

Shoeless students bare feet

Students lose their shoes for comfort and health reasons

Sara DeGonia

Assistant Features Editor

Fallen acorns probably don't feel quite like sand.

But students are walking barefoot across campus on acorns, gravel, bricks and just about any other surface as a personal choice.

Sophomore Ryan Littleton said he spends most of his time shoeless for a very simple reason.

"I really don't like shoes," he said. "They're really kind of a bother."

Littleton said he kicked off his shoes when he came to Truman last year because it became a feasible option. His high school dress code prevented him from going barefoot, but now that he is in college, he said he is free to walk around sans footwear except while in eating establishments.

"Before I eat I have to pop by my room and pick up some sandals," Littleton said.

As far as weather goes, he said he can tolerate anything other than snow, but it's important to be observant at all times for dangerous objects.

"You've got to watch out for broken glass because people can be stupid about where they throw their trash," Littleton said.

But he said he has never had any injuries because of his bare feet, and the only case of athlete's foot he has experienced occurred while wearing shoes.

"It actually is better to go without shoes all the time than with them some of the times," Littleton said. "... When you wear shoes some of the time, that encloses your feet. It would give something like fungus an atmosphere it can grow in."

He said he thinks walking barefoot actually provides a health benefit.

"It strengthens your ankles

because they aren't supported by artificial things from the outside all the time, so they build up strength of their own, and it's harder to hurt them that way," Littleton said.

As far as personal benefits, he said the effect on his feet makes the experience worthwhile.

"Actually feeling the ground as you walk on it is a really nice feeling," Littleton said. "... Grass is nice, but it tends to get dew all over. Probably the nicest is actually rocks that aren't particularly jagged but do have some texture to them. It actually kind of is like having a foot-sole massage."

Furthermore, he said that social reactions do not even provide a slight reason to consider donning shoes because there is an overall lack of concern about Littleton's and others' bare feet.

"Most people don't care once they get past the initial statement that it's weird," he said. "It's actually starting to get relatively common enough that people don't care."

Littleton said he would encourage others to have a go at bare feet, but he obviously doesn't mind if others wear shoes.

"I've found it to be pretty nice, so it would be worth trying," he said. "... [But] shoes don't offend me, so there's no issue there."

After college Littleton said he plans to continue his shoeless trend.

"I don't see any reason to stop because I personally find shoes very uncomfortable," he said.

Sophomore Kip Raske, who said he also walks around campus barefoot, is similar to Littleton in that the motive behind his lack of footwear is fairly easy to understand.

"I like how it feels on my feet, and that's it really," he said.

The main difference between



Lisa Margetis/Index

Freshman Erin Collins goes barefoot in Dobson Hall on Monday night. Some students said they think going shoeless is becoming more of a trend on campus.

Raske and Littleton is that Raske said he dislikes his feet being wet and will take extra precautions to avoid the elements.

"When I wear shoes, I go all out," Raske said. "I wear big clunky boots that I can't feel anything."

Other than that, he said few

places and objects concern him.

"I say I don't like public bathrooms, but I rarely put my shoes on," he said. "I'm not worried about health issues at all."

He said he does avoid glass, big rocks and other things that might cut his feet.

"If there ever is anything wrong with my feet, I pamper them," Raske said. "If I need to wear shoes, I'll wear shoes. I'm not going to be weird about that."

However, he said he was impressed by his feet after he received an injury.

"Feet are really amazing, I've found," Raske said. "Because I've stepped on some glass before - it's stuck in your foot. As soon as you get it out, your feet will stop bleeding immediately."

In Raske's experience, he said few people aside from his Japanese teacher react to his bare feet, and the dynamics for running are much better. Overall, he said he just likes the way it feels.

"It's like having a kind of different sense," Raske said. "We're used to feeling stuff, like with our hands. Like if you went around without a shirt on all day, it'd be very different because you could feel the wind,

or if you rolled around you could feel the grass. ... It's just that extra sense. I like feeling my feet on the ground. It's kind of a security thing."

Deborah Holte, a local podiatrist, said she usually does not recommend going barefoot, but from a runner's point of view, she can understand some of the benefits.

"I can see both sides," she said. "I guess if you're barefooted, you're lighter on your feet. Maybe you can go faster. However, there's so many things out there you can step on and cause problems."

Holte said she has seen several patients because they have gone barefoot and stepped on something, and she especially worries about diabetics who might incur a cut.

"If you're diabetic, you

might get three or four germs growing in that cut, and your chances of an amputation are much higher," she said.

Holte said she also is concerned about legal issues for students going barefoot at Truman or out in the community.

