

OUR VIEW

Big decisions demand big input from faculty and student body

All this talk about sabotaging graduation has got the Editorial Board worried.

Ever since the news broke that former Missouri Governor and U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft would be receiving an honorary degree and speaking at this year's graduation, students and faculty have been in an uproar. From threatening to hand back degrees to threatening to bring noisemakers to graduation, people are up in arms. We think this situation can be avoided or made easier in the future by receiving student and faculty input before selecting the graduation speaker and awarding honorary degrees. We realize it is impossible to make everyone happy, but getting input from those who actually sit through graduation and the students who worked hard to receive degrees from our University might save the Board and the President from another backlash.

As of now, the Board of Governors has to approve any honorary degrees, which are supposed to be nominated by a committee made up of select Board members and faculty. Yet some faculty claim they were never made aware Ashcroft would be receiving a degree, nor did anyone ask them if they approved of the decision.

We would like to see the committee work together, board members and faculty, to recommend someone for an honorary degree. But we also suggest going one step further. Why not add students to the committee? After all, we are the ones who work so hard to earn our degrees. Don't we have a right to help judge whether someone is qualified enough to receive a degree, honorary or not, from Truman? The University wants students to have high standards, so

we should have a right to hold everyone else to that standard as well.

A democratic process will never make everyone happy, but we at least should have some say in who gets to give the generic graduation speech at commencement. As of right now, the President has the ultimate and only say in who the commencement speaker will be, but we want to see a more democratic process put in place. Bring the candidates for graduation speaker before Faculty Senate and Student Senate. Get some input from those who will be attending the graduation ceremony. That way, the President will know if he has a major controversy on his hands ahead of time. The speaker will not always satisfy everyone, but we should at least have the right to argue about who we want to give the traditional 'your future is bright, reach for the stars' speech at commencement.

Even though many of you are opposed to Ashcroft's appointment as graduation speaker, we want graduation to remain focused on the graduates and all their hard work throughout their academic careers. Graduating from college is an irreplaceable moment in life. To bring noisemakers, boo or make a scene while Ashcroft speaks will do nothing but detract from the graduates' achievements and the joy their families will share with them. We support your right to choose not to listen or to perform some type of silent protest. But don't make graduation about John Ashcroft, his questionable political past, or the University's reasoning behind granting him an honorary degree. Graduates, make it the best and most exciting day of your lives in spite of this decision.

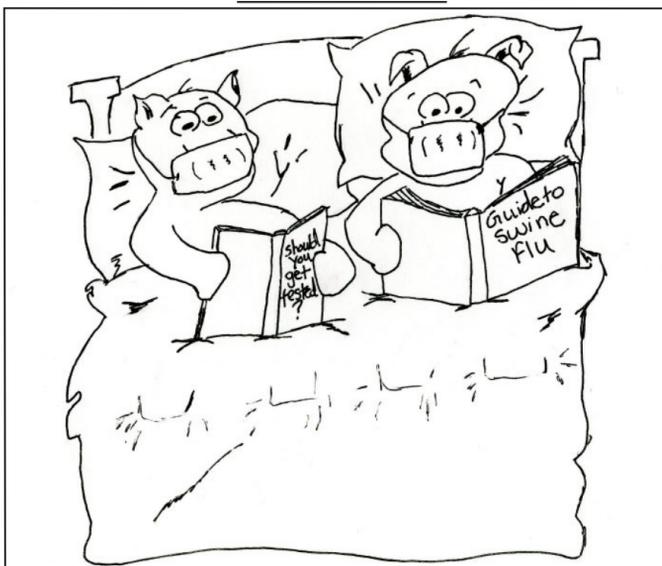
CORRECTIONS

To submit corrections or to contact the editor, please e-mail index@truman.edu, call us at 660-785-4449, or send a letter to Index, 1200 Barnett Hall, Truman State University, Kirksville, Mo. 63501.

