, UHP courses have carried on in the lounges, and you can still get muffins from the Faculty in Residence's apartment (thanks to our superb FiR, Dr. Ann Batenburg). VS– the Honors Dorm– is a wonderful place to live. As a resident and an RA, VS has been like the sort of investment you make in a friend, not for profit but for the sheer joy of seeing growth. It is hard to know that the details of this investment are changing.

I've been asked many times, as an RA, what I think VS will be like next year as a part of the Residential Commons. My answer is: "I don't know." Am I a little anxious? Yes. Will it be a challenging transition? Of course. But the coolest thing about the Honors Community isn't that we all belong to the UHP. In fact, many VS residents don't. What makes VS an outstanding residence hall is the willingness of its residents to share an identity. Where that identity comes from is not as vital as the openness to embracing and building upon it. If anything, VS is proof that a strong residential community can, and should, exist on a college campus. And it should be available to anyone who wants it.

Still, I've begun to play "Time To Say Goodbye." And after belting it in the shower, making up my own versions of Italian, and pretending I know what they mean, I finally looked up the actual translation. "Con te partirò su navi per mari"– "I'll go with you on ships across seas." I was wrong.

Italian Cinderella isn't saying goodbye to Prince Charming. Turns out, she's actually saying farewell to the world she knows, leaving it for the adventure of being with the man she loves. It's still clichéd, but not at all what I first thought it meant.

UHP or RC, I am confident that incredible community can be achieved in VS. And if you find yourself too anxious or upset, listen to "Time To Say Goodbye." It's only $1.29 on iTunes.

Rising Costs of RCs Could Hurt SMU's Diversity Initiative

by Alexa Maffei

One of the main reasons for the implementation of the new Residential Commons system is to promote diversity among students. Incoming freshmen will be placed into these commons at random in order to mix up the students and eliminate stereotypes. This seems fair enough; SMU advertises itself as a diverse campus, and I respect that people recognize that diversity is more than just race and ethnicity. There are many things that make people diverse, such as their age, gender, choice of major, sexual orientation, and class level. SMU is sometimes referred to as a school filled with upper class students, and has inherited the nickname, "Southern Millionaires University." One reason for this is that SMU is a rather expensive college because of its prestige and academic excellence; however, the Residential Commons has caused prices for students to soar. Tuition is expected to increase by about $2000, despite the fact that schools such as Dedman College are getting budget cuts. A double room in most residential halls this year cost $8655, which combined with the freshman meal plan totals a room and board fee just under $14000. The cost of a double room in the Residential Commons costs $9670, and meal plan costs have also risen especially after those living in the Residential Commons are required to buy the most expensive meal plan. This leads to an increased cost of approximately $1500. Students will be spending an extra $3500 per year than they did this past year, and that's just if tuition does not continue rising. All of that money really adds up. A high cost of attendance could cost SMU many potential students in the future, especially those that come from middle and working class families. This will cause SMU to be even less economically diverse if few people can afford it. This could not only hurt SMU's reputation as a university, but it also limits the diversity on campus, which is what the Residential Commons was designed to combat. *This is not meant to be an attack on the Residential Commons at all; I am simply trying to point out a potential flaw that has not been addressed.

How to Stay Single Until You Die: Summertime Sadness

by Alec Petsche

Hello to the people so ill informed about my psychological health that they still intend to take my advice. Are you tired of holding hands with your beloved as your toes sink into the sand and the sun causes his/her beautiful eyes to glimmer like the Ocean next to which you both stand? I know that I am, and for the sake of this long running joke, I'll just go ahead and assume that you're as crazy as I am.

Summer is a difficult time to avoid love. The sun shines, the birds sing, and romance is in the air, but why would you want a significant other forcing you to get vitamin D and exercise when you could just sit alone in the dark with some ice cream and your favorite TV series, getting pale and fat.

To live the dream of a banal sixty year existence cut short by a brain aneurysm from all of that sugar and television, remember one simple tip: constantly belittle others. You could be the billionaire offspring of Ryan Gosling and Kate Upton, if you constantly insult people, no one will ever love you. Not only will this drive off potential lovers, it even works on family members and friends. You won't just be single, you'll be completely alone!

