

College students look to change their communities instead of the world

By Carolyn Barta
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

A cartoon in the student newspaper at Southern Methodist University shortly before the November election lampooned a sorority girl being reminded to vote. "Don't be silly," the cartoon coed replied. "Homecoming isn't for another two weeks."

At the University of Texas, student Cecilia Conti recently explained to a reporter why she wandered away from a student union TV during Gov. George W. Bush's inauguration: "Not to be rude, but I'm not into government."

Typical attitudes on college campuses today? Hardly. While partisan politics hold little attraction for collegians, interviews on some Texas campuses show, that doesn't mean students are uninvolved or disinterested.

Two and three decades ago, campuses were a hotbed of anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, civil-rights activism and anti-establishment protests. College students saw politics as a way to change the world. Today, they would rather work for changes in their campus community.

"If they think there is a direct effect on them, they get involved," said Michael Mulcahy, editor of UT's Daily Texan. Annie Holand, UT

student government president, said students are "politically active but in a different sense."

"It may not mean holding rallies and marching on the Capitol, but working in different ways with legislators, the administration, with each other to see that issues are addressed and problems are solved," she said.

At UT, that has meant student government working with the administration to reopen the university tower, closed almost 25 years because of a sniper attack and suicides, or students seeking ways to increase diversity after the Hopwood decision barred racial preferences in admissions.

At the University of North Texas, an issue has been more humane treatment and control of 200 stray cats on campus. Or, at Texas A&M, improving student parking and celebrating diversity through campus art.

Sure, there are groups involved in global issues, such as the Free Tibet Society whose followers at SMU are planning a benefit concert to raise student awareness about Tibet. But, Holand said: "Typically students tend to be interested in issues that are going to affect their everyday life, such as tuition raises, financial aid, affirmative-action issues, not just in college admissions but in

employment."

Memorial Student Center director Jim Reynolds said students at Texas A&M are more interested in attending programs "to expand their knowledge and personal understanding" than trying to "promote issues." The main campuses of A&M and UT each have more than 700 organizations, and UT has long been known as the state's most active and politically diverse campus.

"Every day on campus, somebody has a table set up for something," Mulcahy said. Students today generally are more conservative and more career-oriented than those 20 years ago, said UT vice president James Vick. "They think of themselves more as part of the system, as opposed to being a critic on the outside."

They seek change in a peaceful way, added Arlene Manthey, SMU's director of student activities. For example, students circulated petitions calling for a campus referendum on adding the words "sexual orientation" to the university's nondiscrimination policy, gaining 800 signatures. Students then voted to recommend the change to the administration.

As for voting in partisan elections, it has little meaning for students. Mulcahy, the Texan editor, said most students don't see voting as a remedy

for issues that interest them. According to Voter News Service, which conducts media exit polls, the 18- to 29-year-old "youth vote" was the smallest segment of November's voting population, accounting for 13 percent. Voters 18 to 24 made up 6 percent.

Rob Persons, an analyst at the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut, said there has been a "steady trend downward" since 1978, when the first exit polls were taken in an off-year election after 18-year-olds got the right to vote. That year, 18- to 29-year-olds accounted for 20 percent of the turnout.

Different organizations staged mock elections on 10 Texas campuses last fall to try to stimulate interest in state elections. Jeremy Kost, chairman of Mustangs for Bush, was surprised when as many as 500 students participated at SMU. He believes voting booths on campus would increase voter turnout in real elections.

The big phenomenon on college campuses in the 1990s has been the growth of the campus arm of candidate campaigns and the decline of political parties. Texas A&M had Aggies for Bush and Aggies for Brady, promoting GOP candidates for governor and Congress. Aggies for Sharp, Aggies for Mattox, Aggies for Hobby and Aggies for Raymond

promoted Democratic candidates for several statewide offices.

"Our students are interested in issues and candidates but less interested in parties," said Reynolds of A&M. But he also observed that sponsorship of candidate appearances by campaign groups tends to attract only candidate supporters, while more neutral forums have drawn larger crowds in the past.

