

## Midterm opportunities are too good to waste



Zach Vicars

Midterm Break is two days away. That's right. Two days. And, really, it's only one more morning, one more groggy slap of the alarm clock before we're free to head home and spend 10 days of blissful irresponsibility, filled with late-night festivities and foggy mornings devoid of any thought of school. At least that's what Midterm Break will be like for most of us. A breath of fresh air, maybe — but mostly a waste. In view of the pending

danger that is Midterm Break, I've taken precautions. I don't plan on wasting my Midterm Break, and I don't want you to waste yours either.

You see, many students get caught up in the cyclical pattern of Midterm Break-waste simply because they see no other options. A week might seem like enough time to catch up on sleep or get really drunk without academic repercussions, but not enough time to fully enjoy. For those struggling students, I offer the following suggestions:

Option 1: Take a service trip. In many cases, this option might be closed off for this year. Raising a couple hundred bucks to hop on a bus to go to a disaster relief area might be a bit much to ask on two-day's notice, but that doesn't mean you can't look for opportunities to serve in your hometown. Volunteering at a local soup kitchen or

picking up trash along the side of the road always are viable and rewarding options if you want to give a little back. Although serving might not earn you bragging rights with your buddies upon return to campus, it will give you something much more valuable: the satisfaction that comes with knowing your Midterm Break made a difference in someone's life.

Option 2: Seek employment. This option provides by far the least glamour. I'll admit, trading five days of study for five days of manual labor is no vacation to Hawaii, but it helps pay for one. That's why — for this year, at least — I'm selecting this option. It's not the most rewarding or rejuvenating choice, but it is a necessary step to the mother of all breaks: summer. So, if you're feeling industrious and willing to test the economic waters, a week-

long stint at a grocery store or your mom's work might suit your fancy.

Option 3: Hit the road. This option is best suited for the student who has a hunger for adventure and could survive an extra week away from Mommy and Daddy. If you meet those two criteria, I suggest that, if you are able, get as far from the Midwest as you can. We currently are stuck in the paralyzing limbo between mild weather and snow. My advice: change your latitude. Head south and drive through the painted deserts of Texas. Head west and witness the magnificence of the Grand Canyon, a sight every American should see. Or head north into the snowy mountains of Montana or Vermont. Take one or two of your best friends on your adventure. Do it by the seat of your pants and take a risk. Don't worry about what you will eat or where you

will stay. You've got 60 more years of life to have those worries.

Now that I've said my piece, you're free to spend the next week however you want, but remember that Midterm Break is meant to be much more than just a week off school. It's meant to be a time that refreshes and invigorates us. Whether students spend their time serving others, working with a greater goal in mind or marveling at creation, it's important to seize the respite that the powers at be have so graciously bestowed upon us. If you commit yourself to trying something different and exciting, this could be the best Midterm Break of your life. I'm planning on making it mine.

Zach Vicars is a freshman physics major from St. Louis, Mo.



## Tru Rants

Index readers get to sound off about what's on their mind. Keep it under 40 words and no personal attacks or profanity, please!

"I wish the University would keep students informed on the search for a new president."

"I hate it when people say they 'could care less' when the really mean they 'couldn't care less.'"

Got a rant? E-mail us at [trurants@gmail.com](mailto:trurants@gmail.com)

## Curriculum should be salvaged



Andrew Kindiger

Truman's curriculum dilemma needs a new perspective.

The way a student or professor considers a topic or Mode of Inquiry should always be flexible to compensate for evolutions in thought.

For many students, college is a means to an end — a job. Even students who have expressed the desire to continue academic study upon graduation from Truman are concerned with entering professional programs that will guarantee better placement in the job market.

Everyone is concerned with doing the best for their future and many students might be worried about acquiring the necessary skills to go on to the next step. But what happens when your interests multiply or old passions die out? A well mapped-out four-year plan might turn into more of a chore than a convenience if the only consideration students give to their education is accomplishing what is required.

