

# Changing perception of Americans takes work



Jean Kaul

Usually, I dread the beginning of the school year because of one question people always ask: "So what did you do this summer?" Most of the time my answer isn't too cool. I mean, saying you worked the entire summer at your local library isn't too exciting — except when you get to shame the locals for looking at pornography on the library computers.

This school year, however, has been an exception. Instead of working as a disillusioned library grunt, I was able to visit one of the most singularly exciting, dynamic places in the world: China. And I got to go for two and

a half months. Unfortunately, I left Beijing exactly a week before the Olympics began, but I was still privileged to witness what some of the most industrious people on the face of the Earth can do when preparing for their coming out party. Yep, it was pretty amazing.

One of the first questions my family and friends asked me (the very first question: How was the food? My answer: Excellent!) concerned the perception of Americans in China. Americans have learned to be wary after our last few disastrous years on the world stage. Some family members who had traveled extensively in Europe warned me that my reception might be chilly at times.

Happily, my experience was one of extreme welcome. Upon entering restaurants, every foreigner is Ni-hao-ed so extensively you feel your mouth might go sore after answering so many times. Although I was pleased to note that China was excited about American visitors

(some people might say a little too excited), I did uncover something troubling while traveling. The perception of what Americans are like, and especially what American college students are like, is severely distorted. Bluntly, to the rest of the world we appear to be fat dumbasses. On two separate occasions, I was asked by Chinese students if American students were like those kids in the movie "American Pie." I was fairly flabbergasted the first time, and the second time I fell into a bout of helpless laughter. Rather embarrassedly, I was able to assure the students that Americans usually don't use pastry in that manner.

Upon reflection, I became somewhat disturbed. Is this really what everyone thinks of us? I had heard it before, but until I was able

to experience it firsthand I couldn't truly believe it. The "American Pie" experience was not the last time I got to witness some funny cultural collision. At the Temple of Heaven, a girl friend and I were viewing the main hall when a mob of Korean boys thronged around us. About 30 of them came running over wearing aviator sunglasses and sideways baseball caps, asking us to take a picture with them. We were so shocked by the mob of boys we

just shook our head yes and let them take a picture with us. But the best part yet: One of the Korean boys shouted, "Hit me baby one more time!" to the boy taking the picture of us when the Koreans wanted to re-take the picture. Apparently, a Britney Spears lyric now takes the place of "Cheese."

Although for the most part I

found these exchanges fairly harmless and often hysterical, it really brought home to me the importance of representing not only myself, but my entire country while traveling overseas. At Truman, where a good number of students will spend a summer, a semester or a year abroad, I hope we can represent our country more effectively. America is more than Britney and "American Pie," but if you walked the streets of Beijing you might not think so. With a little cultural awareness and open minds we can change the way American students are perceived, and slowly but surely our whole nation as well. So ask questions, try not to judge those different than you, make allowances and most of all, try the food. Once the world's perception of us changes, maybe we can regain the respect we aspire to.

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

## McCain reveals poor judgment with vice presidential choice



Brenna McDermott

One morning, as I fired up my computer and browsed the Web, I came across a report that McCain had chosen his running mate. I had expected this for several days, but what I didn't expect was to read a name that was virtually unknown to me, but who I would soon discover to be dubbed, "coldest state, hottest governor."

And that statement alone makes me angry that Gov. Sarah Palin is the vice presidential nominee of the Republican party.

The way I see it, McCain has chosen Palin for all the wrong reasons. He is hypocritical when he attacks Obama's inexperience but then supports someone with almost no experience. He obviously is tempting the female votership with a less qualified version of Hillary Clinton.

McCain's main attack of Democratic nominee Barack Obama has been his lack of political seasoning. But instead of choosing a vice presidential candidate who has experience, McCain managed to pick someone with less political experience than Barack Obama. Palin has been the governor of Alaska for some 20 months, was mayor of Wasilla, Alaska for two terms and was a city councilmember for two terms. When you're being entrusted with the responsibilities of a vice president, a city councilmember might as well be a mom from the PTA.