"With the society the way it is now too, you know if you're walking around campus barefooted and someone gets cut on something, it might be a liability for whoever owns that property," she said.

Holte said she does recognize,

however, that many of her patients make appointments because of dress shoes or other inappropriate footwear.

"Shoe gear can sometimes cause just as much problem as if you don't wear shoes," she said. "People that are barefooted aren't going to have corns and calluses on their toes because they won't be rubbing on their shoes."

Agreeing with Littleton, Holte said a shoeless lifestyle can benefit ankle and leg development.

"If you don't have any structural problems with your feet, it could help strengthen your muscles, going barefooted, as long as you aren't going to step on anything," she said. "Parents tend to put shoes on their babies, I think, much too young."

Holte said her biggest concerns are with people who already have foot problems as well as those who might step on something sharp. But she said she has advice to offer students who are convinced that going barefoot is right for them.

"Watch where you're walking," Holte said. "... Check your feet every day, make sure you don't have any cuts or scrapes in them. ... The big concern is watch where you're walking."

Couples take the test for success

Naomi Davis

Staff Reporter

Young engaged couples usually have a lot on their minds when it comes to planning their special day. A final test of the relationship, however, might prove to be the most important.

"Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding Study" is an inventory tool designed to test the strengths and weaknesses of a couple's relationship through use of questions encouraging communication in all potential areas of conflict.

The Rev. Bill Kottenstette said he has administered the FOCUS program to at least 20 couples a year in his 10 years as Catholic Newman Center chaplain.

"The program is designed to help engaged couples discern their compatibility and areas of agreement and disagreement," Kottenstette said. "It gives them a head

start on potential problems."

FOCUS is divided into three levels. The first level is the questionnaire process, which both partners answer separately. The questions are in agree/disagree format and range from issues of lifestyle expectations, friends and interests to parenting, religion and values, and finances, according to the program's Web site.

"Many couples don't think about these questions," Kottenstette said. "I've had couples come in and realize, 'My God, we shouldn't be getting married'"

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Bill Kottenstette
Newman Center Chaplain

The second level of the program facilitates what Kottenstette says is the key ingredient to a successful marriage: communication. The couple meets with their facilitator to discuss the results of the questionnaire, find explanations for disagreement and consolidate what they have learned.

The final step of the program

Sample Questions: Answer with agree, disagree or uncertain

1. We are in agreement about the husband and wife roles each of us expects of the other in our marriage relationship.
2. There are qualities about my future spouse that I do not respect.
3. We have discussed the ways our families solved problems and how this may affect our problem solving.
4. We disagree with each other over some teachings of the church.
5. My future spouse and I have agreed we will not have children.

Source: FOCUS test

involves a referral. In case of issues of domestic violence or substance abuse, the couple is referred to specialized assistance, according to the program's Web site. Further skill building and mentoring programs are recommended for most couples.

Donna Conn, program support worker at the Family Life Office in Omaha, Neb., where FOCUS originated in 1984, said she usually administers the program to people aged 23 to 29, although some are younger and some older, some marrying for the first time and some for the second time.

"It's a nonjudgmental program," she said. "If couples don't score a high percentage of agree-

ment, it doesn't mean they're going to fail. It just means they have to work harder."

Conn said FOCUS originally began as a Catholic program, but local Christian churches requested an edition for all Christian denominations, which led to the development of editions for nondenominational couples as well. Spanish, French, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Greek translations, among others, also are available.

FOCUS is used in the United States by 400,000 to 500,000 couples yearly and is administered in 13 other countries, according to its Web site.

Kottenstette said the couples he usually works with are juniors and

seniors planning a marriage after graduation. Senior Ken Mayo, who completed the program with his fiancée last May, said he found the program useful.

"It lets the couple know of any problems that might not have come up, so there are no surprises," Mayo said. "I think my marriage will be stronger because of it."

The divorce rate in the United States as of May 2005 is 38 percent, according to www.divorcereform.org. Kottenstette said couples who seriously complete the FOCUS program lower the possibility of a divorce.

"Opposites attract, but you can't be so completely opposite that you don't intertwine any-

where," he said. "Some come in thinking, 'It'll be better when we get married.' If there is no compatibility on certain issues, you need to know if your marriage can survive the problem."

Kottenstette said a good score ranges from 60 percent to 90 percent agreement, and very few couples have total certainty on their issues.

"Most couples take this seriously," he said. "It doesn't stop people from getting married, but it's a chance to find out something they need to know."

Kottenstette said the FOCUS test is available through the Newman Center, as well as online at www.focussinc.com.

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