- In a box on the top right side on Page 11 of the April 23 Index, the Web site and the discount code was printed wrong. The Web site is www.tomsshoes.com and the code is CAMPSTRU.
- A photo outline in the "Crossing hosts abuse program" in the April 23 issue of the Index was inaccurate. The person in the photo was Jim Dennis, Affinity Pastor at the Crossing.
- The sports teaser on Page 17 in the March 23 issue of the Index was incorrect.

CARTOON

BY ALEX BOLES



Letters to the Editor

Firearms jeopardize learning at University

The following is a copy of a letter sent to Sen. Wes Shoemaker, D-Clarence. Dear Senator Shoemaker: I write to ask that you vote against House Bill 668 or any other bill that includes provisions allowing carrying concealed weapons on publicly-funded state institutions of higher education. I am unalterably opposed to this legislation as a Professor of History at Truman State University. Passage of this bill will make Truman less safe than it already is. I wonder how any legislator can think passage of this legislation makes sense just days after the second anniversary of the shooting that took place at Virginia Tech University. The issue is not about Second Amendment rights to carry a weapon. The founding fathers never envisioned an environment where students would carry guns on a college campus where free and unfettered exchange of ideas is cherished. No legislation should ever put that keystone of learning in jeopardy. Weapons in the classroom create a dangerous setting for those who engage in sometimes passionate exchange of ideas about controversial issues that may stir powerful emotions.

As an instructor, I explore and posit alternatives. Sometimes the discussion can become heated, even tense. Two examples from my classroom experience illustrate my concern. The first time I taught the Vietnam War (Washington and Jefferson College, Pennsylvania), the students entered a debate about the war and the morality of combat operations after seeing the film "Hamburger Hill." One of my students had been in that multi-say battle. He became very irate with students who supported the war effort stating that he was mad enough that he would shoot the commanding officer of his battalion if he had a gun and the officer walked into the room at that time. He did not express anger at the students in the class but his comments revealed considerable disgust and disrespect. Later discussions with this student revealed he was under medical care for post-traumatic syndrome.

My second example took place on September 11, 2001, when my Recent U.S. History class met. We devoted much of that session to the terrorist attack. During the discussion I asked, based on what we knew, and my best judgment that al Qaeda was responsible for the loss of life, what should be done. Of the 20 or so students, all but one said we should attack Afghanistan. One student, a pacifist, spoke out against what he termed war mongering. For a time, some of his classmates lost their cool. Calm returned quickly after I reminded them about the value of free and unfettered exchange of ideas, a hallmark of academic inquiry. The dynamic created by the raw feelings caused by the death of so many Americans as a result of an unprecedented attack created so much tension and raw nerves that I am relieved no one was armed that day.

One of my colleagues in history has expressed concern about the chance that a student will someday come into class intending to rectify some grievance with a gun. We have seen that such events occur whether there is carry legislation. That does not mean passage of such a bill will not contribute to the danger of such an event. Legislation legalizing concealment of firearms on a college campus most likely will increase the prevalence of handguns at institutions like Truman State University. Additionally, such legislation will serve as tacit approval for student and faculty to walk into classes

or other events armed. Given the stress inherent in an academic setting, and the psychological fragility of some people, anything that encourages the presence of firearms on campus is likely to impair the exchange of ideas that is central to the quest for learning and exploring ways to hone analytical thinking.

Thomas Zoumaras
Professor of History

Ashcroft degree applauds aid of University

I am puzzled by what appears to be a slanted negative reaction at the University's decision to award an honorary degree to former Missouri governor and U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft. Rather than focus on his role in the history of the University, which appears to be the intent of these honorary degrees given that the late Mel Carnahan (Ashcroft's successor) and former University president Charles McClain also are slated to receive them, the intellectual community is focused on making Ashcroft's presence a protest of his role in the controversial detainment and rendition of alleged terrorists.

I do not doubt that these interrogation tactics might have bordered on, if not breached, basic human rights and created more extremists, nor do I doubt that such tactics might have produced vital intelligence that might have prevented other terrorist attacks on U.S. interests here or abroad. What I do find troublesome about these objections raised by members of the University community is that these are aimed squarely at further soiling the image of the George W. Bush administration, when other issues fall to the wayside. I point to these:

First and foremost, as governor, Ashcroft signed the bill that changed the University's mission from being a regional university to being the state's public liberal arts and sciences university. Most of the professors and students protesting Ashcroft's even presence on campus next month potentially trace their decision to attend and teach at Truman to Ashcroft's pen meeting his copy of the bill signed outside Kirk Memorial on June 20, 1985.