Not to be morbid, but if McCain were to be elected he would be our oldest president. He pretty much looks to me like he is knocking on death's door. The odds are good that he may, in fact, drop dead in the White House. It seems to me that McCain and the GOP have forgotten the most important role of the vice president. If anything should happen to John McCain, Sarah Palin would be running the country. Insert gulp here. If McCain doesn't think Obama deserves to be in the Oval Office, how could he even remotely justify making Palin his successor?

Since Senator Hillary Clinton dropped out of the Democratic primary race many female Democrats have been on the fence about supporting

Obama. A recent Gallup Poll indicated that this election will come down to how white, female independents vote, according to USA Today.

This election will be decided by women.

What better way to tempt white females than with a white female?

I'm hoping, however, that McCain's idea that women will vote for Palin for the mere sake of electing a woman won't be the case. I should hope that the smart, responsible and aware gender that I call my own will be able to see through McCain's obvious ploy to steal Hillary voters (which will never work), and that independents will keep this election from becoming girls vs. boys and make responsible decisions to recognize who will take care of our country the best, not who is the hottest vice president (obviously, Senator Joe Biden. Just kidding).

Palin definitely is hotter than Biden. But should that be any reason to vote for her? Will her "Miss Wasilla" pageant title and runner-up title as "Miss Alaska" help her run the Senate? Only if the Senate establishes a swimsuit competition in the recent future. Again, shudder. She does, however, have the whole world peep thing working for her. If McCain picked Gov. Palin because he needs someone who has even the slightest ounce of charisma and doesn't look uncomfortable at every appearance, that doesn't justify her right to run as his VP.

McCain has chosen Gov. Palin for the wrong reasons. She wasn't chosen because of her long career in politics, her expertise in foreign policy, all the good she has done for the country or because she proved herself in the primaries. She didn't do anything to get chosen except be female, generally attractive and practically unversed in numerous areas of national politics.

"Coldest state, hottest governor" might be enough justification for the people of Alaska, but Palin will need to show me a lot more than that to convince me her appointment as McCain's running mate is even remotely justified. But I bet Palin does have some redeeming qualities. Say, maybe she has a good memory and could help Senator McCain remember how many houses he has. I guess she will be useful after all.

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

### AROUND THE QUAD

Have you been following the presidential race?



**"Yes, I read about it in the newspapers."**

*Olivia Sandbothe*  
sophomore



**"Yes, I watch TV and read the newspaper."**

*Amy Hall*  
freshman



**"Yes, I work for the Obama campaign."**

*James Scholfield*  
senior



**"Kind of - I research the candidates on their Web sites."**

*Jackie Boos*  
sophomore

## Alcohol culture takes toll on new students' experiences



Zach Vicars

Over the centuries wine has soaked its way into the very essence of Italian culture. Rows of grapevines weave through the peninsula, pumping lifeblood into thousands of Italian villages. My mother used to travel to Italy often on business and she'd describe in vivid detail the Tuscan wineries that dotted endless miles of old causeways, some of which were laid by Caesar and his centurions. Only one thing kept my mom from fully experiencing this romantic side of Italy: She doesn't drink.

But when Mom would politely decline a glass of vino rosato, her Italian colleagues wouldn't react in kind. Instead, they'd reel in shock, insist time and time again and most often rudely turn a cold shoulder, thinking my mother was either an alcoholic or had some severe cerebral defect.

When I turned down kegger invitation after kegger invitation during Truman Week, I often elicited the same response. People couldn't believe I didn't drink. Just like in

Italy, the idea of someone choosing not to drink defied traditional culture.

Everywhere I went — be it lunch, class or one of the endless house meetings — I saw someone who was either recovering from a hangover or reliving those foggy memories of embarrassing themselves the night before. Even the school-sponsored events like "Montage" and "Choices" seemed to encourage underage drinking.

Pressure came from the every side to go out with the crowd and drink — simply because that seemed to be the only way to have fun. The Christian organizations on campus — two of which I now regularly attend — knew how to have a good time without damaging their brain cells, but the rest of the student body seemed to only want to engage in festivities that they wouldn't remember the next day. As a non-drinker, I usually would head to my room at about 10 p.m., feeling lonely, bored and above all disappointed.

