

OUR VIEW

Putting ratings online won't bring benefits

She's got an overall quality rating of 4.6 out of 5.0. Most of her reviewers' comments deal with the ease of her exams, although one anonymous reviewer called her lectures "sometimes quite hilarious." Sounds like she's got a lot going for her, right?

Unfortunately, Professor Lynn Rose has no hotness points.

Her doctoral work at the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis means next to nothing. Her book about disability in ancient Greece

can be used for kindling. What about that award in 2006, when she was named the State Professor of the Year? Well, at least the frame is pretty. She's got no hotness points, so who could fathom sitting in her class, wondering when Alex Tetlak, instructor of classics, will walk by?

After all, he's got 15 hotness points, on RateMyProfessors.com.

Such is the pithiness of the online rating of professors and, possibly, end-of-course evaluations. At Truman, after a student fills out an evaluation form with incisive and constructive criticism, the forms are collected and sent to a department office. There they sit until final grades are entered, and the professor's evaluations are returned. At some point, the department chair will — or might — review the evaluations with the professor. There's usually not a lot that can be accomplished in practical terms from these performance reviews, especially for tenured professors.

But Missouri Senate Bill 389 will change all that. Or will it?

The General Assembly recently required that all public universities provide public access to professors' ratings — but the Missouri Department of Higher Education revised the interpretation of the law so that only enrolled students can view ratings, and universities will be allowed to design their own forms for student evaluations.

We have concerns with both the bill and with the revised interpretation of it as proposed by the Department of Education.

First, we strongly disagree with the Department of Higher Education for its attempt to lock away what should be completely and freely available. By trying to prevent the general public from accessing performance evaluations, the Department only is admitting that the professors have something to cower in

the shadows of and that there really is a problem in our public colleges. Missouri taxpayers have a right to know how well professors — whose salaries they pay — are doing their jobs.

We also note that by allowing universities to design their own rating systems, the state permits colleges to water down the surveys into a quickly evaporating puddle.

But besides questions about the revisions, we also aren't so sure that putting these forms online will improve professor performance, which would be the goal in any case.

Without evaluation-based assessment of professors with some method of rewarding those who perform better, students have little reason to contribute their voice. Of course, some professors really do take their evaluations seriously, and they discuss with their superiors how they can improve their courses. But — from all too much experience — we know there are other professors who neither take their evaluations seriously nor make an effort to improve their courses, and no Missouri Senate bill will change that.

No scarlet letter of semi-public shame will fix the poor performance of the worst professors at Truman, and until all ratings outlets are treated as consequential by all students and faculty alike, there won't be much improvement at all.

CORRECTIONS

- A TruLife feature titled "Around the 'Ville" on page 9 of the Oct. 4 Index was incorrect. The name of the Truman student theatre department production is Uncle Vanya, it is an adaptation of a play by Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, and the show began Tuesday, Oct. 9, not Wednesday.
- A review titled "Third book of 'Twilight' series gets rave reviews" on page 12 of the Oct. 4 Index misspelled the first name of the author of the book. The author's name is Stephenie Meyer, not Stephanie Meyer.
- An article titled "Demetri Martin will perform" on page 1 of the Oct. 4 Index misstated the time when Martin will perform at Truman. He will perform at 7 p.m., not 8 p.m.



Letters to the Editor

Patriotism reveals greatness of America through citizen loyalty

The protection of dissent is one of the sources of America's strength and greatness. In no other country can people criticize one another and their country as they can here. Patriotism, like protected dissent, is another source of our greatness.

Patriotism is not nationalism or jingoism, but rather it is the steadfast loyalty to and willingness to defend one's country. In our nation, especially on our college campuses, there are large quantities of people who do not have any love or loyalty for their country or anything, really, beyond their own vice and irresolution. Indeed, they have no conception of what it takes to preserve the freedoms they enjoy and irresponsibly flaunt.

Tacitus said, "Great empires are not maintained by timidity."

Yet many in our nation presume the blessings of liberty are not only their birthright, but also that the blessings are inviolate and will remain for all time. However, the overwhelming majority of those who have lived or live on this planet have spent their lives in chains and absolute tyranny.

Brave men and women founded this country because they recognized that a loyalty to liberty and a culture that supports liberty are among the highest ideals of humankind — ideals that sometimes require personal sacrifice, grave decisions and severe, implacable action.

The signers of the Declaration of Independence would have faced a loss of material provision for their families were the revolution to prove unsuccessful. These men and women — like their progeny at Fort McHenry, at the Somme, at Normandy, at Incheon, at Kuwait City, at Mogadishu, at Fallujah — were willing to defend their country at home and abroad. They are rightly celebrated.

It's surprising that humanists — such as those who have attacked me personally in recent letters — have trouble understanding that human nature seldom changes. The world isn't all sunshine and rainbows, wine and love.

It's a world filled with confused people, many of whom reject progress, human well-being and liberty, many of whom desperately desire to kill all Americans — even fundamentally disloyal, weak, arrogant and ungrateful college professors and graduate students, and even those who ultimately have demonstrated they don't care if America is attacked and if our people bleed.

Jonathon Burns
Alumnus

Flaws in Safe Driver program make cost too great to bear

Although I have the feeling I stand alone on this issue, I believe that the proposed safe driver program is a waste.

