

EDITORIAL

OUR VIEW

University bears guilt for fire alarm fiasco

In the middle of the night, Carl Duncan saved his own life. Fire ripped through the interior of his home, the University Farm Building Duplex, just after 3 a.m. Jan. 10 (see story, Page 1). Carl woke up (very good luck) to find his room full of smoke (very bad luck), and he managed to escape safely.

There was no banshee yell of an electric smoke detector to alert him to vacate the premises. No battery-operated smoke detectors had been installed after the original set had been disconnected during renovations of the duplex.

Obviously the disconnection of the smoke alarms was an oversight on the part of someone somewhere.

Kirksville Fire Captain Joe Schilling said that once the fire was squelched, the building was a total loss. He said Carl is “very lucky” that he woke up.

That’s a vast understatement. We’re sure that Schilling was referring to the good luck Carl had in awakening in his smoke-filled bedroom. But what about his bad luck in choosing a University that doesn’t follow its own rules?

Sure, Missouri is one of 11 states with no fire code. But the state, in broad terms at least, adheres to the National Fire Protection Association’s Life Safety Code, which mandates operational smoke detectors. If the University didn’t break any laws by leaving the residence without detectors, it sure snuck through on a technicality.

But enough about state law, let’s take a look at the Residence Life Handbook’s general policies. Under the heading “Fire Equipment,” the handbook states, “Each apartment is also provided with an adequate number of smoke detectors.”

It’s pretty clear to the Editorial Board that zero is not adequate. The Office of Student Affairs — thank goodness — publishes a Smart Renter’s Checklist. On the list of things to look for: “Is there at least one (1) operable smoke alarm per level in the dwelling?” Student Affairs gives us a document called Renter Rights, too.

First item under safety requirements? Smoke detectors.

Obviously this disconnect was an oversight on the part of someone somewhere. The Kirksville community was devastated a little more than one year ago when seven residents died because of carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide detectors — only commonplace since the 1990s — now are required in Kirksville in

all residences that could produce the colorless, odorless poison.

But the home smoke detector was invented more than 40 years ago. Forty years, credited with saving more than 50,000 lives, and kicked by the wayside at a state university?

The University Farm Duplex is the same as any other campus housing, and it should have had detectors attached. It’s Truman’s responsibility to make sure the places students live are safe. In fact, let’s take another look at the Residence Life Handbook, under its “A Few Reasons to Live on Campus” section:

“Reap the advantages of lively surroundings, security patrols, fire and safety processes, and Hall staff on demand. Live on campus and have a comfortable and safe new home away from home.”

It’s pretty clear to the Editorial Board that waking up to a smoke-filled room is neither comfortable nor safe. Having your belongings burned to a crisp also does not appear to be equivalent to reaping the benefits of “fire and safety processes.” About the only thing in the statement that we can agree with wholeheartedly is that waking up to a burning apartment probably was a lively event not to be forgotten anytime soon.

This incident should serve as a wake-up call to everyone who sacrifices safety for convenience — both those who left Carl without the protection he deserved and those who yank the low batteries from a smoke detector that chirps.



Letters to the Editor

Legal immigrant speaks out in critique of Gov. Blunt’s policies

As a legal alien resident in this land, let me start this semester with a fulsome congratulations to you, as a paper, for your managing editor’s frontispiece report and editorial in your last issue. You bravely defended not only the embattled principle of having immigrants at all, but also specifically you defended so-called “illegals” from Gov. Matt Blunt’s politically expedient attack on issuing driver licenses to illegal aliens.

This ugly genuflection to nativist hate sentiments and courting of votes is even worse an assault on community relations than you highlighted and is in fact a thinly disguised attack on low-paid immigrant workers — especially those that our well-manicured pup of a governor knows are not able enough to respond to his group calumny.

In spite of major surveys in industrialized democracies around the world that show both illegal and legal immigrants put more money into economies than they take out (which President George Bush has practically admitted in public

statements), we still will not do the jobs we need done, and Blunt still hypocritically attacks.

Both the timing and the manner of Blunt’s announcement against immigrants exposes other sinister aspects of his supposed crackdown on my non-U.S. citizen counterparts, all as a part of the Republican attack on all who differ from their views. This has been going on since President Nixon’s days of sheer hate against all who don’t agree with the GOP’s bully tactics dressed up as statesmanship.

You can see all this in the failure of Blunt’s press office to respond to Index calls for explanation of the crackdown, while only a short time before, Blunt visited Kirksville in a flash and was covered in the Kirksville Daily Express with a front page story and a verbatim printing of Blunt’s speech — free speech for them is permissible only in media manipulation and thus censorship of you, the Index, and by extension the immigrant and even liberal residents who loyally prefer this paper to a one-sided Blunt mouthpiece.

I challenge the GOP to tell me whether Blunt actually made any time to really consult the state highway patrol authorities or any of the more urban police departments (bigger than Kirksville, that is) about his new draconian measures and their enforceability. In most accounts from states that depend on immigrant labor more than our own, police departments often are hostile to having added to their duties some extra anti-immigrant policing on top of their already onerous burden of fighting hard drugs and the like.

To put it bluntly, we all need safe drivers in good standing, whether they’re immigrants or not, don’t we folks? To tamper with real road safety issues is as crudely silly as the similar GOP-proposed crackdown on immigrant children’s education rights.

To deprive illegal immigrants of revenue-fulfilling permits is thus to endanger all our roads for the sake of appealing to Blunt’s base of supporters.

