

Registries are unfair to those who served time

Forget the proverbial “turning over of a new leaf” – it’s bolted to the floor, ugly side up. You’re a registered sex offender, and the public’s need to know supercedes your chance to reform.

Last week, the Truman Department of Public Safety released the annual campus crime reports. Follow the link to the DPS Web site and one finds, sandwiched between links for “vehicle registration forms” and “alcohol rules and laws,” Missouri’s very own mandated blacklist – the sex offender registry.

This continually updated list is in keeping with the Wetterling Act, passed in 1994, which requires states to create a registry of individuals charged with sex crimes. Since the act’s original passage, amendment after amendment has made the scarlet letter increasingly more prominent and restrictive, with the formation of community sex-offender notification programs, life registry for certain crimes and required registration on a national listing. Most recently, states have begun dictating where sex offenders can and cannot live – no closer than 1,000 feet to a school, for example. So far, 17 states have passed laws creating such virtual fences.

Despite the fact that these laws constitute a retroactive punishment long after the offender’s sentence has been served, they also do a disservice to the safety-concerned public. Stamping “Dangerous Predator” on the forehead of every person who’s ever committed



Katie Gilbert

a sexual crime generates self-fulfilling prophecies galore, giving convicts little incentive to start afresh and leave their old ways behind. Jack Levin, director of the Brudnick Center on Violence, said that such burdens and ostracism can encourage offenders to “re-criminalize.”

“Sooner or later, it becomes so difficult for them to adjust that they commit another crime,” The Enterprise quoted him as saying.

It goes without saying that no one wants to allow monstrous acts to occur. However, tightening the restraints around offenders little by little until they’re suffocating simply is not the way to keep such atrocities in check.

Judges in a few states, including Iowa, have come to this same conclusion, ruling that the registries be removed from the public’s sight on the grounds that they are unconstitutional. The Michigan registry remained off-line for two years before the Sixth U.S.

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Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the 2004 rule, mandating that it again be made public. The court that decided the case rationalized the decision to reimplement the registry by stating that the list does sex offenders no excessive harm because it supposedly makes no judgments on how dangerous those registered are thought to be.

Oh, of course – a judgment-free sex offender registry. Right. So on a list of thieves where the guy who stole a pack of gum is listed directly under the guy who hijacked a commercial jet, the public is expected to carefully pick and choose which individuals can, say, keep their jobs as pilots? Doubtful. The list isn’t selective in how it applies its stigma.

If only we could be more like the list when doling out basic human rights.

Katie Gilbert is a senior psychology major from Lenexa, Kan.

Lack of accountability among University leaders is troubling

I spoke with three students who went on the study abroad trip chaperoned by Silvia Pites, professor of Spanish, to Salamanca, Spain this past summer. They were extremely dissatisfied with the experience because of the alleged conduct of Pites. They wanted to remain anonymous because they are associated with the Spanish program and fear repercussions for speaking out against division authority. They said other students who went on the trip shared their discontent with Pites, but those students did not speak to me.

The students who did speak to me shared serious allegations concerning Pites’ conduct during the trip. They said she acted unprofessionally, irresponsibly and disrespectfully. One Spanish major said she was particularly upset that Pites did not speak Spanish during the trip, which the student expected would be an experience of foreign language immersion.

The students said they also were dissatisfied with how Pites acted when a male student was assaulted by a local and subsequently hospitalized. One student said she wanted to voice her concerns so other students planning to spend the extra money, time and effort on a study abroad trip chaperoned by Pites would know their experience might not be what they expect.

At least one student said she filed official complaints with the study abroad program and Heinz Woehlk, head of the language and literature department. However, she said she was left with the impression that nothing was going to be done.

When I contacted Pites at the beginning of September, she promptly referred me to



Chris Matthews

Woehlk, saying she would not discuss her conduct. When I contacted Woehlk, he too declined to share any information.

Pites eventually decided to speak with me in the form of a voicemail message. She said there was no legal investigation against her, and no incidents occurred during the study abroad trip. However, it is difficult to believe that several students would individually fabricate the same complaints.

I spoke with Woehlk again last week, and he still was less than cooperative. He even refused to say whether or not any formal complaints had been filed against Pites. I know the nature of complaints filed against faculty members is confidential, but the mere presence of a complaint is not.

Woehlk did say there was no legal investigation into the actions of Pites. However, when asked how the complaints are being handled, he interjected, “I have no further comment” and abruptly ended the conversation. How can we be expected to trust that student complaints are taken seriously by the administration when administrators like

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Woehlk are not forthcoming about how complaints are handled? Woehlk is not legally bound to discuss how complaints are handled, or even if complaints are filed, yet he refused to divulge this information. He is not being as forthcoming as he could and should be.

The Index attempted to shine light on this issue, but according to the editor in chief, a staff reporter could not gain enough information to warrant the printing of a news story. Furthermore, the editor in chief said a news story could not be formulated because Woehlk would not provide adequate information and the student sources did not want their names printed.

A clear message has been sent: Faculty and administrators at this University can act any way they like, and there is no way to know whether or not they will be held accountable for their actions. And there is nothing you can do about it.

Chris Matthews is a senior communication major from St. Joseph, Mo.

University students should be better at prioritizing their lives

I have been a Truman student for a good 2.5 years, and some things still do not fail to amuse me.

Truman has a reputation for accepting only smart students – the average incoming students’ GPA is a smooth 3.8 – and most of the students have had some form of leadership experience.

Truman students, however, are among the most stressed I have seen. The desire to crack straight A’s and to excel in everything they undertake make most of them miserable people.

As one of the very few students who have plenty of time on his hands, I have done extensive research on just how involved many of our students are, and the results have been harsh. I went to the “clubs and jobs” section of Facebook to see how many of us are involved in organizations whose number bordered double digits. The result: a mind-boggling number.

