

"The Lion King" roared onto campus last week. Get a behind-the-scenes look at the Tony Award-winning musical



SEAN COOK / THE STATE NEWS

The animatronic head of Scar is posed in the forward, "veral" position. The mask is made of carbon fiber and turkey feathers and weighs only 9 ounces.

The State News

Opening New Doors

Policy gives transgender students options in deciding their living arrangements

By Brittany Hansas
THE STATE NEWS

He hadn't even left home for his freshman year at MSU, but animal science senior Uri Donnett and his family had spent months talking to housing officials over the phone, hoping to resolve a conflict. Donnett, a transgender student assigned to a female floor and female roommate in Brody Hall, said the arrangement would have been uncomfortable. And even when he succeeded in attaining a single room in another hall, Donnett said he felt out of place in his own room and uncomfortable in the bathroom he shared with two female suiteates.

"Your living situation automatically outs you, puts you in a situation that is not comfortable, when the whole purpose of a living situation is to be comfortable," Donnett said. "You have to walk onto these very gendered floors and that experience can be very difficult."

Almost three years later, students in Donnett's situation might avoid similar conflicts under MSU's transgender student housing policy, which went into effect within the last year.

The policy offers transgender students a say in their housing assignment by working with MSU's LGBT Resource Center and Department of Residence Life. It enables transgender students to create a living arrangement based on their gender identity.

A student who is biologically female but identifies as male, such as Donnett, could have the opportunity to room with a male student.

"Assignments are really about what works best for them — sometimes the student has identified another student they'd love to live with, and we work to make that happen," said Brent Bilo-deau, director of the LGBT Resource Center. "Sometimes they want to live in an apartment. We want to create opportunities for students to let they can be successful there."

Transgender housing

Under a policy introduced last year, transgender students can create a housing arrangement that reinforces their gender identification by working with the LGBT Resource Center and Department of Residence Life.

While there is no guarantee all of a student's preferences will be met, every attempt will be made to create the best possible situation.

Several MSU students have used the policy to arrange their housing.

SOURCE: LGBT RESOURCE CENTER AND DEPARTMENT OF RESIDENCE LIFE

Although there is no guarantee all students' preferences can be met, every effort will be made to find the best housing situation possible, he said. MSU's policy is guided by the wants and needs of each individual student on a case-by-case basis, Bilo-deau said.

Although some universities across the country have begun to take steps toward gender-neutral housing — which creates opportunities for mixed-gender housing — many schools in the Midwest have not enacted such policies.

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SEAN COOK/THE STATE NEWS

Animal science senior Uri Donnett sits beneath a pride flag and in front of postcards and pictures taped to the wall in his dorm room. Donnett was the first student to live openly under a recent housing policy that allows transgender students to live in an assignment that makes them comfortable. Donnett said of the policy: "It helps when you can live as yourself."

LENDING

Top lender modifies student loan deals

By Allison Bush
THE STATE NEWS

Racking up student loans and paying them off for decades will no longer be a reality for students taking loans from the nation's largest private student lender.

Starting in 2009-10, Sallie Mae will scale back the amount of time students have to pay back loans to five to 15 years, from 15-30 years. The lender also will require students to make interest payments while still in school.

Sallie Mae representatives said although students will have less time to repay loans, paying off some interest while still in school will prevent monthly bills from rising dramatically after graduation.

Telecommunication, information studies and media sophomore Kyle Gee, who has a private loan from Citibank, said he would try to secure loans elsewhere if ob-

Loan changes

Sallie Mae, the largest private student lender, will require students to pay student loans back within five to 15 years of graduation beginning with the 2009-10 school year.

Sallie Mae also will require students to pay interest on their loans while in school.

3,178 MSU students received private loans during the 2007-08 school year.

SOURCES: MSU OFFICE OF FINANCIAL AID, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

er private lending companies followed. Sallie Mae representatives said "That's the reason you're taking out loans," he said. "You can pay them back when you're graduated with a job and have more money."

During the 2007-08 school

year, 3,178 MSU students used private loans, said Val Meyers, an MSU associate director of financial aid. About 26,000 students receive financial aid, but most of them apply for federal loans, he said.

"The private loans are less desirable because the federal loans don't require you to have credit background if you're a borrower," Meyers said. "The interest rate on federal loans is a fixed rate and is set by the government."

David Schweikhardt, a professor from the Department of Agricultural, Food and Resource Economics, said Sallie Mae may have changed its policy to attract more private investors who supply lenders with funding in the form of bonds.

"Anything you can do to

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GRADUATE ISSUES

Members still concerned about graduate student group election

By Kayla Habermehl
THE STATE NEWS

Confusion and a whirlwind of he-said, she-said has persisted following the controversial election last week of the Council of Graduate Students' next president.

Paul Curran, the group's former vice president for internal affairs, announced during the March 18 questioning of incumbent presidential candidate Manish Madan and challenger Rachel Naegle that he had completed an internal investigation into Madan's presidency.

Madan went on to lose the election to Naegle. Naegle received 15 votes, Madan received 11 and five people abstained, said Stefan Fletcher, the newly elected vice president for internal affairs.

Curran's report cited numer-

ous issues, including conflicts between Madan and another representative. It also stated that Madan didn't follow certain procedures for scheduling meetings and appointing someone to fill the open position of parliamentarian on the executive board within allotted time.

Numerous council members voiced outrage that the report hadn't been presented sooner. Curran said he had just finished the report earlier the day of the election.

According to COGS constitution, elections must be held at the second to last regularly scheduled meeting of the year. Members were concerned about the delivery of

INVESTIGATION

Task force to evaluate Chicano group director

By Jacob Carpenter
THE STATE NEWS

Amnosity between the MSU Chicano/Latino Studies program director and students over the director's performance will be the subject of an investigation by a College of Social Science task force in the coming weeks after students called for her job.

About 30 people — most of them affiliated with the Chicano/Latino Studies program — vented frustration with Sheila Contreras, the program's director, in a meeting with social science dean Marjette Baba on Wednesday.

The students said Contreras has attempted to dismantle the Chicano/Latino Fellows Program, a mentorship project, and has disrespected students who complained about her job performance.

The students also said Contreras has received a vote of no confidence from staff and students, restricted access to office space typically open to Chicano/Latino Studies students, been unresponsive to communication made by students and created a list of troublemakers who have been critical of her.

"We're trying to work with it and put in our input as much as we could, but the fact is that this semester, we basically saw the elimination of the Fellows Program and her attitude was getting worse and we were systematically getting shut out of the office," said Gabriela Alcizar, an international relations and social relations and policy junior who is part of the Chicano/Latino Studies program.

"We were trying to work around stuff before and compromise, but she wasn't listening to anything that anyone was saying."

Contreras denied claims that there are plans to cut the Chicano/Latino Fellows Program and said she has been responding to student complaints. She added she didn't know the details of the problems students had identified regarding access to office space reserved for the program in South Kedzie Hall and denied allegations of creating a "troublemaker list."

Contreras referred questions related to a vote of no confidence and her process of responding to students' complaints to the College of Social Science's dean's office.

"We have a pretty good process going to look at the student concerns and to respond to them in the most generous and professional way," Contreras said.

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PUT THE PHONE DOWN

A bill recently introduced in the state Senate seeks to ban texting while driving, page 3A

Weather

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