

'Harvard' slogan detracts from distinction



Connor Stangler

You remember it sounded good the first time you heard it. You remember smiling as your friend who actually was going to Harvard complained about the tuition. And you certainly remember the thrill every time you told your friends you were attending Harvard in the fall and then mumbling, as they congratulated you, "... of the Midwest."

Truman's unofficial title certainly has become part of the school's reputation. It is a potent marketing tool and has been the student body's favorite nickname, evidenced by T-shirt sales

and regular, casual references.

I'm not in an appropriate position to assess the accuracy of the name. I have never attended Harvard and, as a freshman, have not yet had the chance to fully experience Truman. But are we prepared to compare ourselves to one of the premier educational institutes in the world? If so, we are assuming an enormous responsibility.

It is a bold claim, to say the least. For the most part, "The Harvard of the Midwest" exists as a complement to the school's established reputation and as a running joke, but flippant and repeated mention of it from students and faculty reinforce the idea. It's hard to separate the fact from the fiction in a recurring joke, especially in one that borders on sincerity. Prospective and current students assume that a claim so often repeated cannot be false.

Truman students are extremely intelligent and driven. But any posi-

tive comparison between Harvard and Truman encourages an, as yet, undeserved arrogance. Unless we commit to the same intellectual and academic rigor the topflight schools practice, our ostentation will keep us from striving to improve. As long as some continue to buy into it, the nickname does a great disservice to the student body and to prospective students.

When they leave Truman, graduates must realize competition is fierce and some of the greatest minds of our time have been training at other universities. Proper acknowledgement of what else is out there will benefit all students and faculty in the long run. Simply look beyond our campus. Schools of the highest caliber are only miles away: University of Chicago, Northwestern University, Washington University, Grinnell College and Carleton College. Talent is not restricted to the east.

The premise that our university

is on the same level as Harvard, Yale or Princeton threatens to lull us into a false sense of security. We are in danger of settling into stasis. If we want to compete with the Ivies, we must push ourselves even more than we do now. A school never should reduce itself to a comparison or else it is doomed to be just that. Of course the comparisons are nice, and of course there has never been a formal reduction, but Truman must never rely on the reputation of other schools to build its own. It must set a new standard for excellence. Several schools in the region have designated themselves as the "Harvard of the Midwest," but if Truman intentionally divorces itself from the name, it will be able to form a legacy independent of other schools.

Trying to separate itself from other schools claiming the "Harvard" distinction has resulted in another nickname, "The Princeton of the Prairie." What do

we hope to accomplish with this new nickname? Let our achievements stand on their own, not on the names of others. Where do the comparisons stop? I assume "The Brown of the Backwoods" or "The Cornell of the Cornfields" is waiting in the wings.

I do not advocate for a more realistic comparison ("The Brandeis of the Midwest" is not inspiring either), but rather for the end of positive ones. Compare our merits to other schools but only as a means to an end. We should compete, not equate. Only then will Truman become the institution it claims to be.

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AROUND THE QUAD

How do you rent movies?



"I download them illegally."

*Eric Stone
freshman*



"Netflix."

*Meghan Woolbright
sophomore*



"Redbox because it's cheap."

*Emily Seithel
sophomore*



"I don't rent movies."

*Antoinette Stewart
sophomore*

Some students abuse welfare system



Jessica Catron

Hungry and low on cash? My usual solution is to inventory all the food in my house and try to compile something tasty. But some state-run universities are suggesting a different approach: food stamps. The main school under fire for this proposal is Portland State University, which has a Web site encouraging students to apply for food stamp assistance because "Being a college student is hard work! Not just academically, but financially too." There is even a notation that Pell Grants and Stafford loans do not have to be listed as income. This is the most ridiculous and immoral thing I have ever heard of a university doing. It is wrong to encourage students who don't need it to get on welfare.

First of all, federal financial aid can be "cashed in" at the end of a given semester and a money-back refund is issued to the student. "Very few" institutions do not do this, according to the FAFSA Web site. Therefore, federal aid is income at the end of each semester. If a student doesn't know how to budget that money, or any money they earn, does that entitle them to government assistance? No. If you can find a way to attend college, you can find a way to pay for food.