Larry Iles
Kirksville resident

Delays in University forms cause unnecessary headache



Alex Hayden

Frustration. That is what I felt when trying to apply for graduation. It’s not enough that we are trying to find jobs or apply to graduate schools while taking upper-level courses and senior seminars, but we also have to apply for graduation. And without a properly processed application, the work we have done for four years means almost nothing. Graduation depends on three things: how well you do your paperwork, how well others are able to do your paperwork and how well the computer system can process your paperwork. But, as you’ll notice, only one of these three factors actually is in your control.

Surprisingly, though, it is the factor in our control that often can end up being the problem. When first writing this article, I wanted to rant about the shortcomings of the system when it comes to processing applications and forms (and trust me, that’s still to come), but I have to admit that we as students make errors as well (shocking!). For example, I accidentally selected the inappropriate catalog on which to base my graduation application. As majors and minors change their requirements, more up-to-date course catalogs must be selected if you are to run your graduation application properly. As

such, you may have to research which catalog you actually need to be audited under.

Still, just getting to that point can be a struggle. My advice to you is that any time you have paperwork for the registrar’s office, do it fast and do it correctly. It can take months to process something as simple as a substitution form for one class to another, which is especially frustrating if you ever study abroad because few things transfer over easily. And why is it so hard to get a simple form processed at our school? Some might blame the bureaucracy at Truman, and I would be inclined to agree with them slightly.

Yet there is something more than administration and academic bureaucracy that is gumming up the system. In fact, two things probably slow down the process more than the bureaucracy. The first is duplication. If you’ve ever had to do a class substitution or add/drop a major or minor, then you’ve gotten a mailing telling you your substitution or major/minor form either went through or did not. Of course, this is only the first mailing you get. The second is an electronic mailing and actually comes from a different office a few weeks later. Although it is unclear to me why the forms are processed this way, it continues to happen. As such, graduation applications, substitution forms, etc., are delayed because there is overlap in the work being done. Instead of processing a form once, it is processed twice, creating two times the work.

This brings me to the second system slowdown, understaffing in critical areas. As if having to do twice the paperwork wasn’t bad enough, the

registrar and other offices often only have one person who is assigned to sign specified paperwork. As such, substitutions are all filtered to one location then come to a halt because there are previous substitutions that still are being filled out. And I will not even begin to discuss the online degree audit system’s numerous errors that still need to be worked out. For most of the fall semester, communication students on older catalogs were not having their degrees processed correctly because course numbers no longer matched up. Translation: Your application for graduation must be delayed until we fix the error, sorry.

In short, I know that there are ways to improve the system, whether it be hiring a few more people or spreading out more of the work between current employees. Yet I still can’t help but feel my degree rests in others’ hands more than my own. If something goes wrong in the system, oops, I guess you’ll have to wait another semester to graduate. If we screwed up a substitution, guess we have to wait on that before you graduate. Heck, who knows, maybe even writing this article could cause a sudden “error” in my paperwork. With so many things stacked against a student graduating, it becomes a struggle to do just that. I suggest to future students that you get your forms turned in as early as possible and that you become good friends with the folks at the registrar’s office. Otherwise, you also might find your graduation pending.

Alex Hayden is a senior philosophy and religion and communication major from Jefferson City, Mo.

University break and holiday schedule could use clean-up



Kelsey Landhuis

I hate breaks. Don’t get me wrong, I love being able to kick back for a couple of weeks and do nothing but sleep until noon and watch CSI marathons on TV. However, the length, distribution and naming of breaks in the University’s current academic calendar is confusing and illogical. The schedule already is set until the summer of 2009, but the University should reconfigure the break system for future years to better meet students’ and faculty members’ needs and expectations.

One of the most problematic aspects of the current break system is the confusion created by the names of breaks. For example, anyone who looks at a fall semester schedule for the first time and reads the phrase “Midterm Break” might assume that students would be given ample time to rest and recuperate

after stressful midterm tests. Alas, this so-called “Midterm Break” lasts a single day, or two days at the most, and classes start up again before students realize they had stopped.

When students see that Midterm Break is coming up on the spring semester calendar, they might prepare themselves for another depressingly brief respite, but this break lasts an entire week. However, excitement about this discovery evaporates when they realize that the infamous Spring Break consists of just one day: definitely not enough time for a trip to Cabo. To avoid this ambiguity, midterm vacations should be called “Fall Break” and “Spring Break.”

Students are smart enough to figure out that they happen in the middle of the term. The University’s current Spring Break, which occurs the day after Easter, would adopt a new, (somewhat) politically correct name, “Bunny Day.”

So that one might need a little work. Another problem is the frustrating length of Winter Interim. Four weeks is plenty of time for me to get bored enough to tackle a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle and take up painting, but not enough time to pursue any gainful employment. If the winter break were

a week shorter, classes could end a week earlier at the end of the term and students could spend their free time enjoying sunshine and warmth instead of trying not to freeze to death in the bitter cold of January.

I realize that scheduling breaks and interims is a difficult task, and many factors must be taken into account. I also know that for every student who was more than ready to come back to school at the end of Winter Interim, there was probably a student who wishes the break had lasted longer.

However, this does not mean that the University should leave well enough alone. When the next academic calendar is created, administrators should survey students and faculty to determine their preferences. Although the schedule cannot accommodate everyone, the University administration should at least make an effort to consult the people who will be most affected.

Soliciting students’ opinions on matters that are important to us is one way the University should give us a break.

Kelsey Landhuis is a junior English and French major from Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

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