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[Islam101@tamu.edu](mailto:Islam101@tamu.edu)

# AGGIELIFE

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## Nine Dutch roommates compete for cash

ALMERE, Netherlands (AP) — Ruud absent-mindedly sweeps the kitchen floor. A few minutes later, he takes out the trash. Bored, he lights a cigarette and sits down to strum his guitar.

And a million Dutch viewers, roughly one in 15 people, watch every tedious move.

This is "Big Brother," a new television and Internet show that is enjoying unprecedented popularity and controversy with its unique approach to reality TV: nine strangers confined for 100 days in a house packed with surveillance gadgetry, all for a shot at fame and a \$120,000 prize.

"This type of show appeals to a certain sense of voyeurism in all of us, like listening in on a nearby conversation or walking past a house and glancing in the window," executive producer of "Big Brother" Paul Romer said. "There is something magical about being able to listen to and watch other people."

Drawing its name from George Orwell's classic novel 1984, the show takes the idea of an omnipresent Big Brother to the brink of the new millennium by isolating and continuously monitoring the participants from mid-September to New Year's Eve. There are nightly updates on TV and live Webcasts via an Internet site that has been swamped with more than 11 million hits since the show began.

With 24 cameras and 59 microphones placed throughout the house, even the bathroom is utterly devoid of privacy.

There is a twist to this carefully constructed Orwellian world: Every few weeks, the participants nominate one or more of their fellow housemates to leave the Almere homestead, about 20 miles east of Amsterdam. The show's viewers have the final say on who

gets the boot and on Dec. 31 will select a winner from among the final three survivors.

While admitting the setup is "a little cruel," Romer said psychologists regularly were consulted during the show's three-year development, and the participants' last names have been withheld to protect their identities.

Despite the show's competitive nature, Romer stressed the participants were instructed to "just be themselves."

**"They also know  
that in the end  
there can be only  
one winner."**

— Paul Romer  
Executive director  
of "Big Brother"

"It is very much a mix of group psychology versus the individual," he said. "As a group, they must work together to survive and get things done. But they also know that in the end there can be only one winner. You can feel and see these two ideas competing with each other."

Martin, 32, was the first to feel the wrath of these contradicting forces. After a failed attempt to thwart a budding romance between Bart, 23, and Sabine, 25, Martin's popularity took a nosedive, and he was voted out after less than two weeks on the show.

Even for a loser, there are perks. Martin entered the house an anonymous citizen and left a celebrity sought after for interviews and TV appearances.

"It's been a big surprise," he said. "It's very strange, it's like being in a whole new world."

"Big Brother" is produced by Endemol, a Dutch entertainment company, and airs on the oriented Veronica network, that it has snagged 40 percent of viewers in the 20-34 age group. Other stations are scrambling to get in on the action.

One rival network even has its own celebrity reporter game show behind enemy lines, featuring candy and beer to the surprise of "Brother" inhabitants.

CBS recently announced it will air its own "reality adventure" house in the summer. "Survivor" will be a series of strangers in a uninhabited island in the South China Sea, who will gradually be voted out until a single winner can claim a \$1 million prize.

A Swedish version of the show began with a dark incident in an opening season of "Explores" Robinson" in 1997, the contestant declared a loser and committed suicide a month after being voted out.

The idea of a real-life social experiment is not new. MTV's "The Real World" and "Road Rules" series have been peeking into not-so-private lives for eight seasons. The phenomenon has been lampooned by Hollywood in "The Truman Show" and "Survivor."

"Big Brother" has its critics. The Netherlands Society of Psychologists branded it "irresponsible and unethical" while others called it a type of mental torture. Now, most commentaries call it dull.

"Big Brother" is all emptiness — and every day millions of people, there is a cape," Joost Zwagerman wrote in a recent commentary in newspaper De Volkskrant.

## GRADES

Continued from Page 3

"I just cannot comprehend science," Shaffer said. "I was getting depressed because my grade was going down, and I couldn't do anything to stop it. I'm glad I only had to take one class in science, so the damage done wasn't so bad."

When worry over grades gets in the way of extracurricular experiences, problems arise. Dr. Jay Malon Southerland, vice president for student affairs, said A&M students generally handle the strain of both sides of the student-life coin well.

"We really have done both academics and leadership experience in tandem," Southerland said. "Hindsight says we have done really well on both counts, but being a student — and being in school — is of primary importance."

A major litmus test for academic expectations are the achievements of the freshman classes which are recruited every year.

A&M recruits above-average students, so academic competition follows.

"What you have here is success breeding success," Southerland said. "As the institution becomes more well-known, more students are attracted to the University."

So many students were attracted to A&M last spring that 3,000 applicants who met the minimum requirements for admission were turned down.

Forty-seven percent of incoming freshmen were from the top 10 percent of their graduating classes, with an average SAT score of 1180 and an average ACT composite score of 25.2.

Wehrly said, this, combined with A&M's approach to determining one's overall grade-point ratio, can create intense academic pressure.

"A&M has policies that make receiving a good grade a little tougher than at other institutions,"

Wehrly said. "For example, when you retake a course here, your average for the course is determined by the averages from every time you've taken the course before, not just the best grade you got. If you got last time you took the class."

Serrano said some unique symptoms peaked the high-grade junkie.

"It's not that I think I'm not learning the material," Serrano said. "I spend a lot of time in classes. At the time of the test, I get real nervous. After the test, I'm relaxed and thinking of answers I couldn't think of inside the test. You think, 'I have to make a good grade. I have to make it,' and it distracts you."

Wehrly said students who succeed usually are those who take professors' advice and strive to understand the required material instead of trying to get a good grade their goal.

"I'd rather the students learn both what they think they need to know," he said. "I'd learn what I'd like them to learn, they will do it. I'm not wedded to a grade distribution."

Even the Faculty Senate concerns itself with students' grades.

"We ask ourselves, 'Should we have the system we use now, or add a plus and minus use numerical grades?'" Wehrly said. "Somebody would rather go pass/fail."

There is hope for the grade-obsessed student. "Two weeks ago, I changed my mind," Wehrly said. "I was not going out, not going to party anything. Now, I'm trying to relax a little bit, slowing down."

Shaffer said his outlook on college life changed when he decided grades were not everything.

"Look around you before you get out of here," he said. "If you get caught up in believing everything, you miss everything that you're really shouldn't be missing. The world won't be a cause of a 'C.'"

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# jazz 101

New Orleans jazz dominates the syllabus of this one night only offering thanks to the music of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. Students are encouraged to sit back, relax and let these jazz sounds transport them to the French Quarter. Please note, Jazz 101 administers no tests and assigns no homework. Offered by MSC OPAS, Preservation Hall Jazz Band should be attended for enjoyment purposes only.

To register for Jazz 101, call the MSC Box Office at 845-1234 or visit our website at [opas.tamu.edu](http://opas.tamu.edu).

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