

# ONE-ON-ONE

This week, two of our columnists debate each other. Their topic for this issue is:

# Should Truman implement student-initiated courses?



Andrew Kindiger

## Courses would benefit learning, University image

The University is considering adding a course option that would let students become more engaged with how they learn through self-directed courses. You might think such courses would include “The Analysis of Sleeping” or “The Simpsons and the Scientific Method,” but just because these courses are going to be designed by students doesn’t mean ridiculous classes with no substance will be the goal of this course option. Classes that allow students to pursue a subject on their own still can be rewarding even if the instructor does not have a Ph.D., or even a bachelor’s degree for that matter.

Many universities offer a course option that requires students to manage their work for a particular course, or in some cases actually teach the class to other students. Rice University offers students the opportunity to receive one credit for teaching a course, and the students who take the course also receive one credit. This type of activity serves more as an academic supplement but has tremendous benefits for students. It allows students enrolled in the course to be exposed to something new, and most importantly, this course option gives a student the opportunity to direct a class. Such an experience could be valuable to those

wanting to teach or for those who have spent time doing independent research who want to share what they have learned with their peers.

And it’s not like students are going to be able to complete full degrees by teaching half of their classes to themselves. It is something that would be organized by the student and then submitted for review. Such policies would not be unfamiliar to the staff at the University either considering that there already are options to choose an interdisciplinary major that requires more careful guiding and planning for both students and advisers. Students also most likely would submit their research to an adviser or a specific department to be evaluated. It wouldn’t be an academic free-for-all that would allow a student to earn an A just by making a phony name for a course and claiming he or she is taking it.

Adding an option for students to create and direct their own courses definitely would improve the University’s curriculum. It would help to set the University apart from other public institutions by enhancing the quality of learning and experience for students. It also would be easy to set limits on the types of classes that could be self-directed. Universities offering similar options,

including Rice, have a review process in place to ensure that the classes will be worthwhile and have a scholarly value for the students. These courses most likely will be offered to students only once per semester and also could have a limit on how many credits accumulated by such courses can count toward a diploma.

So to those who think offering a self-directed course option to students would be the death of academia: Calm down. There aren’t going to be six sections of “Underwater Basket Weaving” or inflated GPAs because of a record number of self-taught courses. There will be guidelines and advice available for those seeking to engage in such a program. Students engaging in the process also will be able to experience something completely unique from their other coursework.

When considering this idea, I would encourage students and faculty to inquire about not only having students manage and direct courses, but also have students teach a course. Adding in the extra option for students to gain teaching experience would be a tremendous benefit.

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



Jackie Gonzalez

## Students lack teaching skills of professors

Everyone seems to love these student-initiated courses. I mean, they sound like a dream. You can hand-pick the materials to read, and grade yourself. Although this initially sounds like a fun use of time, I couldn’t imagine taking a course like this without feeling guilty about it. Believe it or not, I didn’t come to college for fun. I came to learn.

Student-initiated courses are being touted as the ultimate complement to a liberal arts education, but imagine the lack of a challenge and the inefficiencies these courses could potentially have. Most advocates I’ve encountered have been preaching that these courses offer discipline and an exciting new approach to coursework. But let’s face it, I’m sure everyone also places these courses under the subcategory of Easy A classes.

Students would be entering these classes with the stipulation that the courses hardly reflect any type of rigor or legitimacy. In order for these classes to truly be helpful in broadening students’ scope of a specific topic, a serious

commitment from their faculty mentor would be required. Does Truman faculty have the time to dedicate to the specifics of these courses? Probably not.

Courses taught by students for students should not have letter grades associated with them. Giving students the opportunity to grade their peers and themselves can lead to power struggles and pity grades. Therefore, student-initiated courses should be only pass/fail. This would prevent students from enrolling in a “Rubick’s Cube” class for the sake of getting that “A” in order to renew their campus scholarships for the following year. Other universities require these courses to be pass/fail, and hopefully Truman will utilize this precedent in order to keep these courses where they should be — considerably less important than courses taught by the professionals.

Professors spend years to get where they are intellectually. To have a student teach a course that is valued the same as one taught by an established professor with a doctoral degree is simply insulting. As an aspiring professor, my previous years of academic experience

would be drastically more beneficial to students than an undergraduate with JSTOR articles.

According to the Provost Web site, the core of these courses is to provide students with an opportunity to be leaders and be more engaged in their coursework. Yet these options already exist if you take the initiative to ask around. If you want teaching experience serve as a teaching assistant. If you want to further your leadership abilities, acquire positions in your extracurricular organizations. There are other ways to meet these needs than these seemingly sketchy student-taught courses.

Students pay thousands of dollars to take classes here. Part of our tuition goes to faculty — the ones with the proper educational background and the capabilities to teach. Whether we like it or not, professors do know more than us in their fields. There are many opportunities for independent study and outside research that should fill this void in students’ academic curriculum.

Jackie Gonzalez is a senior communication and history major from San Diego, Calif.

## Candidates sacrifice values to increase campaign spending



Ryan Carothers

Sen. Barack Obama’s campaign: \$158,509,859. Sen. John McCain’s campaign: \$58,432,608. Finally casting a vote Nov. 4 after one year, eight months and 17 days of presidential campaigning: priceless.

While passing the time during these last nail-biting days before the Nov. 4, 2008 election, I decided to reflect on all of the fun memories I had collected throughout my rookie election year. I reflected on all of the critical moments of the election such as the debates about Joe the Plumber, the racial comments like McCain’s “that one,” the Hillary Clinton nutcracker action figure and, of course, Steven Colbert’s short-lived presidential candidacy.

