

Jesus ate beef, and other Texan reflections

You can learn a lot about a place from its airport. Or at least, you can learn a lot about Texas from spending six-and-a-half hours in the Houston International Airport. It's not enough time to get a real sense, but enough time to reinforce all the stereotypes.

People really do call you ma'am. And none of them seem to mean it. It's sort of like they say it half as habit and half to keep you happy enough not to pull a gun on them. A woman at Wendy's who called me ma'am at least three times in as many seconds told me they were out of Frostys — but assured me it was nothing personal against me. As if I thought she was stashing a load of chocolate shakes in the back room to spite me and I could only get one by threatening to kill her.

Which may be why security was such a big issue. Apparently even after people have gone through a metal detector the escalators need to be heavily guarded for any illicit trafficking that might occur on the revolving 20 steps. Drugs. Guns. Frostys. So two people are always watching you — one at the top, one at the bottom.

But at least the escalator watchers have it better than the shuttle drivers. Intended for the old

and infirm — although I actually saw one woman run to catch one — these people drive up and down the airport all day. With no horns.

These are Texas' real cowboys. Wading through hordes of people on nothing more than an elaborate golf cart requires a steady hand and a ready distaste for virtually everyone. So here's how they do it — they try to act like they are horns. They all just bellow out these low guttural beeeeeeeppps over and over. I heard one guy, who must have been new, try to "pardon

me" and "excuse me" his way through the crowd but eventually when no one moved he just started beeeeeeeppping too.

The carts drive right through the airport's food court. A whole food court. Subway was there. Taco Bell was there. The combined barbeque (bar-b-q) and pancake house with the neon sign was there. And the beer place, which opens in time for breakfast. At eleven thirty in the morning one table already had empty beer bottles.

And you know anyone who's drinking beer that early had to be wearing a cowboy hat. Because people really do wear cowboy hats there. And cowboy boots, big ass

buckle belts and string ties. And for anyone who forgot theirs, the gift shop was well stocked.

Which might seem fine until you consider the equivalent — it's not like all Nova Scotians wear sou'westers, gum boots and hidden fiddles.

It was like wondering into some part of the Epcot Center where people are paid to act like caricatures of themselves.

"Why thank you Bobby Sue," Bubba would say in his thick drawl wearing the full Marlboro Man get up. "Now why don't y'all follow me over to the oil rig room for a film strip on cattle ranching and cussing."

People didn't just live the stereotypes, they were proud of them.

The gift shop also had "Don't Mess with Texas" key chains, bumper stickers and shot glasses. And lots of crosses.

Because a lot of people in Texas really do want to know if you have a church. They want to know if you know Jesus loves you. Because they have just a li'l pamphlet or two to prove it and would love to give it to you.

Just smile and say thank you ma'am.

Oh, and these people invariably eat beef. Jesus ate beef.

Just smile and say yes ma'am.

SHELLEY ROBINSON

EDITORIAL

OPINIONS

The Letters/Opinions section of the Gazette is meant as a campus forum for all Dalhousie students. The opinions expressed within may not necessarily be those of the Gazette staff or editorial board. We welcome all submissions, but reserve the right to edit for style and content. It is the Gazette's policy not to print racist, sexist or homophobic material.

Show me the money! Some financial news on Dalhousie

Much has happened in the Board of Governors since our last report in November. For the purpose of this article though, we will again be covering mostly financially related matters.

First, a few words about the budget surplus. Halfway through every fiscal year, the university always does a review of its finances. The review this year showed that there was a \$800,000 surplus. It may seem like a lot but this is less than 1 percent of Dalhousie's operating budget. The surplus was due primarily to an increase in enrolment for Computer Science. The extra money has been allocated to the library (which suffered from the drop in the Canadian dollar), the Faculty of Computer Science (where a lot of the money came from), improvements in computers (God knows, we need it) and debt refinancing (the financial policy of the 90s).

Second, something that you may find interesting is the way in which you will pay your tuition next year (well except for DalTech students). Per-course tuition will begin when the new Banner information system is implemented in the upcoming academic year to address the Y2K problem.

On one hand, this will be good news for students who take only 4 courses and were paying a full time student's tuition. More good news comes in the fact that an Arts student and a Science student taking the same course will no longer be paying different amounts for that course.

On the other hand, since students will no longer be "donating" money to the university by paying for courses they are not taking, overall tuition will be raised by approximately 1.5 percent to make up for the shortfall.

Third, have you ever used Dalhousie Health Services? It was discovered one and a half years ago that the centre, located in Howe Hall, is in financial trouble. Administration considered cutting back on services (like weekend hours) but it important for students to have a place where they can get weekend medical service other than the hospital. The university also did not want to lose control over the service by having an outside party provide it. Since the centre is already running efficiently, it became apparent that more money needs to be put towards Health Services. Currently, the university gives only a small amount to the

centre but cannot afford to give more. Therefore, in the upcoming year, each full time student will be paying \$7 to \$10 per term towards the centre in the form of a Health Services Fee. Sure, it sucks that we have to pay more money. However, we feel this is an important service to have and, on the flip side, they will be eliminating some of the current fees at the centre. For example, you won't have to pay for sick notes anymore!

Fourth, the Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) gave its recommendations for next year's budget in January. Notable changes include more money for student employment (security shifts in the new buildings) and increases in the library and scholarship/bursary budgets. However, two important lines were missing from the budget: tuition fees and budget units. The first item is self-explanatory. The second outlines how much money is given to the "units" (faculties and departments) of the university. In order to balance the university budget, there needs to be a tuition fee hike and a corresponding reduction in the unit budgets. The Committee did not make a recommendation on these figures because it wants input from the members of the Board (including us). Our mandate is pretty clear: keep tuition as low as possible. However, a severe reduction in faculty and departmental budgets could also have a negative impact on the education of students. As more discussion is made, we will keep you updated.

Finally, you may ask yourself what have students accomplished on the Board? Besides attending meetings, we also advocate student issues. One visible success we have had this year was passing a 'Student Accessibility' motion. This motion states that the University reaffirms its policy on tuition, basically stating that 'where permitted' Dalhousie is committed to making tuition as affordable as possible. The success of the motion is that it will appear under the University mission statements, therefore every year when Board members (who set tuition) get their updated Board handbooks, one of the very first pages they will see will emphasize this policy. The Handbook outlines the mission statement, critical issues and other policies of the University but until now, it contained no statement about tuition. The intention here is to remind Board members to keep tuition affordable a high priority.

LEVEL CHAN
DSU Board of Governors
Representative

Oh look Reggie, they're having a fundraising dance!

I am so there Wilbur. I am sooo there!



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All submissions must be typed double-spaced on paper, e-mailed, or on a Mac or IBM 3 1/2 inch disk, in a WP version not greater than Word 6.0 or equivalent. The deadline is Mondays at 4:30 p.m.

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