Now, I hear some of you disagreeing "But Alec, what if I find someone that I find so wonderful that I can't be cruel to them?" Well, I can only offer you a pearl of solace my friends. Although you will get married and likely have long and meaningful relationships or, God forbid, marriages, know that all relationships end eventually, be it in a messy break up, divorce, or death. On that horrifyingly depressing note, I leave you to go eat a pint of cookies and cream and start on one of the foreign films on my instant queue. God speed, and may the singleness be with you.

New Garage, Same Problems

by Cole Chandler

One issue that SMU students can agree on is that parking on campus sucks. We have been complaining about it for years now but very little seems to have been done. The Student Senate has a task force on parking, but little news has ever been heard from them and any news is buried in the minutes from student senate. The new residential commons system may help the parking situation on campus. SMU will take control of the new 800 car garage off of Bush Ave in May, but only 700 of the spaces will be dedicated to residents and students. This new garage will help alleviate the lack of resident parking spots, but it will fail to fix the overall problem that students have. The living on campus requirement will reduce the amount of students commuting to class each day. This will hopefully make finding spots easier for those driving every morning to class. However, the number of cars that are on campus all day will increase significantly as about two thirds of the sophomore class will keep their cars on campus full time. One thing for sure is that the residents in the new residential commons will have a much easier time of finding a space than commuting students or those living in the north quad. Count yourself lucky if you are living in Armstrong, Crow, Crum, Loyd, or Ware. Commons parking should be much easier.

Looking Back

by Graham Lumley

The talk of the first few weeks of school at SMU was all about how horrible Mustang Corral was, but looking back now, I've come to the same conclusion that I heard from all upperclassmen. Mustang Corral may be horrible, but you can make some of your best friends in college there. If only we could accomplish this without the cabins and team building activities.

The class schedule in college seemed like a dream the first couple months. You only needed to be in class for 3-5 hours a day and you didn't have to wake up crazy early, unless you foolishly enrolled in an 8 am class that is. Second semester I wonder how I ever woke up for high school before 7 and had class from 8 to 3 five days a week because waking up for classes at 9 has become such a struggle.

And then there is Umph. All I'm going to say, even though the food has been disappointing on several occasions, is that from what I have heard from my friends at other schools, we are all spoiled when it comes to our choices in food.

I'm glad there was always something to do during our first year, it's never boring. Boulevarding was a blast, watching the basketball team succeed was extremely exciting, and we even got to see B.o.B. and Aaron Carter perform. Before Winter Break we had the amazing Celebration of Lights.

Overall, my first year at SMU I had a lot of fun, the freedom from the watchful eyes of my parents was definitely liberating. I met some of the best people I know in this year and I cannot wait to see what the rest of my time here will bring. I know I picked the right school.

Looking for the Next Freshman Phenoms

by A.J. Jeffries

This winter, for the first time since I arrived on campus, we saw the SMU student body get behind a sports team. Moody Madness broke out in Highland Park, and suddenly basketball tickets were a hot commodity. Hearts were broken when we weren't selected for the NCAA tournament, and those who continued watching were devastated again when we lost in the NIT final. Fortunately, as any sports fan will tell you, there's always next year. And SMU basketball fans, and those with enough school spirit to support our other sports, have plenty to look forward to in the 2014-2015 school year.

Let's start with the man who's been the talk of the town since well before he signed his letter of intent. Emmanuel Mudiay, the six foot-five inch point guard who is, according to nbadraft.net, "arguably the top point guard in the class of 2014". In all likelihood we'll only get him for one year, but with Mudiay and Nic Moore running our backcourt we can count on that one year being something special for our basketball program. Add that in to the team we are bringing back from last year, and we got ranked #11 in ESPN's way-too-early-top-25!

Now to the gridiron. We're bringing in a 24 man recruiting class that features sons of NFL players in Darrel Colbert and Tony Richards, but they aren't the highest rated incoming freshmen. Inoke Ngalo is an inside linebacker out of Trinity High School in Euless, Texas, and Daniel Gresham is a four star running back out of All Saints Episcopal School in Fort Worth, Texas, and it is very tough to tell which of them head coach June Jones is more enthusiastic about. Hopefully with the players we have returning SMU football can put the death penalty even further behind it, returning to a bowl game again next year.

Next year students who make it out to Westcott for the men's soccer games will be able to see Oklahoma player of the year, center midfielder Mauro Cichero and the Pennsylvania player of the year, striker Colten Habecker working together with the other four incoming freshmen to help SMU soccer return to its traditional status as a soccer powerhouse. Women's soccer will also attempt to improve on last year's 9-9-1 record with the addition of eight new players.