But among all of these life-changing experiences, I thought about the irony of spending so much money on campaigning in the middle of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Each candidate in the 2008 election has used the economic crisis to his advantage to advocate economic solutions. This stands in direct contrast to the Federal Exchange Commission candidate financial report describing the vastly increased amount of money that has been spent and continues to be spent on the presidential campaigns.

It doesn’t seem right that with inflation being such a problem, candidates would be spending record amounts of money during this election. Spending this money on unnecessary trips overseas to Iraq also hurts the economy when the candidates already are spending millions of dollars on jet fuel alone just to travel within the United States.

During the past three elections the average amount of money spent on a presidential campaign has increased nine times. In 1995 President Bill Clinton

spent a total of \$13,436,897 on his campaign, and Bob Dole spent \$20,845,136. In the most recent presidential election, President George W. Bush spent \$33,634,358 on his campaign, and Sen. John Kerry spent \$23,678,068, according to the Campaign Finance Institute. There has been an enormous and unnecessary increase in the amount of money spent on campaigns. Especially during a time of economic instability, it is completely hypocritical of the presidential candidates to be spending this much money.

Another issue I have with this is the major difference between the amount of money spent by Obama’s campaign and McCain’s campaign. Obama has outspent McCain by more than \$1 million. This seems ridiculous given that in the past, candidates never have spent more than half of what some of the candidates in the 2008 presidential election have spent. Obama also has no real track record of effectiveness in an executive position that manages

large amounts of money, so I have no reason to think Obama will be responsible with money.

It is completely unnecessary to spend such a large amount of money on campaigning and has been a crucial factor

in why elections have lost their fundamental focus of purposefully informing and advocating to voters.

I think Obama is a strong candidate but learning this information has caused me to lose faith in this election’s theme of “change.”

It sends a message of irrational spending, which our country has unfortunately been guilty of during the past eight years and needs to cleanse itself of.

I understand that campaigning is very expensive, but when the country you are campaigning to lead is in economic crisis, conserving as much money as possible only seems logical.

Ryan Carothers is a freshman communication major from Kansas City, Mo.

**AROUND THE QUAD**

What was the best Halloween costume you ever had?

 <p><b>“I was a Power Ranger in first grade.”</b></p> <p><i>Samantha Crouch</i> freshman</p>	 <p><b>“A clown. My roommate was scared of clowns, so that was good.”</b></p> <p><i>Mae Shoaf</i> junior</p>
 <p><b>“When I was four I was Beauty from ‘Beauty and the Beast.’”</b></p> <p><i>Sarah Duvall</i> junior</p>	 <p><b>“David Blaine.”</b></p> <p><i>Daniel Drummond</i> senior</p>

## Humans vs. Zombies provides opportunity for harmless fun



Jean Kaul

On Tuesday, the campus-wide civil war ended.

No, it wasn’t between students and faculty (although some days that might seem like a good idea). It was between humans — and zombies? Not real zombies, just kids with bandanas around their heads or forearms, depending on their species. The game might have seemed like harmless fun, but bad things happened — although not as bad as having your flesh torn from your arm by ravenous zombies. According to a conversation I heard on KTRM’s “BackTalk,” there were zombie/human hate crimes on campus. I kid you not. Apparently on Saturday night someone threw a soda (I’m going to make a wild guess that the assailant was drunk) at a player innocently trying to participate in the game. After chucking at this — I’m not completely heartless, I waited to find out the player was unhurt — I decided it was time to find out a little bit more about this, shall I say, nerdy

game being played on our campus.

Maybe I should take the whole nerdy thing back. Three hundred of my peers participated this semester, and it seemed like they all had a blast. That means one out of every 20 Truman students is a Humans vs. Zombies nerd. In my mind, that really isn’t surprising considering that high level of nerdiness on campus already.

My main complaint with the game: Several times, I was blitzkrieged by overeager players intent on their mission. I was vaguely threatened when trench coat-clad people ran around me with Nerf guns. On my way to class several times, I paused on the sidewalk besieged by the spectacle of zombies hunting humans. Also, those socks the humans used to stun zombies? Some of them looked kind of suspicious, like they hadn’t been washed for a while. I didn’t want to get hit by those.

So I was pretty skeptical about the whole game until I saw one of my friends wearing the dreaded bandana. I said, “Oh no! Not you too.” He merely grinned his zombie-like smile and continued to pursue wandering humans. I called after him, “I don’t know if I can acknowledge you in public anymore.” He didn’t seem to care. Apparently, the allure of Human vs. Zombies is stronger than the need for social acceptance.

I decided it was time to take matters into my own hands and learn more about this game. Because the number of players doubled this semester, I don’t think we can pretend anymore that Humans vs. Zombies is going away anytime soon. Maybe it’s time for me to stop making fun of a game that is harmless, carb-burning, and best of all not homework based. Should we knock the players for finding a procrastination alternative to Facebook?

To some players, the game offers a welcome respite from the drudgery of studying (and running across campus in search of human prey is a lot more fun than 30 minutes on the elliptical). As I thought more about the game, I realized the joy the players get from it is pretty darn similar to the sense of fun a rousing game of Capture the Flag during middle school recess made me feel. As we grow older, a lot of us seem to lose that sense of fun — and start caring a lot more about what other people think.

I decided I need to stop calling the Human vs. Zombies players nerds. They are actually non-conformists — I should salute them as non-conforming nerds.

Jean Kaul is a junior English major from Marengo, Ill.

**WEB POLL**

Are you following political campaigns for local offices?

 <p><b>Yes — 50%</b></p>	<p><b>This week’s question:</b></p> <p><b>What is the most important issue for you in voting for president?</b></p>
 <p><b>No — 50%</b></p>	<p><b>Vote online at</b> <a href="http://trumanindex.com">trumanindex.com</a></p>