

Selective memory of Ashcroft sets bad precedent



Tyler Retherford

I've sat through dozens of lectures and talks about the liberal arts mission and taking a holistic approach to education in my time here at Truman. Apparently, this only applies to students and faculty and not to the people who the University awards honorary degrees. Supporters of the decision to award John Ashcroft an honorary degree and allow him to be this year's commencement speaker are arguing that we should compart-

mentalize his actions as governor that helped the University and ignore the role he played in the Bush administration's use of torture and rendition.

Apparently this involvement by Ashcroft in what basically amounts to war crimes, human rights violations and disregard for American and international law should be overlooked so we can honor him for getting the University more money. Interim University President Krueger is right when he says he isn't making any political statements. The University instead is making a statement that our institution is willing to turn a blind eye to corruption and immoral decisions so long as the end result is more funding.

Krueger certainly is trying to make it clear that the honorary degree is being awarded for the former

governor's role in building the University into the institution it is today, but this simply isn't the best way to convey that appreciation. An honorary degree is not something awarded for a single action like a Nobel Prize. It should be awarded just like a normal degree for a student is awarded - not solely for a particular project, but for their learning experience as a whole during their time at Truman.

Ashcroft's role as this year's commencement speaker poses a similar problem. The idea of a commencement speaker is to encourage graduates to carry on the traditions of the University as a role model for the way they should live the rest of their lives. Frankly, the morally dubious actions of John Ashcroft make him ill-suited for this role. Again, he might be invited to speak as some-

one representing a dedication to higher education in our state, but the University still is telling our graduates that this is a man to listen to, and that his words carry a great deal of authority — an authority he used to violate human rights.

This is not just a matter of whether to honor an individual who was involved in one of the most questionable actions in recent American history. It is also a matter of how this reflects on our University. Admittedly, I highly doubt this is going to be a matter that national news is going to actively broadcast across the country. But I know if I were graduating this spring, I would be more than a little sad that Ashcroft was representing my university, much less for him to have been specifically chosen as the figure to speak to me as I leave Tru-

man to make my way in the world. The former governor's support of our University is not something we should just ignore, but at the same time, we cannot pretend like it is the only thing he has done. This is an occasion where the positive and negative effects of a career should be weighed, and we should really think about whether the sum of that career is something we, as a University, want to reward. Funding for higher education is extraordinarily important, but it is not something so valuable we should be willing to overlook the kind of abuses of power in which Ashcroft has participated.

Tyler Retherford is a sophomore anthropology major from Springfield, Mo.

Political progress mandates a shift to moderate policy



Andrew Kindiger

Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., has decided to jump on the progressive bandwagon and move past the political gimmicks of the Republican Party to make Congress more efficient.

Sen. Specter was quoted in the New York Times saying, "The Republican Party has moved far to the right. I now find my political philosophy more in line with democrats than republicans." He made the switch so that democrats would have 60 votes in the Senate so that filibusters could be easily broken.

Some skeptics have raised concerns about what kind of democrat Specter will be. Even liberals might believe that he will be too much of a conservative democrat. However, moving toward more moderate thinking is something our nation can benefit from. Take, for example, President Obama's first 100 days in office: ABC polls articulate his approval rating at 69 percent, and the Huffington Post even commented that the only major issue the public is dissatisfied with is his immigration policy. Of course he has a long way to go, but compared to former President Bush's approval rating when he left office, President Obama is getting off on the right track — especially considering that he has to amend the mistakes of the previous administration.

However, the argument could be made that President Obama is not holding up to the political ideals of his campaign. During the race to the White House, Obama proclaimed himself to be somewhat of an international icon, assuring the public he was going to make great strides with the global issues concerning the United States. But after he was elected, France, Germany and Britain were the only countries cheering him on — countries that the U.S. already has good relations with for years. Vice President Joe Biden actually has more experience with international policy than President Obama, a key reason for his appoint-

ment to the vice presidency.

The point I'm trying to make is that even though President Obama is off to a great start, he is not going to be the liberal salvation some democrats might have hoped for. He is even moving in a direction that would suggest his actions are of a moderate inclination.