These four, along with the other thirteen sports at SMU, are looking to take advantage of the young talents coming in and represent our Mustang athletics well in the coming 2014-2015 season.

New Dining Designs

by Abbey Norton

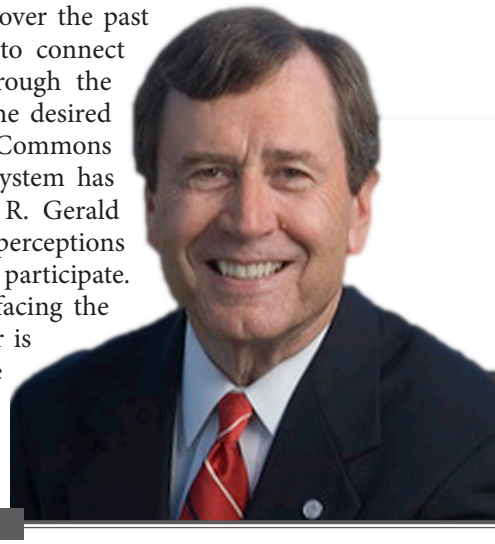
Where will you be getting your ever-important meals next semester? For those of you living on campus, there will be many changes in the dining accommodations that will enhance not only your food experience, but also your SMU experience. What additions will make this possible? Talking to a student member of the dinning ambassadors, I heard a lot about the new dining hall that is part of the Residential Commons expansion and some modifications to some of our old favorites that will bring us into the new school year.

First there will be a new dining hall. Part of the RC's goal is to create an even better community where people feel welcome and comfortable to stay outside their dorm rooms and truly immerse themselves in campus life. This has been kept in mind in the design of the new food spot, as seating will not be limited to the typical table and booth of Umph. It will be more conducive to friends studying and eating for a long time together or a meeting for a few club members to discuss next week's agenda. The same mentality was utilized in the new designs of Umph. Umph will be modified to fit this goal, but still hold the same food stations we know and love.

The new RC dining will have similar foods, but it is believed to be more open to options like the international food station at Umph, where you pick the fixings or made-to-order. The final change that began this spring 2013 semester is to the very popular Mac's Place. It is not going away, despite rumors that circulated. It is just getting a makeover where there will no longer be the large indoor seating area. It will be an outdoor area to enjoy time with friends over dinner or a quick snack of the grab-n-go variety. The grill will remain as well, but your sandwich or burgers will be even greater as you will be making the specifications for your food on touch screens. Hopefully these changes in our food options will further enhance not only everyone's SMU dining experience, but also the campus community as a whole.

President Turner Comments on the RC System

by Sara Jendrusch



The new Residential Commons system has sparked an enormous amount of debate over the past several months. Some have expressed concern that students will find it difficult to connect with fellow residents who have nothing in common, aside from their bond through the residence hall. Or perhaps that remaining on campus for two years will have less than the desired effect. However, others have been quick to point out several advantages to the Residential Commons system, and those advantages are appealing indeed. In light of the discussion that the system has brought about, I decided to speak with the mastermind behind the system: President R. Gerald Turner himself. This past week, I have been able to correspond with Dr. Turner about his perceptions of the new Commons system and the benefits that it will bring to the students who will participate.

His optimism and enthusiasm were quite encouraging, especially in regards to facing the challenges that the system poses. As the president of our prestigious university, Dr. Turner is concerned about creating the appropriate living and learning environment. After all, the purpose of the Commons system lies in its ability to promote learning opportunities, as well as provide students with a closer relationship with their fellow residents.

"The most challenging part is to develop a viable learning component to augment the obvious residential part of the living/learning environment," Dr. Turner says.

But, despite the challenges, he remains optimistic that with the help of the residents and staff, the system will be a success. Adjustments can be made, and Dr. Turner is willing to work with the students to make their living experience as memorable as possible.

To improve the Commons system for future Mustangs, Dr. Turner tells me that "we will moderate our success based upon feedback from both the students and the faculty-in-residence at all eleven of the Residential Commons."

The new traditions of the Commons system will play a great part in bringing SMU residents closer together. There may be a small amount of "Commons rivalry" that develops between residence halls, but the students who live under the new system will form a bond that should survive for years to come. It is this bond—this tradition—that Dr. Turner believes is important for the students to have. Those traditions have been in the making over the past year, and some of them have a common theme, which certainly takes advantage of the "food-and-fun" combination that unites college students.