I was disappointed because, like it or not, this taste Truman students had acquired for alcohol leaves a nasty stain on the campus. You see, we Bulldogs, like the Italians I described earlier, have developed a certain heritage to complement our cultural obsession with alcohol. But instead of fine wines, scenic vistas and ancient byways, our fixation has produced wretched beverages, dilapidated frat

houses and vomit-soaked upholstery.

And, what's worse, this taste for alcohol has brought the name of the University down with it.

Sure, people across the state recognize Truman as the university that's highly-selective, affordable and all that other marketable propaganda, but this university is also recognized as the place where smart kids go to get drunk.

For instance, when I told my friends back home that I was headed off to Truman, they'd often respond, "Why? All people do up there is drink."

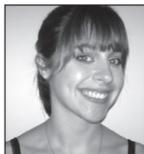
"No, not at all," I'd call back. "There are plenty of people who know how to have fun and stay sober."

And at the time, I really believed that. I really believed Truman students would want to build on their intellect, not destroy it. I really believed Truman students here would seek a sound mind and a sound body. I really believed Truman students were better than everyone said.

Then I came to Truman and saw how alcohol had been absorbed into the culture of this campus. I watched classmate after classmate go out and live up to Truman's unwritten reputation, and all those beliefs were shattered.

Zach Vicars is a freshman English and history major from St. Charles, Mo.

## Presidential candidates offer contrasting views of future



Molly Skyles

It's easy to rattle off some of the qualities that make for a good person. It's not as easy to list the qualities needed in a good president. I believe some of the characteristics are the same, though. Qualities like optimism, gratitude, humility and pride make for a good person and a great president.

In his acceptance speech for the Democratic nomination Aug. 28, Barack Obama demonstrated the power of words and the quality of his character. As he talked of ending dependence on Middle Eastern oil in 10 years, closing tax loopholes and making health care obtainable and affordable to all people, it was hard not to put my trust in Obama.

But are words and promises enough?

During a time when our loved ones are serving two or more military tours overseas, families are giving up their homes because they can't afford them and students aren't able to get an education because of costly

student loans, these promises sound comforting.

The Republican nominee John McCain is obviously qualified to be president. He has years of experience in the political realm and has worn our country's uniform. What does it really mean to fight for our country, though? Does that make him a better American or better qualified to be president? McCain, like Obama and like the majority of the U.S. population, is patriotic — there's no denying that. But just because a person served our country doesn't mean he or she is the best candidate to run it.

In Obama's acceptance speech, he mentioned McCain's views on politics and how they differ from his own. McCain thinks if he helps out the big businesses and the CEOs that all of that wealth somehow will find its way down through society and eventually help all the little people of the country. In a perfect world this might be true. However, he is forgetting a few key details. We are humans. We are greedy. And we are money-obsessed. Do you really think the president of a major corporation is going to directly or indirectly help out the poor man

struggling to make ends meet? I'm no expert on economic affairs, but I don't think that's very likely. Obama, on the other hand, believes the exact opposite as McCain: Help the little guy first, and watch him grow.

Liberals, like Obama, believe by helping and supporting those who cannot help themselves, a foundation is created for them to one day prosper and learn from their past struggles. Conservatives, on the other hand,

believe that people will be better off if they are left to deal with their problems on their own. How will they be better off, McCain? Does allowing someone to get so poor that they have to sell their car, home and possessions just to eat really make them a better person in the long run? Is it really OK when people are dying solely because they can't afford proper health care?

Now maybe McCain does have a few tricks up his sleeve. But to me, the promises of the senator from Illinois are looking pretty good. After all, as Obama said, isn't eight years enough?

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

### WEB POLL

Does Truman's alcohol policy need revision?

**Yes**  
(43% — 33 votes)



**No**  
(27% — 21 votes)



**Truman has an alcohol policy?**  
(30% — 33 votes)



**This week's question:**

Do you think John McCain's vice presidential choice will help or hurt his campaign?

Vote online at [trumanindex.com](http://trumanindex.com)