

OUR VIEW

Televising meetings provides benefits

Oh, how times have changed. In the old days — “When I was your age,” as someone’s grandfather might say — politics and government were all about smoke-filled back rooms and shady deals. Nowadays, American government on state and national levels is fairly transparent. Legislation like freedom of information acts and sunshine laws, Web sites like Project Vote Smart and TV stations like C-SPAN make it easy for citizens to find out everything they could possibly want to know about how their elected officials are running their state and the country.

However, one group that often gets ignored is local government. Whether it’s because of apathy, lack of interest or some other reason, many people don’t devote the time and effort to knowing what’s going on in their very own town.

But all that might be changing in Kirksville, thanks to a new agreement between City Council and the University’s own News 36 (KTRM-TV) (see story, page 2). The Council not only has given News 36 permission to broadcast Council meetings on cable channel 3 but is providing the funding. In essence the University and the community now have their very own C-SPAN, at least for a couple of hours each week.

This project is operating on a trial basis right now, but we like the idea for several reasons. For one thing, it shines a spotlight on a governing body that often gets ignored. Sure, Council meetings are open to the public, but let’s face it, they’re not exactly gripping political drama. No one goes to a Council meeting expecting the kind of excitement seen on “The West Wing,” or even

on C-SPAN2’s “Prime Minister’s Questions.” But being able to view the meetings from the comfort of your own home makes keeping up with the issues facing the city incredibly convenient. If your TV has split-screen capabilities, you could even watch the Council meeting on one side while keeping an eye on the game on the other side. Broadcasting these meetings eliminates excuses for not knowing what’s going on in local government.

Keeping voters informed is another benefit that televising Council meetings provides. Prior to this Election Day, there was a big push to register students in Adair County. Voting locally is a double-edged sword: Yes, it’s convenient, but it also means you have to keep up with local issues and know the candidates for local government. Seeing how councilmembers conduct themselves at meetings and what opinions they express will allow students to be informed voters the next time Council elections roll around.

Giving Council meeting broadcasting permission to News 36, a student-run organization, establishes a link between the University and the community. It sends a positive message to students, acknowledging the fact that Kirksville is our town, too. As students we spend the majority of our time here, and we deserve input in the political process.

The presidential election generated a lot of political excitement among young voters. The decision to televise Council meetings takes advantage of this excitement and provides an opportunity for it to carry on into future elections.

The University and Kirksville now have their very own C-SPAN.

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.

- Last week’s corrections were cited for the wrong issue. The corrections were for the Oct. 23, 2008 issue of the Index, not the Oct. 30 issue.

CARTOON

BY ERIN NEUMAN



Letters to the Editor

College Democrats fail to register some voters

On Oct. 8, I registered to vote — or so I thought. I turned in my registration form to the College Democrats table on the Quad. I intended to take it directly to the county clerk but saw that they were taking the forms. On Nov. 4, I went to my polling place to vote, and the volunteers said they did not have my name listed. They then called the county clerk who checked as well. So there I was, stripped of my right to vote because members of an organization were too lazy to do what they said they would do. I even went in person to the county clerk’s office, and they checked a few piles that were not filled out correctly or were late. I was not in either pile. There were three other students behind me at the county clerk’s office who also had turned in their registration forms on campus but weren’t registered. I simply ask that the College Democrats return the registration form that has my personal information on it and give a detailed explanation of why they never turned it in.

Stephen Emlund
Senior

Apathy isn’t problem for Truman students

In response to Larry Iles’ letter in the Oct. 30 issue of the Index, not only is his accusation that the College Republicans encourage apathy completely off base, his charge that the Truman community is inherently apathetic is flawed.

The College Republicans did not encourage student apathy toward the general election and, in fact, worked to register voters in the Kirksville community in addition to students. They actively participated in campaigning efforts for local and national candidates just as the College Democrats did. The College Republicans made statements addressing questionable practices by certain students registering voters on campus, but in no way encouraged students not to vote or not to register to vote. Rather, they encouraged students to vote in Kirksville, in their home towns or by absentee ballot as they saw fit.

Iles insinuated that those who are not involved with groups like Amnesty International are apathetic. It certainly is within our rights as students to participate in whatever organizations we choose, and our lack of participation in one organization or another most likely speaks more to our busy schedules or our time commitment to another organization rather than to our apathy.

Students on this campus are involved in a variety of organizations that promote activism and community involvement. For example, in addition to the work College Democrats and Republicans do, Alpha Phi Omega and Alpha Sigma Gamma, two large organizations on campus, regularly engage in

extensive community service throughout Kirksville and the nation. Other organizations like Prism, Voices for Planned Parenthood and Colleges Against Cancer focus on raising specific issues on campus and in the community.