Chuck Norton, a graduate student at the University of North Texas, believes most students on the Denton campus "are not interested in the political scene. Those who are tend to be more conservative." So he organized the Progressive Students League to address environmental, social justice and civil liberties issues on campus. Concerns include increasing student safety on campus and getting a plastics recycling program.

He blames the two major parties with "turning off a lot of people." But he also noted that collegians have less time for student activities because many have jobs. UNT has more than 150 student organizations, most of which are social or academically oriented. The Social Dance Liberation Front, for example, is really a swing dance club.

But there are opportunities for political action in such groups as

Students for Life; the Women's Collective, which promotes feminist issues; the Students Peace Action Network; and Courage, a group concerned with gay-lesbian issues to name a few.

Cat-lovers at UNT organized the Campus Cat Coalition after learning the university was trapping stray cats and having them euthanized. The coalition is trying to control the cat population by getting the animals sterilized and neutered and finding homes for younger cats.

Jerry Yeric, associate professor of political science at UNT, has seen students move from the anti-establishment phase of the 1970s to an ultraconservatism in the 1980s to now an era of wider interests and tolerance for a diversity of views, such as on presidential impeachment.

"They're more interested in specific issues that are going to affect them when they get out, environment, health care, employment," he said. He finds his class discussions more thoughtful and students politically more knowledgeable, thanks in part to CNN and the Internet.

"They can relate to the Jesse Venturas of the world," he said, referring to Minnesota's Reform governor. "But they see very little difference between Democrats and Republicans. 'They're more sophisticated, in many ways.'"

Students battle ban on federal aid to those convicted of drug crimes

By Carol Lewis
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

Opposition is growing on college campuses to a provision of the Higher Education Act that withholds federal financial aid from students convicted of selling or possessing drugs. Congress passed the provision in the fall to send a message to young drug users, but opponents say that it denies money to troubled students when they need it most to turn their lives around, that it fails to address drug intervention and education, and that it ignores other types of criminal behavior.

Many college students are becoming aware of the provision but worry about its ramifications. "I am a little scared myself. I know how people's names get dropped, and

they can get arrested," said Hunter Russell, a junior at the University of Texas at Dallas. "My main fear is being in the wrong place at the wrong time. I could lose my financial aid. I'm pretty dependent on it."

The provision, part of the Higher Education Act Amendments of 1998, goes into effect in fall 2000 and denies grants, loans and work assistance to students convicted under federal or state law. Students can lose at least one year of financial aid for a drug possession conviction and at least two years for a conviction of selling drugs.

Eligibility can be reinstated during the suspension if students complete rehabilitation and pass two random drug tests, but the law does not define rehabilitation, said Judy Schneider, assistant vice president and director

of Student Financial Aid at the University of Texas at Arlington.

"We are somewhat hopeful that Congress will address some of the questions and actually reverse its position and not tie financial aid to the issue," said Schneider, president of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. "We do not feel like it's an issue that should be tied to receiving financial aid."

The opinion is shared by Drug Reform Coordination Network officials in Washington, who are trying to spread awareness of the provision through an online newsletter.

Student leaders at UT-Dallas and 130 other campuses are reviewing the provision to determine whether they will support a resolution to ask Congress to overturn it, said Adam

Smith, the network's associate director.

"The provision is a misguided way to fight the war on drugs," said Smith, who is helping students to coordinate the campaign. "Given the racial disparity in drug law enforcement, this will inevitably have a discriminatory impact. It will deny education to those for whom it is most vital: the poor, the nonwhite and nonviolent young people who have had previous contact with the criminal justice system and who are trying to turn their lives around."

Reports of increasing drug arrests among college students have contributed to lawmakers' frustration, but their approach should have focused on intervention and treatment, said Irma P. Jones, coordinator of substance abuse

prevention and vice president for student affairs at University of North Texas.

