

Tragedy creates opportunity to answer the call



Zach Vicars

During the last nine days, I've heard many reactions to the catastrophe in Haiti. As the world grieves the loss of more than 50,000 men, women and children, many have responded in disbelief — I know I did. Others have responded in anger, wondering how this could happen. At least one misguided American blamed the tragedy on a curse. But all of these reactions are misplaced. There can be only one reaction to such an atrocity, only one response to such terrible destruction: Heartbreak. Disbelief takes away from the suffering, and blaming someone or

something only adds bitterness to the already seething pain. At a time like this, we all must mourn for our brothers and sisters who perished on that fateful morning.

As my pastor reminded us on Sunday, sometimes when our lives are at their worst, our focus is at its best, because with broken hearts we are able to see the need. With broken hearts we are ready to help. We are ready to write the check. We are ready to help rebuild. We are ready to give a cup of cold water to those who are thirsty.

With broken hearts we are ready to answer the call.

And at times like this, when the need is so great, not much else seems to matter. Ideology doesn't matter. Race doesn't matter. Culture doesn't matter. What matters is that somewhere not so far from here, millions of people are without their homes, millions of injured people are without proper medical supplies, thou-

sands of mothers are without their sons and thousands of daughters are without their fathers. What matters is that we are here, and we can help.

And help we must. As college students, as Americans, as members of this global community, we must respond to this terrible tragedy. When tsunamis wrecked the shores of South Asia and when earthquakes nearly tore Pakistan asunder, we had an excuse because those problems happened on the other side of the globe. This time we have no excuse. This time the disaster is in our own backyard. This time it won't be enough to watch the death toll rise online, to watch the relief work on a hi-def screen or to send in a donation via text message. This time we must go with broken hearts and ready hands. This time we must be there when the suffering hearts need us most. And this time if the wealthiest nation in the world refuses to help its neighbor, then America has truly

failed.

That may be a sweeping statement, but it's moments like these that define us. It's time that we, as a nation, as a college campus and as individuals, decide to help those who desperately need us. It's time for us to realign our priorities. It's time for us to make choices. It's time to make sacrifices.

When a situation is as dire as that in Haiti, there is no place for apathy, no place for selfishness, no place for lethargy. We must find ways to help now. In the short term, we must seek out relief organizations to support: UNICEF, the Red Cross, the Clinton-Bush Fund. Next, organizations on campus such as GlobeMed, which has already been at work in Haiti, must continue to raise support and help mobilize Truman students who wish to lend a hand. And in the long term, I hope students will consider traveling to Haiti to help in the immense task of rebuilding a devastated

city. Making such a decision is a sacrifice — you may have to turn down a summer job or walk away from a valuable internship, but the difference that just one person can make is incalculable. After all, monetary aid can only do so much, but a hand to hold can change a life.

I beg of you, students of Truman, not to forget the heartache you feel right now for the people of Haiti. Don't allow yourselves to see this devastation so close to home and not be moved. Respond to the need. Reach out to your fellow man.

When we answer the call without question, when we serve without reservation, when we love without asking why, that's when we make a difference.

Zach Vicars is a sophomore philosophy/religion and linguistics major from St. Charles, Mo.

AROUND THE QUAD

What is one of your goals for the new semester?



"Study more for my classes."

Ashley Maricic sophomore



"Survive Psych Research with Terry Palmer."

Bridget Rothermich senior



"To have an awesome senior exhibition."

Rosemary Melton senior



"To get some cultural experience on my trip to Panama."

Daniel Quinn senior

Student involvement helps improve learning process



Tyler Retherford

Last Friday I started helping out one of my professors as a teaching assistant, sitting in on a few anthropology classes to help facilitate small group discussion. I was simply hoping to help the classes run a little more smoothly and learn a few practical lessons about teaching. Instead, I ended up giving a lot of thought to the role of students in a college environment. When looking back on the most influential and helpful experiences from my time at Truman, I realized most were student initiated in some way. Certainly reading assignments and lectures form the basis of most of my classes, but the application of that information tends to be best served by allowing students to get involved in the teaching process.

