

## OUR VIEW

### E-readers should be considered cautiously

As Truman students lug hundreds of dollars worth of textbooks to the checkout counter at Patty's and the University Bookstore, the financial pain inflicted on every student's pocketbook is a constant topic of discussion around campus.

Expensive textbooks are nothing new to the already financially-strapped college student, but a little financial relief would be sweet, sweet medicine.

The medicine comes in the form of new technology: e-readers (see story, page 1). Basically, students would pay for a device on which textbooks could be downloaded. E-readers would allow professors to teach their classes without textbooks and save students a whole semester of backaches caused by overstuffed backpacks. It seems like a no-brainer — the University should go textbook-less.

Not so fast. The idea of going textbook free isn't a new one. Northwest Missouri State University is attempting to introduce the e-reader on a trial basis in the wake of state and university budget cuts — the same budget cuts that will inevitably affect Truman. The philosophy: Paying once for a device will save students semester after semester of \$500-book bills, and the school will save paper and ink costs by making course materials available on the e-readers. But, the technology hasn't caught up to the convenience the concept suggests, and similar to the difficulties every new technological gadget that arrives on the scene encounters, the e-reader still is in its early stages, and it shows.

Many Northwest students who took part in the trial returned the e-reader early and went back to old-fashioned textbooks, citing difficulty of usage and inconvenience according to a Dec. 4 article in the Northwest Missourian. The students who continued to use the device reported slower study sessions and general frustration with the e-reader functioning capabilities.

In light of the bleak financial future

public universities in Missouri face, a task force has been formed at Truman to evaluate the high costs of textbooks. We applaud the University's efforts, but encourage them not get caught up in the e-reader hoopla as they look at this issue. Since the whole point of the venture is to cut costs and add convenience, it might be necessary to wait a year or two until the technology is improved as well as more affordable. If you're going to do it, do it right.

Other possible problems abound. If Truman would decide to go entirely textbook-less, it will be necessary to spend time training students to use the device. Also, if an eTextbook program is used, one that could be downloaded onto a computer, the University would need to increase the number of computers available on campus. Not everyone has a laptop, and attempting a program like this could be just a new way to make students pay — instead of buying textbooks, they would be buying computers. The program shouldn't be used to push University costs into the lap of students. Unlike Northwest, where every student receives a university-purchased laptop, Truman will have to make budget provisions for these technology costs.

All things considered, the greatest obstacle to the current success of the eTextbook and e-reader is the attachment between college life and that expensive textbook purchased for a couple hundred dollars a pop. People value books in a way they don't value computers and most students dislike reading a computer screen when they could read on a physical page instead. That's why every article a teacher posts on Blackboard gets printed out — the sensory adventure of reading is still preferred by students. We're not hesitant about electronic textbooks because we don't like change, we just think University officials should consider the question carefully and choose the most practical and cost-effective option for textbooks.

## CORRECTIONS

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

## CARTOON

BY ERIN NEUMAN



## Letters to the Editor

### Better discourse needed in local politics

In this new 2009 semester, can I congratulate Senior T. Dwiggins for his letter in the Dec. 4 issue of the Index and other students for their indignant online responses to Thom Van Vleck: defeated, self-appointed arbiter of conservative values. His original letter to the Index, in which he mentioned me, has caused many students to approach me. His letter was an affront not just to educated voters — it also stamped on voting rights and the modern constitutional practices of most Western democracies.

His taunts in the Nov. 20 issue of the Index were unjustly baseless and gratuitously offensive in a calculated affront against me and Truman's students. Rather than call Van Vleck a crybaby, as many rural working class Democrats were doing at McClanahan's victory party, I will ask, if he cannot take personal political rejection and debate, why is he participating in local politics? He should not dish out abusive ads and then bizarrely deny all later responsibility for them.

In a nutshell, his points against me are refuted, and his challenge for public debate is accepted with zest. I again wrote a letter to the editor including political attacks, along with those in the two I wrote last semester which I am proud of. If he disliked my original letter, he had time to answer it in the campaign, but he chose not to.

I was expecting Van Vleck to disavow my claims that his literature and ads were inherently sexist. However, he did not. I hope local moderate Republicans note, in anger, not to select this extremist moralist in the future. He is seriously claiming he has no responsibility for literature issued in that campaign by the Missouri Republican State Committee, but our household received a male foregrounded, photographed leaflet just as thousands of others did. These leaflets are categorically themed in "the turning our values upside down" debate against, specifically, just not his named woman opponent, but also by inference, against households that are allegedly atypical. To me that means many households we know, such as households of divorce, single parents, homosexuals, and bisexuals.

Finally, having encountered his tactics, now in denial, I will ask for space to comment freshly for a new hopeful year, despite the economic mess the needless capital butcheries have done to our aspirations. I retort to Van Vleck that Christ was non-exclusionary in his household radical values. Christ consorted with and protected prostitutes and Jews and gave away free food and clothes. And if he excluded anyone, it was the money lenders that operated in places of worship. I think if Van Vleck and his party are ever to understand why many rural residents of Adair county endorsed McClanahan, it lies in the recognition of the radical-social gossip feeling now in the air.

Local Republicans desperately need better, less extreme and less overtly chauvinistic representatives if we are to gain a better-informed local political discourse in 2009.

Larry Iles  
Kirksville Resident

### Going green requires moral choice

This letter is a rebuttal to a previous one written by Justin Logan in the Dec. 4 issue of the Index entitled, "Costs of Going Green Outweigh the Benefits." In brief, Mr. Logan asserts that we don't need to recycle or reduce our consumption as "it does nothing in the long run." Under Mr. Logan's theory, where does he ever account for the impact of the damage inflicted on the environment? To him, it simply doesn't matter. However, anyone can see that there has been and there always will be a cost to the environment in the type of world that Mr. Logan imagines. The elevated costs and reduced profits that are a result of some environmental initiatives such as recycling and reduced carbon emissions would be absolutely dwarfed next to the effect of a total lack of conservation of our resources. Furthermore, the effects that a total lack of conservation would have on many ecosystems would be irreversible.

Mr. Logan lacks any kind of moral obligation to leave our earth in a better condition than when we found it, or even to maintain it. The principal problem with his analysis is that it pertains only to monetary gains and losses and completely neglects values that cannot be monetized.

Ryan Campbell

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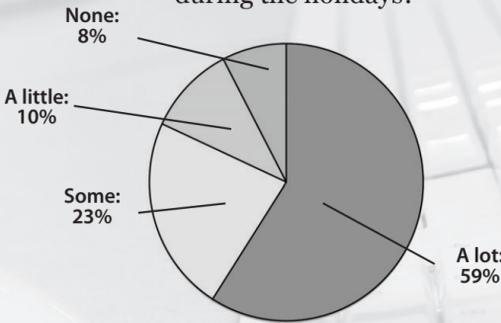
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