Take, for example, President Obama's stance on the torture suit brought against the U.S. by five ex-terrorism suspects once in the custody of the CIA. The L.A. Times articulated that President Obama did not correct the comments made by the Bush Administration that this trial would threaten matters of national security. This is a very important issue to human rights organizations as well as the American Civil Liberties Union, but even our liberal leader is going to have to make moderate compromises on issues he might have been able to take a more liberal perspective on when he was on the campaign trail.

Keep in mind that this sort of shift isn't a bad thing. Democrats and republicans alike are going to be changing their minds on sensitive issues affecting the future of the U.S., not to discredit their proclaimed ideology, but in an effort to better address the needs of our diverse nation. Opinions like Sen. Specter's are refreshing because it shows there are politicians in this country who still have a rational frame of mind and are not completely absorbed in the overgrown political machine.

I think it's very important to stop adhering to stringent classifications of political allegiances during a great shift in our nation's political future because with so much to handle domestically and internationally, a move toward the middle really is what's going to help our country move forward. President Obama is off to a great start: Congress has the possibility to become more efficient, and it seems that a majority of the nation is happy with how sensitive issues are being handled. Maybe we actually can see some progress in the next four years and start building a more positive reputation for our nation. But to do that we should all take a lesson from Sen. Specter and realize that it's OK to change our minds, especially in a progressive direction.

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Got a rant? E-mail us at trurants@gmail.com

"Please stop drawing male genitalia on the cubes in the library. Are we all 13 years old?"

Tru Rants

Index readers get to sound off about what's on their mind.



"Thanks to the fellow student who gave up the umbrella for the two girls walking in the rain! It was much appreciated, e-mail the Index and we'll get it back to you!"



"Injustice affects us all. Justice, not so much."

Enjoy small moments in life



Kelsey Landhuis

I never was a fan of the concept of the "Last Lecture."

The notion that graduating seniors suddenly accumulate some sort of mystical wisdom that is hidden from everyone else always has struck me as complete baloney. Soon-to-be-graduates, educated in the ways of academia but not in the ways of the world and the majority of them scared out of their minds, didn't seem fit to give any sort of advice to anyone.

But now that I'm in the category of terrified almost-graduate, I can see that being in this position allows for reflection on the past and the future, on the meaning of life, death and love and maybe does offer some unique insights about the world.

So here I am, endowed with the clarity of thought that comes from staring the future right in the face and having no idea what it holds, and the advice I have to offer is this: Enjoy life.

That's it. Whatever makes you

happiest, do that thing. It's a simple concept, but I'm always surprised at how easy it is for duty to get in the way of living life to its fullest. The things that seem important to us as conscientious college students — tests, papers, GPAs, résumés and four-year plans — won't be the things you remember about this time of your life, even one or two years from now.

When I look back at my undergraduate career, I don't remember the nights I spent dutifully studying for tests or writing papers — although those things were worthwhile, important and satisfying for other reasons. I do remember playing with puppies on the Quad, dancing at blues shows and having midnight margaritas with my friends. I do remember laughing hysterically at "It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia" with my roommate late at night and at nothing at all with my Index comrades at 2 a.m.

These small moments are the stuff of life, the essence of happiness and the heart of satisfaction. A couple of months ago I stopped paying attention to world events for about a week. I stopped picking up the New York Times from the bins on campus and checking CNN.com first thing in the morning. The news always seemed so depressing. The world economy was crumbling. The environment was in shambles. Nations were at

war. People were suffering from disease, malnutrition, poverty and oppression. I was convinced that the world was coming to its swift and certain end.

I'm still not entirely convinced that it isn't. But if the apocalypse is impending, there definitely isn't anything I can do to keep it from happening. I can only make an impact on my small sphere of existence. I can choose to see the beauty in nature and in people. I can be kind to others, offering a smile or a word of encouragement. I can be strong in the face of adversity, knowing that the sun only will shine brighter when the clouds clear. I can find a cause and work for it. I can seize the day and live life to its fullest.