"This is part of the 'let's get tough on drugs' attitude," she said. "I hope this is not a political ploy on the part of someone who wants to come up with a solution." U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass. gave the students' campaign a boost last week by introducing a bill to repeal the provision. But it most likely will be opposed by lawmakers such as House Majority Leader Dick Army, R-Texas, who strongly supported the provision.

"Every criminal who gets funding takes away from other students who need it," said Jim Wilkinson, Army's press secretary. "There are so many kids in the inner city that do not have access to money for

education who want to get out of their situations and to make something out of their lives. To think that some students get turned down because a drug dealer gets it, is a big concern." Not all students consider the provision a slap in the face.

Jesse Martin, a junior political science major at UNT, said he has grieved for friends killed or injured in drug or alcohol-related accidents and believes that the provision will force students re-evaluate substance abuse. "That is not a harsh punishment at all. It's not denying them financial aid forever," Martin said. "They have the option of rehabilitation. It gives them reason for rehabilitation to help put their lives together. Their education will mean more to them."

Businesses damaged during weekend riot at Michigan State

By Mary Sell
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As shards of glass are cleared away and boards replace broken glass windows, East Lansing business owners and MSU students are wondering how a basketball game resulted in property destruction.

"College students get drunk every weekend, but they don't riot," said Kristyn Hausauer, a journalism senior and shift supervisor at Bruegger's Bagels, 505 E. Grand River Ave. "It is hard to believe that college students could act so irresponsibly."

The bagel shop's glass door was shattered when rioters threw a

wooden barricade through it. It was among at least 24 downtown windows damaged in this weekend's riot, according to statistics released Sunday by East Lansing police. The riot began as fans flooded city and campus streets after MSU lost the men's basketball game. Fires and destruction continued until nearly dawn.

"We already lost a couple hundred bucks just to put that wood in there," Hausauer said of the plywood board that replaced the glass. Hausauer said the only thing businesses can do to prevent broken windows is "pray that it never happens again."

Attempting to avoid destruction as crowds swarmed the city, Joel Lichty,

owner of Veritas Wine Shop, 110 Division St., kept the lights off Saturday night. He stayed in the business in case rioters broke in, but his store was untouched. "I was really angry, but you don't know who to focus your anger on," said Lichty, who has been at the Division Street location for two years. "This is the worst yet."

Connected to Lichty's store is Footgear, 108 Division St., where a large window was broken and single shoes were taken from a display. "This store is not a chain," said Sharon Waldron, an English senior and employee. "There are only two people who work here so this is going to be a big expense. 'I've worked here

for three years, so it is kind of like my store, too. You're not hurting the city, you're hurting the individual store owners."

Waldron said students' reaction after the game was ridiculous. "People are more worried about a basketball game than (the fact) we are bombing people (in Kosovo)," she said.

Businesses weren't the only victims of property damage. Animal science freshman Claire Lowe was sleeping in her residence hall when someone woke her to tell her her 1981 DeLorean had been flipped on its roof on Abbott Road near Campbell Hall around 11 p.m. A DeLorean is featured in the "Back to the Future" films.

"This place is full of such intelligent

people, and people have such ridiculous actions," Lowe said. Windows also were broken at Quality Dairy, 1109 E. Grand River Ave., when a man fled after attacking a female security guard who was trying to close the store on police request, said Dustin Rayner, a store employee.

Laura Griffin, a University of Michigan biopsychology sophomore, said she lent her 1989 Ford Tempo to her boyfriend for the weekend. Griffin's car was among the eight vehicles destroyed this weekend by rioters.

"My boyfriend has a lot of explaining to do," Griffin said. Griffin had just returned from a conference in Toledo. "I feel kind of mad," she

said. "I just spent this weekend with a bunch of State people from a sorority. (The University of Michigan) lost a hockey game last night and I don't see anything damaged around here."

Other damaged businesses included: Taco Bell, 565 E. Grand River Ave., where two windows were smashed; Student Book Store, 417 E. Grand River, where three windows were smashed; Tcnv's Restaurant, 235 Ann St., where a window was broken; and Jacobson's, 333 E. Grand River, where display windows were broken. A window also was broken in the MSU Federal Credit Union, 523 E. Grand River.

