

Improv leaders prepare to leave a legacy

BY HARRY BURSON
Staff Reporter

Senior J.C. Scholfield said he hopes to see the group he co-founded outlast his own time at the University.

In its third year, the improvisational comedy group Tag is looking to continue as a campus organization as its original members prepare to graduate and leave Truman.

Scholfield, senior Clint Worthington and senior Joey Comstock founded Tag in fall 2005 as sophomores after the failure of similar groups on campus. A previous improv organization disbanded that semester because of poor publicity.

"I make sure everyone knows about every performance any time, anywhere," Scholfield said. "Whereas [the previous improv group] didn't do that. So they weren't very popular and people lost interest. They were kind of exclusive [and] died out when people graduated."

He recently stepped down as president to integrate younger members into the organization.

"I was actually elected basically as emperor of Tag until I stepped down," Scholfield said. "But I decided to [step down] in the tradition of George Washington, just because if I stay there the whole time and I leave, what's going to happen?"

He said he now serves as Tag's special events coordinator, a newly created position in which Scholfield schedules special events and helps direct the future of the organization. He arranges every performance beyond the group's usual show every other



Tag members seniors J.C. Scholfield and Ben Dansby, junior Jon Grant and sophomore Katibeth Lee practice in a third floor Baldwin Hall classroom Tuesday night. Scholfield said he hopes the group continues after he graduates.

Friday in the SUB Down Under.

He said he hopes to plan an "all-improv conference" comedy show in Kirksville featuring improv groups from the University of Missouri, Washington University and other schools in the region.

Looking forward, Scholfield said he also wants to increase Tag's membership. The group currently has nine members and will audition for four

to five open spots in the fall. He said he wants to see Tag expand to include non-performing members.

"I can see Tag turning into, not so much an improv group, but an organization that does improv," Scholfield said. "Almost like, not a fraternity or sorority or anything, but definitely a social organization with possibly more members."

Tag's faculty adviser Kay Cowan,

secretary for the Center for Student Involvement, volunteered her services to the group after Scholfield, a CSI worker, approached her.

Although she has been unable to attend any Tag performances, she said she assists the group with publicity and gives them ideas to help their continued growth.

Junior Jon Grant is the current president of Tag, a position its mem-

bers call DMC or Director and Master of Ceremonies. He joined the group in its first semester as a freshman in fall 2005.

Grant said the group continually changes from semester to semester.

"Every time we have tryouts every person brings something new to the group — usually good," he said. "It changes every time we add or lose someone."

He said the group has increased its number of performances per semester.

"Now, definitely more than when we started out we have other events," Grant said. "Last semester we had a fundraiser for ourselves at the Wooden Nickel Journal Printing Building. We've done events before with the Tom Thumb [yearly art festival]. Other groups have asked us to do things with them too."

Grant said he wants the group to continue after he graduates.

"I want Tag to have a legacy," he said. "I want it to live on beyond the initial generation who ran Tag. I want to make sure there's enough enthusiasm from the members to carry it on after we've all gone. We don't want it to just be associated with J.C., so when J.C. leaves Tag's over. We spread out responsibilities. J.C. isn't such a figurehead anymore."

Scholfield echoed these sentiments, saying Tag has become a Truman institution.

"I think the biggest thing is that we're a tradition now," he said. "When people talk about Truman and they talk about what there is to do up there, I really have heard people talk about us."

Professor wrote political pieces in Kenya under KANU oppression

BY MICHELLE MARTIN
Staff Reporter

Charles Ngugi can say he actually risked everything to stand up for democracy.

Ngugi, an assistant professor of communication, was born in the central province of Kenya in the district of Kiambu, where he said he and his family grew up in poverty. Ngugi said his father was disinherited because of a family dispute and that this left the family struggling for money.

In his "Statement of Teaching Philosophy," Ngugi describes himself in those days as "one of those barefooted-African urchins you see on TV ogling at white missionaries, journalists and aid workers."

Ngugi said his education saved him. A scholarship started by a Peace Corps volunteer, Tom Millsop, allowed him to complete school, he said.

"If it were not for the opportunity provided by education, I ... would probably still be there: hopeless, hungry and humbled," he said.

Ngugi said he became the first in his village to attend A Level high school — the equivalent of the first year of college. After studying at the Kenya Institute of Mass Communications in Nairobi, he worked for various Kenyan news publications before writing for the Weekly Review, a prominent political news magazine, he said.

