

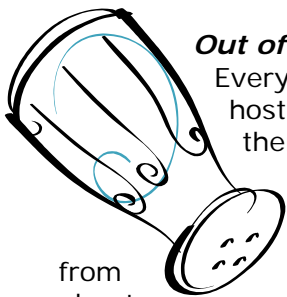
**Vignettes in Ministry:** Houston Area Baptist Student Ministry

By Jonathan Brooks

Making the most of unexpected opportunities. That phrase could be the theme for three Houston-area Baptist Student Ministries (BSMs) for the fall of 2008. Below is a series of three vignettes depicting how three different BSMs have been able to reach out to students on their campus in the midst of an unexpected opportunity.

- o *Out of the Salt Shaker at Rice University*
- o *High Leverage in the Short Term at University of Houston*
- o *A Good Thing Comes Out of Ike at Houston Baptist University*

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***Out of the Salt Shaker at Rice University***

Every year during the weekend before Halloween, students at Rice University host "The Night of Debauchery" or "NOD". This quite large party is a sexually-themed "costume" party of which the point is to wear as little clothing as possible and to drink alcohol as much as possible.

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According to Andy Dennis, BSM Director at Rice University, anywhere 1,200 to 1,800 students have been known to attend the party, which is one-third to one-half of the undergraduate student population. "There's drinking and lots of really poor choices that happen throughout the evening, and somehow NOD makes it okay," said Dennis. "Many of the involved begin drinking way before the party actually gets started at 10 PM."

In the past, Christian organizations at Rice have traditionally just hosted Christian alternatives to NOD. They have hosted alternatives such as "The Night of Innocence," which includes wearing more modest pajamas and watching Disney movies and "Gym-mania," which includes eating pizza and playing dodgeball.

"After last year [Dennis' first year as director at the Rice BSM], I asked our students the question, 'How would Jesus respond to our friends at NOD? Would He be playing dodgeball while people trashed their lives?'" said Dennis. "Students responded that we should be serving instead."

During this year's NOD, the Rice BSM partnered with the Wellness Center at Rice. Rice BSM students drove golf carts from the party to the dorms where they live. They also brought water and blankets for the scantily-clad, party-goers as well to help protect them from dehydration after a night of drinking too much alcohol and to protect them from cold weather. Dennis noted that they drove the golf carts until about 3 in the morning.

"Driving golf carts during NOD this year was a great way for me to reach out through compassion to my peers," said Avery Cate, a sophomore mechanical engineering major. "It was not hard to see the needs of many of the students we served that night: too much to drink, too far to walk, and sometimes no friends there to help them back.

"I spent about an hour helping one girl who was barely able to sit up in the cart she was so far gone. I held her up the entire ride to her college, and when she started throwing up, I continued holding her until Emergency Medical Services [EMS] arrived, checked her out, and helped her up the elevator to her room. My heart really went out to her, because she had gone out that night looking for a great time and instead found herself sick, cold, and weary.

She was so grateful for the help, and I'm glad for her sake that we were able to be present that night. It was very important for us to be Jesus for our fellow classmates on the night of the biggest party of the year."

"Over and over through the night, there were these kinds of things happening to [Rice BSM] students who were really living out the ideas that Jesus talked about in Matthew 25... except a little differently," said Dennis. "We held hair while you vomited. We gave blankets while you were almost naked. We drove you back when you were unable to walk. We gave you water when you were dehydrated. We were moved to compassion because that's what Jesus would've done."

Dennis observed that this year there were fewer EMS calls and fewer arrests. "If Jesus talked about salt being a preserver, then I kind of like to think that our presence among the party-goers gave some kind of preserving in that environment."

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**High Leverage in the Short Term at University of Houston**



With a campus as diverse and international as the University of Houston, Tamara Brooks, director of the UH BSM, never knows what each semester will bring. Frequently, visiting scholars from universities in countries around the world will spend from one semester to one year at UH conducting research in their respective fields of expertise. During the fall of 2008, a group of such visitors landed on the steps of the UH BSM.

visitors noted Brooks. "This particular group is different from visiting scholars who have encountered our ministry in the past in that this group is composed of visiting business people. The group was sent by their employer in China to study in their related field on the campus of UH for one semester."

"During this semester, we have a group of about 15-20 from China who have been frequenting the UH BSM,"

One of the goals of this group of Chinese business people while in the United States is to practice conversational English. The group asked the International Student & Scholar Services Office (ISSSO) at UH about opportunities to practice English. An employee in the ISSSO referred them to the weekly conversational English classes held at the UH BM.

The weekly, Friday classes held at the UH BSM are conducted by four volunteers who represent three UBA churches. The volunteers use the Bible as curriculum for leading the conversational English classes, which means that international students and visitors not only are able to practice English, but they are also exposed to the Bible.

Due to the short term nature of the group of visiting business people and their level of interest, the volunteers have added an additional meeting time on Wednesday afternoons. By adding this additional meeting time, the group has also been exposed to the UH BSM's FREE LUNCH, which happens each Wednesday immediately prior to the class. During FREE LUNCH, which is sponsored weekly by a different church, the visiting business people are able to have conversations with UH BSM staff and students.

The UH BSM has also invited the visiting business people to participate in such events as the pumpkin carving night held in October and the upcoming Thanksgiving dinner, which is held in conjunction with the Catholic student center next door to the UH BSM. "Since we have such a short time with these visitors, we want to make the most of this opportunity," said Brooks. "We have this one semester to share the love of Christ with them. We hope that the time we have been able to invest in their lives will have an eternal impact."

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### ***A Good Thing Comes out of Ike at Houston Baptist University***

For most people, having their office rendered unusable by Hurricane Ike is a bad thing. For Danny Miller, BSM director at Houston Baptist University, this seemingly "bad thing" has actually been a good thing. "HBU received about 17 million dollars in damage as a result of [Hurricane] Ike," said Miller. "The Brown Administration Building where my office was located was one of the hardest hit. The Spiritual Life offices are currently being housed in the [Eula Mae] Baugh Center."



The Baugh

According to Miller, this

Center also houses *The Corner Pawket* student lounge. According to Miller, this lounge has primarily been utilized by International and non-Christian students in the past. He further noted that prior to Ike, the main student lounge for American and Christian students at HBU was the M. D. Anderson Student Center, which was lost as a result of Ike. "Because of the loss of the M. D. Anderson Student Center, all students – both American and International, Christian and non-Christian – were forced to hang out in the same space," said Miller.

Not only has the loss of the M. D. Anderson Student Center forced HBU students to integrate, but it has also put Miller in the middle of student traffic patterns since his office is located in a study room in the Baugh Center. "I am not sure if [the Spiritual Life offices] were put here by design or default, but this change has been a huge step for student ministries."

Miller related that in the past students would rarely visit his office. Apart from a few student leaders, students would primarily only stop by if absolutely necessary.

"Now, students stop by quite frequently since we are near where they hang out. I recently had a Muslim student with whom I had had a few conversations with in the past drop by my office, sit down, and want to talk. I was able to ask him about his Ramadan experience this year and if he was able to keep his fast.

"While my current office is only about one-fourth the size of my previous office and there are files I still cannot find because they are packed away in boxes somewhere at the University, conversations like the one above would have never have happened pre-Ike. Instead of us having to go to students, we are now right here in the midst of them."

*For more information about Houston Area Baptist Student Ministries contact Nick Howard, Area Coordinator, at (713) 805-3740 or Jeff Berger, UBA Student Ministry Team Chair, at (713) 723-6428.*