I think there is a misconception of the goals of a liberal arts education coming from both students and teachers. It seems that the ultimate goal does not spark much debate — most students as well as professors

probably would agree that what is learned in four years of undergraduate study is not as important as how an individual interprets and synthesizes information. If an institution supports the liberal arts, it doesn't have to mean that a student needs to be a jack-of-all-trades and ready to converse about any topic with a cocktail in one hand and a doctoral degree in the other, but rather a student should be able to conceptualize a point of interest with a level of sophistication.

It is possible for a single institution to provide for students who want to adhere to a well structured major and students who want to integrate an element of discovery into their undergraduate education. The University already offers opportunities for students to make their own major based on courses offered at Truman or the ability for students to craft a major loosely constructed with a concentration on a general area of study. Though students who have an interdisciplinary major might still have qualms with the Modes of Inquiry as well as the Essential Skills requirement. I thought it odd that the Public Speaking course I took my first semester at Truman evaluated students on a loose understanding of rhetoric and mixed principles of communication when the most important aspect of the course simply was to assist students in becoming more comfortable with presenting information intelligently to an audience.

Tweaking the requirements of the Modes of Inquiry as well as

the Essential Skills is something students and faculty need to discuss and have open dialogue about. Find out what works and what doesn't in order to form a more cohesive understanding of essential concepts students need to be successful with their liberal investigation of academic study. We might find that it is easier to package concepts differently, but only through deliberation will students and teachers find the best way to introduce information to students based on a general framework of academic inquiry.

There are always going to be the professors who believe nothing good was written after Shakespeare or that social sciences are inferior to quadratic equations, but there are also going to be professors who offer topic courses that coincide with an area of academic study that legitimize the overall focus of the subject being analyzed.

Students should try to be more empathetic to those professors who want to help make Truman the best school it can be. While we worry about securing jobs after college, professors are concerned with legitimizing their field of study through their achievements in the academic community. The faculty and students can assist each other during a curriculum change by entering into dialogue to ensure that the University offers a well-rounded general education despite the job market or what literature is selling well at Barnes and Noble.

Andrew Kindiger is a sophomore English major from Liberty, Mo.

## Public speaking is valuable part of higher education



Brenna McDermott

There are times when I wish I didn't attend a liberal arts school. These times include calculus, statistics and biology. Being forced to take these kinds of classes as an English major can be daunting. I don't see how examining the anatomy of a frog will help me become a great writer or English teacher, but I put up with that stuff anyway.

But now I hear rumors that one mandatory class might be eliminated from the curriculum. And it just so happens to be the one mandatory class I've found to be incredibly helpful — public speaking.

All of us might not be mathematicians or scientists, but there is one thing that we all do. We speak. We speak in class, we speak with friends and we will have to speak like professionals when we move on to the great unknown of professional life.

Being a Truman graduate does have weight. People realize that Truman is a good school, and that Truman graduates are hard-working, smart and well-spoken individuals. I have to believe that public speaking contributes to that reputation. We are forced to work hard, we build our skill base and we practice speaking well. I believe that public speaking is mandatory for a good reason.

So what happens when public speaking classes no longer are mandatory?

We will sound like a bunch of idiots. Okay, maybe not quite. But I do think public speaking is one of the most beneficial general education classes Truman offers. What will happen to Truman students when we are no longer forced to practice how to speak like professionals? One name comes to mind: Paula Abdul.

Okay, this is probably the worst-case

scenario, but Paula Abdul literally is the worst public speaker I can think of. She's a successful, beautiful and rich woman who happens to be on the most popular, unscripted show on television. But she probably is best known for being a complete idiot.

In this day and age, image is everything. We all are judged by our appearance, our friendly demeanor and the way we speak. Adding 'like' after every other spoken word does not make us sound scholarly or professional. It makes us sound like valley girls. Or take our former President George W. Bush. There are entire Web sites, such as [Dubyaspeak.com](http://Dubyaspeak.com), devoted to chronicling how stupid he sounds. When the former President of the United States has trouble delivering a speech well, he loses credibility and respect, something national leaders really can't afford to lose.