Driver in deadly Kentucky crash says he can't escape that fatal night

College Press Exchange

COLLEGEDALE, Tenn. (CPX) - A University of Kentucky football player who was driving drunk the night his truck crashed, killing two friends who were along for the ride, said he has the forgiveness of their families but can't forgive himself.

"You almost want them to be mad at you because it will make the guilt easier," 21-year-old Jason Watts said of the families of his teammate Arthur Steinmetz, 19, and friend Scott Brock, 21, a student at Eastern Kentucky.

Speaking publicly for the first time since the crash, Watts told a group of students at Southern Adventist University, about 18 miles north of Chattanooga, that he can't shake images of his dead friends and is lucky if he gets three or four hours of sleep each night. Should he manage to think of something else, Watts said the scars

he bears from the accident snap his attention right back to the "stupid mistakes" and "poor judgment" that he says have caused a lot of people a tremendous amount of pain.

"I literally see my buddies dying in my arms because of me," he said. Watts, who spoke March 25 as a part of SAU's drug and alcohol awareness week, said he wants other students to learn from his mistakes. In addition to the "mental and emotional scars that will last forever," Watts said he's facing the outcome of a July 19 trial on two counts of second-degree manslaughter and one count of wanton endangerment.

"Drinking beers and getting behind the wheel is something that could have been avoided," he said. Watts, who was dismissed from the team after the crash, said he spent the night drinking with his friends to celebrate Kentucky's 55-17 Senior Day

victory over Vanderbilt, a win that earned the Wildcats a berth in the Outback Bowl. By early morning, the trio decided they were bored and wanted to hunt deer. Watts was driving along U.S. 27 when it ran off the roadway as he passed a car, hit a mailbox and blew out a back tire.

The three men said nothing to each other knowing they were about to crash, Watts said. The truck flipped, throwing all of them out of the vehicle. Watts went through the windshield. When he came to, Watts said he ran first to Brock, who smiled at him before dying. Then he said he ran to Steinmetz, who died in his arms.

"When you think about it, I should've been the first to go," Watts said, adding that he wanted to die along with his friends and even tried holding his breath in the ambulance that whisked him away for treatment.

At the hospital, Watts' blood-alcohol level was 1 1/2 times the legal limit. He had a foot-long gash on his right arm that has required surgery several times. He also had injured ribs and cuts on his left shoulder and back that needed to be stitched and stapled.

Sadly, it was not the first time Watts had been in trouble for drinking, he said. Watts shot then-teammate Oscar Smith in the buttocks as they handled a rifle outside the house they shared in October 1997. Two hours after the shooting, Watts' blood-alcohol content was 0.129. He was charged with unlawful discharge of a weapon.

But if he didn't learn a lesson then, he certainly has now, he said. He told the audience at SAU that he feels as if he's now living three lives, his and those of his dead friends.

"It's rough, but it's nowhere near as rough as it is on the families," he said.

School pulls plug on radio show after students read from Salinger novel

College Press Exchange

DE PERE, Wis. (CPX) - A couple of students at St. Norbert College said they were kicked off the air after they read eight pages from *The Catcher in the Rye* during their weekly campus radio show.

Murray McGough and Christopher Danczyk, both students enrolled at the Roman Catholic school, said the director of campus security showed up in the radio station's studios a little more than an hour into their two-hour, March 4 broadcast, ordering them to sign off. The pair said the officer told them a college priest had complained about their use of offensive language on the air and that school officials had

instructed him to yank them off the air.

School officials confirmed that someone was dispatched to the station after a caller complained that the broadcast, which could be heard only on campus, contained obscene language, but they insist they didn't pull the plug on the show.

McGough and Danczyk said they read passages from J.D. Salinger's famous, and oft-censored, novel because they wanted to try something new. To protest the school's actions, the two students devoted their next show to reading sex-related passages from the Bible.