Truly, this idea is the solution to no problem, our own local "bridge to nowhere." There are many reasons that this program is not needed, and a lot of problems would arise if it were to be instituted.

First, Truman is not Mizzou. Our campus is much smaller, our town is much smaller and because of its size, far fewer people drive to parties at Truman than at expansive Mizzou.

Second, as stated in the article, many social fraternities already have their own safe driver programs. We do not need a replacement for a system that clearly is already in place and working effectively on its own.

Also, if the program were to start, the problems would be endless. At Mizzou, the STRIPES program has an agreement with local police that their cars will not be pulled over and the passengers not arrested. For that kind of program to work here, a similar deal would have to be struck. In addition, if the program were run on a payment-optional plan for passengers, it would be extremely unfair to those students who either do not drink or are responsible enough to secure safe rides on their own.

Student Senate should not be wasting \$2,000 to \$5,000 to enable irresponsible students, and those who utilize the service should be the main suppliers of its funds. Finally, there is an endless list of items that are more deserving of this huge amount of money. Perhaps that money could be distributed to student organizations or refunded to students.

Basically, my argument is this: If it isn't broken, don't spend \$2,000 to fix it. It should be noted that, in the article, it is implied that this amount is how much it would cost to run the program for just three months. I shudder when thinking of the costs to make it permanent. Our Student Senate really needs to get its priorities in line and think harder about how to spend our money.

Sean Cooksey
Freshman

Professor responds to alumnus' letter denouncing birth control

I have been asked to respond by some, and I have been told by a smaller number steeped in our more recent cultural history of discretion and good taste that it would be of no constructive use to pursue a duel of public debate in the media.

Having seen the consequences of not responding, for both mainstream

and progressive politics in this country — with all due respect for friends and colleagues of both viewpoints — I briefly, and perhaps clumsily, write the following.

It might have seemed unusual to one of the respondents in last week's Index to hear an incident and viewpoint centering on the perspective and rightful concerns of a Semitic woman and Holocaust victim who had recognized the signs of an increasing spirit of racism and xenophobia. But that cultural perspective certainly should not be regarded as odd or atypical. She is no less typical and representative of our country and humanity than would be someone from a deeply religious Christian community. As a Jewish woman, I would expect that the cultural and historical experience of one would be taken as seriously as the other and treated with no less respect.

Regarding the need for and right to contraception, fortunately most of us do not believe that women who take birth control are promiscuous, nor do we believe that the men in their lives are consequently irresponsible. Contraception gives people choices. If one consults actual statistics, it is no exaggeration to note that our rate of infant mortality and teenage pregnancy is among the highest in western civilization.

Learning to just say no can be helpful, but imposing a culture of sexual restraint is shortsighted and dangerous. Our society has victims of incest and rape and runaways frequently turning to the streets, drugs and prostitution for survival. We have young people coming to grips with the demands of life and racing toward their own dreams and hopes, some with greater difficulty than others.

Planning and choices needed for healthy, full and decent lives give couples and individuals a chance to establish a sensible financial base and give many families the opportunity to provide the best chances in life for their children. It is a safeguard against disease and pregnancy, against backroom, barbaric illegal abortions.

Contraception is needed support for women and men struggling against poverty to make ends meet, who have a right to decide for themselves the means and time for welcoming another life into their midst.

With all due respect to another of the respondents in last week's edition, there must be a point where disallowing dissent is not dignified as a form of dissent itself, but history surely has taught us to recognize it as the beginnings of tyranny.

A good semester to everyone.

Betty L. McLane-Iles
Professor of French

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Editorial Policy

The Index is published Thursdays during the school year by students at Truman State University, Kirksville, MO 63501. The first copy is free, additional copies cost \$.50 each. The production offices are located in Barnett Hall. We can be reached by phone at 660-785-4449. The Index is a designated public forum, and content of the Index is the responsibility of the Index staff. The editor in chief consults with the staff and adviser but ultimately is responsible for all decisions. Opinions of Index columnists are not necessarily representative of the opinions of the staff or the newspaper. Our View editorials represent the view of the Editorial Board through a majority vote. The Editorial Board consists of the editor in chief, managing editor, news editor, copy chief and opinions editor. The Index reserves the right to edit submitted material because of space limitations, repetitive subject matter, libelous content or any other reason the editor in chief deems appropriate. Submitted material includes advertisements and letters to the editor.

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What was going on in the

INDEX?

95 years ago ...

Vol. 4, Issue 25. Oct. 11, 1912
Students organized both the local Bull Moose Party to promote Theodore Roosevelt and the local Wilson Club to promote Woodrow Wilson for president.

25 years ago ...

Vol. 74, Issue 6. Oct. 14, 1982
Two bomb threats emptied both the Administration-Humanities Building (now McClain Hall) and Violette Hall.

50 years ago ...

Vol. 49, Issue 21. Oct. 9, 1957
Nine-hundred forty-one students and teachers received free chest X-rays from the State X-ray Unit to detect tuberculosis and other diseases.

1 year ago ...

Vol. 98, Issue 7. Oct. 12, 2006
Rumors were confirmed that Dashboard Confessional would perform at Truman on Nov. 3 in Pershing Building.