"I think that having each Residential Commons schedule an occasional group meal will become an important tradition," he says, adding that future residents will certainly benefit from visits at the meals from Commons alumni. These food-centered traditions are only a few of the brewing ideas for the Commons system. Soon, the Residential Commons will be open for business, hopefully bringing Dr. Turner's hopes and expectations to life. .

Proper Prospie Etiquette

by Anton Nemirovski

With college-visit season in full bloom, current SMU students have to make sure they don't antagonize any potential Mustangs. I realize this may be hard since honest peeves about schoolwork, campus affairs, and personal things make up a hefty bulk of what we talk about on the Boulevard. So, here is a set of 4 guidelines to help you determine the do's and dont's of proper decorum around high-schoolers. I even added a few rhymes, so take those as you please. Whenever you see a bundle of awkward kids and their parents following a friend in a navy polo, keep these in mind:

If you make eye-contact with one of them, make sure you smile. Otherwise just move along. If you look at one with a frown, they'll quickly leave town!

Sound happy when you talk to them. Even if you're in the middle of a lengthy complaint to a friend about how awful a certain class is or why participation grades that are worth 40% are absolutely ridiculous, change the subject to something lighter if a prospective student talks to you. Talk about your plans for the weekend or how nice something about the school is. Even if your heart's in a ditch, don't appear like a witch!

However, don't make the school seem like a joke. We work hard here, and sometimes people don't realize that. If you're talking to one, let them know that good and challenging classes are rewarding. I've actually argued with friends from other colleges about how academically serious SMU can be. This point's too serious for a corny rhyme.

Rephrasing and omissions are key. Use your best judgment when determining what not to say around a group of prospective students and their parents. If you're in doubt, just leave it out!

There you have it. Hopefully these rhymes will both reflect each rule and stick in your head. By following these four guidelines, you'll turn every potential Mustang you see into a real one.

Letter from the Editor

by Tess Griesedieck

Beginning this year, I had no idea what was in store for me. If there's one thing I've learned over the past two years, it's that college life is ever changing and as soon as you see something as a constant, it's suddenly not.

For this reason, I am so incredibly grateful for the staff I had working this year with Hilltopics. This was a huge year of change for the paper that had not seen much energy in awhile. That all changed, though, as soon as I met the group of kids willing to bring life back to Hilltopics. Each and every staff member had ideas or input for at least one of the issues and many had a passion and a vision for what they wanted to write about. This made my job incredibly easy because I could just let them pursue their passion and not worry because I knew the outcome would be fantastic.

A Year of Hilltopics

Thank you, first, to those who came up with column ideas. I hold you in high regard because each time we would have a story meeting, you knew what you wanted to write about. The ideas and energy that came from these people and everyone else during story meetings made me excited to see the final product.

A huge thank you also goes out to Camille Aucoin as well. She is the brains behind the layout and, without her help, these issues would never look as good as they do. No matter how behind I got, she was always available to help and always quick to finish her job.

To all faculty in the University Honors Program who have helped with the issues this year, especially Dr. Doyle and Ms. Spaniolo, thank you so much for your unwavering assistance and faith in Hilltopics. This issue in particular has been driven by you and it would not have happened without all your help.

I cannot wait to see what comes next year. I know things will change and some staff members will move on while we also gain new ones. I cannot wait to see the new life and energy that is poured into Hilltopics and I am so grateful to be here for another two years to see it come even further. Thank you again to each and every person who has encountered our little newspaper. Everyone who pitched ideas, wrote stories, edited articles, created the layout, or even just picked up a copy helped to make Hilltopics change from what it was at the beginning of the year. Life does not happen without change and, for Hilltopics, this change is so good.

Hilltopics • Staff and Contributors

Writers and Editors

Preston Ash
Cole Chandler
Nicole Dabney
Margaret Fegan
Abigail Foster
Zain Haidar
Aurora Havens
Eric Hawkins
Sara Jendrusch
Viral Kotecha
Niz Lazzara
Sam Ligon
Graham Lumley
Alexa Maffei
Cameron Matson
Kate Moody
Anton Nemirovski
Emily Nguyen
Abbey Norton
Alec Petsche
A.J. Jeffries
Courtney Tibbetts

Editor in Chief
Tess Griesedieck

Tech and Layout
Camille Aucoin

Special thanks to
Dr. David Doyle and Sally Spaniolo

Find us online at
http://smu.edu/univhonors/