Full-time students often are claimed as dependents by their parents — putting them in a separate tax bracket. Being in

this bracket means that students get less tax money taken from their paychecks and almost nothing taken out to go toward welfare programs. So the defense of "We pay the government for benefits we don't use" for using food stamps does not apply in this situation. Most students do not pay into welfare programs. Their parents do. If your parents claim you as a dependent, they also get certain tax breaks for you at the end of the year. If you are having problems making ends meet, this money they receive is there to help you do so, not the government's welfare money.

In the very near future Truman students will not be allowed to use scholarship money to pay for a meal plan if they live off campus. This means that the choice to live off campus forces students to find a way to shop and cook for themselves. This can get expensive if you have expensive taste and don't know how to budget.

If you think there's a loophole you are wrong. The Attorney General audits and prosecutes for welfare fraud. If you're in a state school, receiving state assistance and your parents are also residents, you are not going to fall through the cracks for long. The government will prosecute you with punishments ranging from fines and loss of any future government assistance (including student loans) to jail time. Would a little extra beer money be worth six months in jail? I don't think so.

You might be asking yourself what the crime is here. It is welfare fraud, pure and simple. And even before you dig into the crimes, being on food stamps alone has consequences. You have to report use of food stamps on loan applications — including home and car loans. While technically these aren't supposed to be

factors, they are, and rightfully so. If you can't afford to eat, the last thing you deserve is a clean credit history with a brand new house and car.

What university administrator would believe this is an appropriate act to encourage? For a publicly funded university to encourage students to hop on the welfare bus is to promote laziness. If many students are having problems with buying food, a campus-wide program may be in order, not abuse of the welfare system. This type of fraud is the reason why so many distrust the government and aid programs. In fact, this topic alone is what's wrong with the government: publicly funded institutions encouraging abuse of public funds. Any school with a Web site encouraging this activity — and there are currently about 14 of them — should be reprimanded by their presiding Attorney General and face consequences.

In a way, welfare fraud is a hidden crime. Many people know it happens, and even see it happen, but no one knows how to stop it. Truman's Leadership Forum organization and College Republicans are bringing a former welfare abuser to campus 6:30 p.m. April 20 in Baldwin Hall Little Theatre to discuss welfare fraud and why it happens. Universities are attempting to squelch our independence, starting with college, where we're supposed to thrive on it. This is robbing us, America's next leading generation, of a valuable life experience and our rights. Period.

Jessica Catron is a junior political science major from Warrenton, Mo.

Palin's celebrity makes politics a joke



Molly Skyles

We've all heard of Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Hollywood celebrity turned politician. There was also Ronald Reagan, an acclaimed actor who became the 40th president of the United States. Although unorthodox, it is possible to transition from Hollywood celebrity to successful politician. However, the opposite might not turn out so well.

Case in point: Sarah Palin. Palin started her career as a TV sports reporter in Alaska before she became governor. She then became the vice presidential candidate for John McCain. But now she is writing books, appearing on Saturday Night Live and even developing her own TLC show about her family and nature in Alaska. I didn't take her seriously as a politician, but now this wannabe famous hockey mom is even more of a joke.

In general, Palin is a pretty laughable political figure. She was a nobody governor from Alaska before McCain discovered her. She was a trained journalist with little to no political or historical background knowledge, and comedians constantly are making fun of her lack of political substance.

Regardless of her lack of credibility, Palin was a political figure (note the use of the word "was"), and with that job comes a level of responsibility. However, Palin's recent stint in the non-political limelight should make even the most loyal Palin followers question her motives. Is she really interested in politics, or does she just want fame?

Palin also has become a Fox News correspondent, which is great because that is exactly where a dumb, right-wing politician belongs. Somewhere the word "liberal" is an insult — that's the best place to put an uninformed Republican. What I find even fun-

nier is that she isn't going to be a successful correspondent. Maybe she can handle a few speeches to partisan audiences about basic concepts, but her knowledge is pretty limited when it comes to more varied political topics.

The McCain-Palin team might have lost the election last year, but that defeat was probably the best thing that's happened to Palin. Because she wasn't busy being vice president this year, she had time to publish her memoir entitled "Going Rogue: An American Life." She also has been busy with public speeches, which pay her an astounding six figures each. Currently, Palin is focused on her nature show. What makes a semi-famous, bad politician credible as a nature expert? I have no idea.