Second, I must note that Carnahan, who signed a bill 10 years later that changed the University's name to Truman State University, is not without fault in putting a black eye on Missouri and the U.S. before the world community. During his 7 3/4 years as governor, 37 lethal injections occurred in Missouri, surpassed only by Texas and Virginia. That amounts to more than four executions per year during his administration, double that of Ashcroft for the four years of his tenure when the death penalty was reinstated. One of these executions occurred just four weeks after Pope John Paul II, whose papacy discouraged the use of capital punishment, visited St. Louis. I have yet to hear an objection about Carnahan posthumously receiving an honorary degree for allowing to occur what can be called state-sponsored murder. Were there one raised, again I would find issue with the merit of such an objection.

It is my belief that the University's administration wishes to pat Ashcroft, Carnahan and McClain on the back for their role in turning a run-of-the-mill regional university into one of the Midwest's most reputable centers of higher education. As far as I am concerned, this is their only reason. Debate all you want about whether Ashcroft's actions as attorney general were inhumane or perhaps criminal, but at the end of the day, Truman's conferring these degrees should not and does not indicate

that the University supports torture or capital punishment.

Kyle Hill, Alumnus

Graduation ceremony deserves respect, not protest

I attended a panel discussion regarding former Missouri Governor John Ashcroft's appointment as recipient of Truman's second honorary doctorate and commencement speaker for the graduating class of 2009. A recurring theme of the discussion that ensued revolved around a possible student led protest. The protests suggested ranged from withholding applause to the use of whistles and noisemakers to drown out the speaker. I wish to strongly encourage any students intent on pursuing such measures to reconsider.

One faculty speaker (from the audience) suggested that Mr. Ashcroft was courted as commencement speaker for the possible financial favoritism that might then be brought upon the University. The resonating question left unasked by this opinion was, "For what price are we willing to sell our commencement?" If the selection of a commencement speaker was a financial stroke, I implore the graduating class not to repeat the sins of the administrator. We cannot respond to the commercialization of commencement by turning the ceremony into a political pulpit. An eye for an eye will certainly leave Stokes Stadium blind.

We open a dangerous door when we take commencement as an opportunity to demonstrate. Commencement speeches occupy a unique place in rhetoric. They are not solipsism nor are they merely campaign speeches. They are abstract, discussing the future, but concrete, ever aware of the world into which students embark. They have potential to illuminate the intersection between actual person and public persona.

I personally would like to see if Ashcroft takes advantage of this medium. Ashcroft is a controversial speaker and perhaps for the worst reasons. But if the Truman graduating class sets down a precedent where controversy is shouted down, the tremors will be felt by graduating classes long after we have left these halls. Any controversial would-be commencement speaker will be forced to weigh the virtues of speaking with the possibility of a PR nightmare.

Truman is a diverse community, and making commencement a venue for protest only opens the door for any group of students, regardless of viewpoint, to make a self-indulgent ruckus at the expense of everyone else's commencement ceremony. I am upset with Truman's choice in commencement speaker and recipient of an honorary doctorate, but I remain steadfast in my assertion that venues such as editorials are the means by which that frustration ought to be voiced. If students make a spectacle out of commencement, they hurt Truman, they hurt themselves and the graduating class of 2009.

For many people, commencement is a measure of their time here at Truman and everything they have accomplished therein. I assure you all that I will be the first one to grit my teeth as Ashcroft ascends to the podium, but I will be the last one to turn commencement into anything but a celebration of the feat accomplished by the graduating class of 2009. The Board of Governors does not have the ability to sell our commencement. Only we can sell it, and I ask you, "for what price?"

Arthur David Gregg, Alumnus

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The Index is published Thursdays during the school year by students at Truman State University, Kirksville, MO 63501. The first copy is free, and additional copies cost 50 cents 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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