Ngugi said that through his journalism, he challenged the authoritarian dictatorship of his homeland, Kenya.

Ngugi first became involved in the Kenyan political scene when he became involved in journalism, he said.

"I was writing for Nairobi

Law Monthly," he said. "I was writing for Society Magazine, and I was writing for the People Newspaper."

Ngugi said that at the time, Kenya was run by the sole national party, the Kenya African National Union. KANU had won control in the 1960s and was tightening its hold on Kenya by outlawing political oppression and dissent, he said.

"We wanted to bring about change," Ngugi said. "So the people could express themselves freely without fearing that the government was going to come arrest them and put them in jail — so they could form political parties and so they could compete for political office."

Ngugi said he first encountered the police while covering a demonstration during which he witnessed police beating women demonstrators protesting against the detentions of their sons without trial. He said his photographer was badly beaten.

"I myself had been beaten up earlier by the General Service Unit paramilitary police as I covered demonstrations in the Riruta slum in Nairobi and had been arrested at the Nairobi City Mortuary as I investigated allegations that the city authorities and police had killed several people as they forcibly evacuated people and demolished Muroto slum," he said.

The situation grew worse when Ngugi wrote a scathing profile for the Nairobi Law Monthly about the Kenyan president, Daniel Arap Moi, whom he depicted as dictatorial, cunning and hypocritical, he said.

Ngugi said that soon after the article was published, the editor of the Nairobi Law Monthly informed

him of an unsettling reality. "[KANU policemen] had gone to the office of the editor of my publication," he said. "They were looking for me."

Because Ngugi was a freelance journalist he had no office, so officials couldn't locate him, he said.

Ngugi said he didn't want to replicate his previous encounters with the police, so he decided to go into hiding at a friend's house for two weeks.

"I didn't want, shall I say, a repeat performance," he said.

If Ngugi had been caught, his story might have had a very different outcome. He mentioned the story of another journalist, Wallace Gichere, who was not so lucky.

"They had gone to his apartment on the fourth floor, ... and they had thrown him out of the window, so he ended up breaking his legs," Ngugi said.

Disappearances were common occurrences, he said. Ngugi said it was not unusual for people to be detained without trials or to be kept in solitary confinement for indefinite periods of time.

He said that when the tension died down, he was able to emerge from hiding only to find a difficult choice before him. He said he wanted to use his newly acquired journalistic skills to do good.

"I didn't want to leave Kenya," he said. "I thought I was going to go back and contribute."

Despite his desires to stay and help fight against the government, he said he knew this no longer was a safe possibility. Ngugi said he then flew from Kenya to Pittsburgh where his wife, Monica, attended school.

Ngugi said that regardless of his extensive journalism experience and credentials, including his experience teaching at Day-



Erin Lee Givarr/Index

Charles Ngugi, assistant professor of communication, studied Mass Communication in Nairobi and worked for Kenyan news publications before leaving for refuge in America.

star University and his master's degree from the U.K. University of Wales at Cardiff, he had to re-establish himself in America.

"I had a lot of journalistic experience, but because I didn't have that experience in America, people didn't think I could write," he said.

However, he said he was able to prove himself after working on some aviation magazines with Phoenix Publishing.

Ngugi found work at Network Solutions as manager for investigations and research, where he adjudicated copyright disputes between celebrities, senators, executives and other customers over Internet domain issues, he said.

Ngugi now is completing the final steps to receiving his Ph.D. in Liberal Arts from Emory University, he said. Ngugi said that after teaching at Washington-Jefferson College on a fellowship, he was drawn to Truman, where he began teaching last year.

"The idea that Truman was sold to the idea of a liberal arts education was one that attracted me here, and I'm happy to contribute in my own small way," Ngugi said.

Ngugi said he was interested in the rural setting of Kirksville as opposed to a city because it reminded him of his childhood in central Kenya.

Ngugi said he views the op-

portunity to educate as a big responsibility. In his "Statement of Teaching Philosophy," he reveals exactly how seriously he approaches his field.

"Under my care are the lives of not just young people but of the nation," he said in the statement. "The future, like a ball, is in my hands. I dare not drop it."

Ngugi said he has faith in the power of education to bring success to the students who want it.

"Having grown up in poverty and overcome great challenges in my life, I am a living, walking example that you can overcome all odds to make something of yourself," he said.

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