One of the strengths of the student body is the diversity of interests and causes, which allows new students to choose from a variety of ways to spend their time. Iles certainly is within his rights to continue his barrage of entertaining letters to the Index, but, as a senior, it is apparent to me that his rants are hurting his cause to draw more students to groups like Amnesty International rather than promoting participation.

Additionally, some College Republicans and College Democrats might very well be “wannabe state house staffers,” according to Iles, but given that many successful small business owners, well respected attorneys, CEOs and politicians have started their careers as congressional staffers, I doubt anyone would consider this an offensive label. Students on this campus work hard for their academic successes and causes, and they do not deserve to have their hard work dismissed nor personal attacks leveled against them.

Theresa Perkins
Senior

Student-led courses would provide benefits

I disagree with Jackie Gonzalez’s assertion in the Oct. 30 issue of the Index that student-initiated courses are, to paraphrase her argument, dumb. As a history major, I think our history department does its best to cover its bases. We have phenomenal faculty in American history as well as the ancient world. We were fortunate enough to get Jason McDonald to stay as a visiting professor for three semesters and to be sure the professors covering the other continents know their stuff, but unlike a big school such as the University of Missouri-Columbia, we often lack course variety and courses that would be invaluable to the knowledge and understanding of global history. I think our faculty would not permit some schmuck or one of those irritating know-it-alls to teach a college course. They are quite aware of who should or should not be given such responsibility.

Graduate student Thomas Lecaque has been enthusiastic about teaching a course on the Byzantine Empire for some time now. This is exactly what our department needs. A class like this should be pass/fail and worth one credit, particularly at the start of the program, but I think it would be well worth it and could do nothing but strengthen our major.

I don’t see the practicality of student-initiated courses extending to all majors — I can’t imagine a student-led course about advanced physics or public policy, but I’ve

known a good handful of students who would be able to give solid lectures and spark interest in important fields that our limited faculty simply cannot cover.

Sean Cahn
Senior

Greater participation in debates is needed

Now that the elections, in all their tedious expensiveness, are at last over, can one seriously hope that Americans will look at other countries to see whether they can save themselves a lot of money and attain the higher turnout that other countries obtain, and as the U.S. obtained thanks to Obama and third-party campaigns during this exceptional contest?

The first reform point ought to be aimed directly at the Truman communication department. For example, when Professor of Communication Jay Self introduced the KTVO/KGAN-sponsored Congressional candidates debate he mistreated all — pathetically few — 200 of us, trying to make it look as if the empty Baldwin Hall was falsely crammed, to a long preamble, firstly claiming correctly elections are about democracy and “participatory ... like the ancient Greek polis or assembly,” then wrongly, that “modern circumstances” required “procedure time rules for television” in a hint at what was to come of his own principled over-grandiloquence.

What transpired, of course, under this gross perversion of real participation was complete exclusion of the actual audience from any spontaneous questions or even brief statements, except a “pre-selected by a moderator” set of fixed, mild interrogations of the candidates. Even the applause was confined, by pre-set sheets, to less than two minutes of the 52-minute duration.

In conclusion, I know, having run for both the Commons and two levels of municipality back in my native UK, you can and must do better than this, Mr. Self, as even people at that meeting were rightly aghast at how the candidates were coerced into having to compress real diversity to suit the “mediocracy” of TV. There was no real involvement, which is ironically like the real Athenian polis that treacherously excluded all women and slaves as non-participants.

Any reader can do an Internet search for CBC, BBC or LCP (France) Congressional TV or radio election programs to see how, in 52 minutes, audience debate and queries still can be made. I offer up to Mr. Self, his colleague and mutual friend Reverend Dr. Barry Poyner, to bring class tutorials about how to free University events into the real century of, so far, locally denied democracy.

Larry Iles
Kirksville resident

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The Index welcomes letters to the editor from the University community. Letters to the editor are due by noon the Monday before publication and become property of the Index. Submissions are subject to editing, must contain a well-developed theme and cannot exceed 500 words except at the discretion of the Editorial Board. All letters to the editor must be typed, double-spaced, signed by at least one individual and include a phone number for verification. The Index does not publish anonymous letters to the editor. Letters to the editor also may be submitted by e-mail at index@truman.edu or on our Web site at www.trumanindex.com. Include the words “letter to the editor” in the subject line of the e-mail. No individual may submit more than one letter a week.

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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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