Seriously, I am concerned about what’s happening here. I am worried because a few of my friends clock their lives to the last nanosecond. Their planners look so choc-a-bloc with things to do that it almost looks like the space provided cannot really accommodate them all.

Some of my acquaintances say they don’t have an AIM screen name because it “is a waste of time.” And I was taught to believe that you wasted all your time when you are in college. Once the world of kids and work caught on, one would be too busy, I thought. Wow, does it not suggest that our schedules are in desperate need of loosening?

A good number of Truman students



Prajwal Sharma

don’t even know the line that distinguishes weekdays from weekends. For them, weekends are just times to catch up on things that busy weekdays have no room for: Truman students study during the weekends. Eeks, that’s one pathetic excuse for a life.

And what perfectionists most of us are – I am yet to come across such a high number of students who think getting a B is the equivalent of failing. I finally am getting used to the look of horror and sympathy in people’s eyes when I claim I am happy with a B.

I know of someone who graduated with a 3.98 GPA and decided to work a job that does not even use what she learned in her major. I saw her sprint through college in three years, more stressed out than my dad ever has been, weighing every ounce of her self-worth with the grades she received. She would have gotten the job as easily with a 2.5 GPA. Why then do students invite heart diseases? Is this passion for academic excellence just a feel-good thing – totally useless once you are out of college? And most students are really involved.

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How do they get the time to get involved in so many organizations all at the same time? Is it just a sad résumé-building attempt or the desire to be part of everything on campus?

It’s time students realize that college is not all about being busy and getting great grades. Staying involved and 4.0s are all good – just don’t allow them to be more important than sleep.

Oh, speaking of sleep – when was the last time you had a good eight hours of sleep? And when was the last time you went to bed before midnight? Assess your lives, people, and see where it’s heading. Getting into law school, I am sure, would not be a pretty sight if you went in on a cute wheelchair, right?

And please end your passionate embrace with books and homework during the weekends. You lead one sorry life if schoolwork does occupy your weekends.

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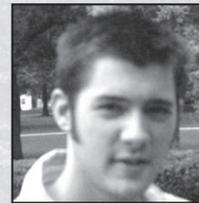
Around the Quad

This week’s question: “What improvements do you think should be made to downtown Kirksville?”



Lindsay Lewis
sophomore

“I’d like to see stores that are more geared toward younger kids. Aesthetically speaking, we could make it prettier with greenery or streetlights, which is how they improved downtown St. Louis.”



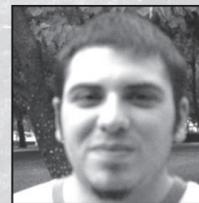
Alan Prater
freshman

“I’ve only seen one music store, Hastings, and their variety of CDs and music is pretty horrible for being the only place you can buy music in Kirksville. I’d like to see a better music store, better selection.”



Alana Webster
freshman

“I’d like to see newer stores and newer things that are in the stores that are there now.”



Josh Beck
sophomore

“I’d like there to be more activities for students to do, maybe like a concert venue or a club for students to go and hang out, listen to music and enjoy themselves.”

Threats must be put in better perspective

No one ever accused the federal government of being efficient.

Even I, with my bleeding liberal heart, understand that the federal government can be a many-limbed monster incapable of a single focus or complete coordination.

I accept the fact that the trade-off I make for government programs involved in everything from education to the military makes the monster larger. Inefficiency is a result.

There are limits to my patience and to the patience of the rest of the nation. Certainly, I do not need to recount all the governmental failures in the wake of Hurricane Katrina:

The most graphic and horrible have been shown on television screens across the country. However, a new mishap committed by FEMA came to light last weekend. It seems taxpayers will pay \$100 million for 182 million pounds of ice ordered to cool medicine and food in the disaster area. About 75 million pounds of the ice was used while the rest was put into storage, according to the Denver Post. Inefficiency can be excused when the positives greatly outweigh the negatives.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, President Bush told American citizens to unite and get ready to fight the War on Terror. The administration preached to us about putting together our safety kits. It advised us to get duct tape to seal our windows in the event of a biological attack. To me, this seemed much like advising students in the ‘50s and ‘60s to get under their desks in case of nuclear attack: useless, but duct tape started flying off store shelves. The government created a color-coded warning system and provided money to first-responders and state governments to train for security threats. Planning, preparation and prevention of terror threats seemed to be the key ingredients. Although I think the threat of terror is overblown – we all are much more likely to die in a car accident or from cancer or a heart attack – the government believed in this threat and was putting its money where its often-misguided mouth was.

Some of you are saying to yourselves that the terror threat is real, and there are people in the world who are trying to kill us. I do not doubt the truth of that. It would be foolish to completely



Katie Stuart

“ We live with cancer in our society every day, scary and threatening to our way of life, but huge in number. Let us remember where the largest threats are coming from. ”

ignore fanatical people that will kill themselves while killing and/or terrorizing as many of us as possible. However, it is also important to put things in perspective. We see images of terrorists who are relatively small in number, scary and threatening to our way of life.

We live with cancer in our society every day, scary and threatening to our way of life but huge in number. Let us remember where the largest threats are coming from.

But I digress. All this money poured into disaster training, preparation and response. Then came Katrina, an opportunity to put all this preparation and training to use. Where was this giant dragon-slayer of a government that the Bush administration promised me? Nowhere to be found. Instead, Katrina was the dragon that felled the giant.

If I wasn’t so convinced that worrying about terrorism all the time would be like constantly fretting about being struck by lightning, I would be more worried about what would happen should our obvious weaknesses be exploited. President Bush has based his presidency on the fear of terrorism.

Because he believes in the war on terror so strongly, I would suggest he be a little more concerned about getting this giant on its feet again.

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