Her show is called "Sarah Palin's Alaska." It will air on Discovery Communication's TLC, but the date has yet to be announced. It is an eight-part documentary about the beauty of Alaska as Palin sees it, and even will feature the Palin family. Palin will receive a whopping \$1.2 million per episode.

How on earth could someone who has taken a non eco-friendly stance have the credibility to discuss nature in a positive manner? Need I bring up her denial of climate change? And

who can forget her most famous, "Drill, baby, drill" response to oil concerns in the U.S.? I don't see how eco-friendly Discovery can air a woman so incompetent.

Let's be honest, Sarah Palin has had a busy career. She has been a journalist, a politician and now apparently a celebrity. Too bad she was not successful at any of them. Maybe "nature expert" will be her calling, because she sure can't return to politics and have any hope of being respected. Respect walked out the door, for me at least, when she began making fun of herself on SNL. I guess you also can add "comedian" to her list of trades.

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

Faith can't answer questions about human origin



John Hitzel

Last week, I heard a guy on KTRM wonder aloud whether Bill Nye the Science Guy, believed in creationism.

I was inclined to believe he was serious, because of the overt conservative slant of the show.

If he's for real, then may Darwin help us all.

Humor or not, his statement is absurd because creationism is not science. I cannot convince myself that a Truman student would seriously consider creationism to be true.

For those of you who have yet to take Exploring Religions or who don't care about the curricula in

public schools, creationism is the belief that God created humanity as we appear now. Creationism is at odds with Darwin's theory of evolution, which states that life forms mutate as they procreate and that these mutations are what led to the current traits and genetic makeups of organisms today.

I don't know why there's such a heated debate. Couldn't God have created evolution which in turn begat humanity, so then we can all stop bickering over something we can never truly know?

Some folks, mostly creationists, cite the book of Genesis as their proof that they are right. Adam and Eve do not evolve, they are made perfectly, which is why my ingrown toenail hurts like hell every time I take a step, why AIDS exists and why nobody ever has a birth defect.

Scientists think all life on Earth, including animals and plants and bacteria, evolved from a common ancestor. Evolution cites the fossil record, DNA comparisons and even similar skeletal patterns among in-

vertebrates to back up their theory. Such blasphemy.

Intelligent design is not a theory. Yes, it's an answer, but an easy answer to a tough, emotion-laden, adult question: Where do we come from? Humanity can only guess, but some guesses are better than others. Juxtaposed against the answer offered by evolution, arguing for intelligent design is the equivalent of telling your six-year-old that babies come from the stork.

The major difference I observe is that science uses observable, falsifiable data to justify and refute its claims. Creationists simply accept the Bible's words without question — these are the fundamentalist Christians, mind you, who have apparently never heard of metaphor or allegory and interpret the Bible literally.

My issue is not that intelligent design exists. For millennia, it was the best answer that humanity could come up with. My problem is with militant Christians using intelligent design as a political tool to further

destroy the separation of church and state by blurring the line dividing what is and what is not science, and by doing so increasing religion's unwelcome presence in politics and secular education.

Faith is different than belief. I can believe in cells, but I don't have faith in them, because having faith means I believe something despite a lack of evidence or simply because I want to. I can believe in scientific claims because they are observable and refutable. I can use a telescope or microscope to examine something I don't think I understand well enough.

I can never observe whether a god created humanity, but I can observe mutations in the fossil record, similar numbers of bones in vertebrate mammals and all of us breathing air. There is that issue of the missing link, and that is why evolution is a theory, not a law. We can see this process happen with dinosaurs becoming birds and in our own evolutionary path from various genera of hominids into Homo sapi-

ens. It's not watertight yet, but there is a glut of evidence that suggests it is, with little to the contrary.

We will know the missing link when we find it. If we find something completely different, we will have to re-evaluate our ideas about where we came from, and that's what science is about, rejecting hypotheses that other evidence contradicts until we have a more clear and direct path to knowledge and the truth.

The radio show was satirical, I later found out. I doubt Mr. Nye will bring this up, but it may be entertaining and enlightening to ask him why religions have such a problem with science in the first place. Maybe they just don't want to evolve.

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