One of the first things we learn in public speaking class is that people will judge your credibility as a speaker or presenter by the way you talk. When Truman students go

**What will happen to Truman students when we are no longer forced to practice how to speak like professionals?**

out and interview for jobs or give a presentation, they are armed with the basic knowledge and experience that public speaking provides. I'd be willing to bet that the experience of speaking professionally in public speaking courses can be the difference between getting or not getting a job.

Public speaking is more than just a stupid, mandatory class. It might be the one class here at Truman that every single person, no matter what their field or interests, can benefit from. Sure, it might not be the most exciting class, but public speaking should remain part of the curriculum. I don't think it is a coincidence that Truman is looked upon so highly, and that we have public speaking classes to aid students in improving their interview and speaking skills. Take that away, and you might just take away something none of us want to lose: our reputation.

Brenna McDermott is a sophomore English major from St. Louis, Mo.

## Defense at home law confuses



Molly Skyles

A man's home is his castle according to English common law dating to the 1700s. This means that in a person's own home he or she is allowed to do basically whatever is necessary — as long as it's law abiding, of course — and should be free from illegal trespassing and violent attacks. But what about extreme situations, including those that could lead to murder in a person's home? Murder is illegal, but there is an exception when it comes to defending your "castle."

The castle doctrine states that a person has the right to protect his or her own home from violent attack or unlawful intrusion with the use of deadly force, if necessary. The Office of Legislative Research reported that as of January 2007, 15 states have adopted the castle doctrine. This law was enacted in Missouri in 2007, but had not been applied in the state until a Kirksville murder case in May 2008.

Jackie Gleason, former Adair County jail administrator, shot and killed Kirksville resident Rogelio Johnson in May 2008 after he

unlawfully entered her home through a window, according to the Aug. 18 issue of the Index. Recently, Attorney General Chris Koster dropped all charges on the basis of the castle doctrine.

In the situation of someone breaking into my own home, I most likely would do anything possible to save myself and those present. And I would not want to be charged for doing so. However, the fact that we can take the law this much into our own hands is a little scary. Murder is not an issue to be tampered with.

It seems to me that the castle doctrine could be summed up essentially as self-defense. In the United States, justifiable homicide, the use of deadly force when a person's own life or the lives of his or her family or those near by are in imminent danger, is entirely legal. The only difference is that the castle doctrine removes the portion of self-defense laws that state a person has the duty to retreat, meaning that the occupant of the home has an obligation to leave the scene of the incident to avoid confrontation, according to an Aug. 7, 2006 article in the International Herald Tribune. In other words, the castle doctrine tells you to stand your ground and meet force with force. Take any necessary means to defend yourself and your home — or your castle.

Because the castle doctrine does not include the duty to retreat, I take

that to mean that a person's home is more important than someone's life, and that is where my real issue with this law comes into play. Are material items really worth the life of another? If someone broke into your home with the sole intention of stealing your plasma screen TV, that does not give you the right to kill the burglar. The castle doctrine has specific conditions that must be met for a person to be able to use it on his or her own behalf. For example, the occupant of the home must reasonably believe that the intruder plans to cause some type of serious bodily harm. Therefore, stealing or breaking expensive items does not apply. However, the police are not present, and the intruder obviously cannot testify after the fact. So, how does one know if the homeowner was lawfully entitled to use deadly force on a trespasser?

Despite the fact that you should not be charged if you have to resort to taking someone's life in your own home to save yourself, I'm not convinced the castle doctrine really is the best solution. When something is as open to interpretation as this law is, only confusion can come from it. A law should make something clear and concise, not confuse the people it is supposed to be protecting.

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### WEB POLL

What are you planning to do during summer break?

**Internship: 43%**      **Part-time job: 57%**

This week's question:

Are you worried about finding a job after graduation?

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