I realize that many of these suggestions seem silly, naïve or cliché. I'm not suggesting sticking your head in the sand and ignoring the rest of the world — just realize what you can change and what you can't. Rather than looking at all the problems facing us and thinking they're too big to solve, pick one issue, and devote yourself to it. And most importantly, enjoy life. Laugh. Love. Make a difference. Choose to be happy, and you can't go wrong.

Kelsey Landhuis is a senior English major from Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Truman Days brings welcome change



Molly Skyles

I never went to summer camp. Luckily though, I chose to go to Truman, and experiencing Truman Week basically was the same thing — ridiculous games like "Move Your Butt," barbecues and ice cream socials. Yeah, who needs summer camp, anyway?

From waking up early for Truman Week classes to staying out late adjusting to the newfound freedom of college, Truman Week definitely was interesting, for lack of a better word. However, next semester's freshmen do not get to experience all that is Truman Week. That's right. The full Truman Week is no more. Instead, the incoming freshmen will have a weekend and a three-day Truman week class, and then classes will begin for everyone on Thursday. The University's reasoning behind getting rid of Truman Week is that it was just too long. Students became anxious and nervous about classes, and a week of orientation just extended that anxiety. The activities of Truman Week, including the Truman Week course, seminars

and book discussions, will remain the same, though just in a shorter time span. (See article on page 3 for the full story.)

My opinion: thank God. Don't get me wrong — Truman Week, for some, was a great experience. Meeting new people and finding your way around campus, yeah, it was good for something. However, others took Truman Week as one giant party. With open parties every night, a freshman could quickly turn from innocent and naive to a party animal with a few frat parties under his or her belt. Welcome to college.

Another great feature (please note the sarcasm) of Truman Week was the dreaded Truman Week class. It met a few times that week, and if I recall, it was very early in the morning and lasted a couple of hours. I guess the point was to get you adjusted to college classes before they actually began. Honestly though, don't we all learn best from experience? Is it really necessary to give me pointless work and sit through pointless lectures just to get the feeling of a college class a week before the semester begins? I'll learn soon enough, thanks.

For me, Truman Week was just a waste of time. I mean, I did everything I was supposed to do. I went to all the lame activities and assemblies. I played all the games, and I even left my door propped as my student advisor sug-

gested to help meet new people. When nighttime rolled around, I went out. Yeah, I was the typical Truman Week specimen. However, by day three I was bored out of my mind and ready to start classes.

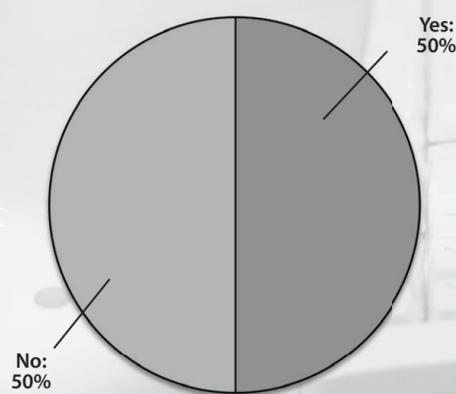
Whether you spent your week overly eager or hung over, it was much too long. All that was done in a week's span could have been accomplished in two days, and I'm glad that has finally been realized. So, take a walk through campus, find all your classrooms, have a bonding activity with your house and hit up a party one night. That's all you need.

I do not mean to bash the purpose behind Truman Week. Being a freshman is a scary thing, and being thrown head first into the new world of college is just cruel. Knowing no one in a completely new place is not a fun experience — exciting maybe, but certainly not fun, at least not at first. Therefore, a trial run of the campus and the dorms is a great way to ease some of the fears of a new freshman and get him or her excited about all that college offers. And you know what, go ahead and throw in some lame ice breakers, but for God's sake, a week's worth of making rhymes about your name can kill even the strongest.

Molly Skyles is a freshman communication major from St. Louis, Mo.

WEB POLL

Do you think the University has enough safety precautions in place?



This week's question:

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