Students serving as teachers to their classmates is one of the most obvious examples. Student initiated courses are another manifestation, but this happens across departments in simpler ways all the time. Several of my classes have had small group discussions once a week or so led by students who had previously taken the class. In my logic class, past students were available for tutoring outside regular class times. Allowing students to learn the basic class materials from other students as well as the professor means they're getting information from different sources that can explain it in a variety of ways. One

of the largest limitations of communication is that people tend to explain by means of analogies. The more ways people can explain something to you, the wider the range of analogies you're receiving and the better the chances you hear one that makes better sense or is more compatible with your own past experiences.

In my anthropology courses, it always has been helpful to study for exams or work on projects with other students who have taken several other anthropology classes with me. This lets us not only talk about the material in reference to the context of the specific class we are studying for, but also in the framework of the other classes we have taken together. Having tutors or teaching assistants who also share these past experiences with students helps not only make the information clearer, but also connects it to the broader discipline, or perhaps even to other classes in different fields.

Perhaps a far more common example of classes made better by student involvement is student-initiated projects. Some of the most interesting things I've learned in my classes have been presented by students as they talked about their research projects. In some classes this has been as simple as having students find different scholarly articles to summarize and critique in class, thus quickly exposing the entire class to a wide variety of professional literature, or as complex as presentations of a staggering array of research projects for my linguistic anthropology class, which ranged from studies on anonymity in online communities to the diffusion of military language into the everyday speech of military families. In these cases it wasn't just the way the material was presented that was different from the usual professor-

led class sessions, but the decisions on what information was relevant and interesting. I'm planning on producing a large research project for some of my anthropology classes based on information presented in one such project.

Many departments emphasize students going out and researching areas they're interested in, affording students not only support in their own research but also many opportunities to listen to the findings of their fellows. A plethora of departments offer senior seminar presentations or even small research conferences, sometimes going so far as to bring in presenters from other universities. The annual undergraduate research conference is a spectacular way the University actively works to support student involvement in their education.

All of these aspects of education are really phenomenal additions to the more standard professor-led approaches, but for them to be successful, students have to be willing to step up and participate. Many of these methods are pretty time intensive and take a fair bit of dedication to make worthwhile. Fortunately, many teaching assistant and tutoring positions also serve as scholarship jobs, something most students are required to spend time on anyway. Getting involved also generally looks good on a graduate school application or résumé, but more than that improves your understanding of what you're helping to teach as well as exposing you to the way other people conceptualize and learn the same information.

Tyler Retherford is a junior anthropology major from Springfield, Mo.

Privacy settings protect free speech



Alex Boles

I bet you think the inside jokes with your friends that are shared through social networking sites like Twitter and MySpace are private, right?

One Truman student recently found out just how wrong that statement is when she jokingly made an anti-Semitic comment to one of her friends through Twitter (see story, Page 1). A Jewish organization, Jewish Internet Defense Force, found her statement and re-tweeted it to their followers — more than 50,000 of them — calling her a "Jew-hater" and soiling her reputation. And all of this could have been avoided.

Our generation checks Facebook or Twitter more often than they shower. I'm sure there are some people who update their accounts in the shower. We are so caught up with this social networking fad, myself included, that we haven't stepped back to realize the risks of putting our lives and our words out in the open. People are forgetting that the words they say and the information they share is out there for good. We're under the impression that our tweets and Facebook status updates are temporary and private, but we're wrong. With Web sites like Campus Tweet archiving every post, including screen shots of profiles, our updates are and always will be permanent and open. We can, however, combat this by only sharing information with certain individuals through controlled privacy settings.

This incident could very well have been avoided if the Truman student, well, never said the comment in the first place, or had her Twitter profile locked so only her followers could see her updates. By locking your profile, you have to approve everyone who requests to follow you, making it easier to monitor who is looking at your updates. Having your profile open allows anyone using Twitter to search for one word,

let's say "Jew," and see every post you or anyone has made including that word. Adjusting your privacy settings could allow you to avoid being seen altogether on that list. And don't worry that locking your profile will limit who can search for you. The only difference is that you have to approve them to follow you. Think of it as accepting a friend request on Facebook. If people want to follow you that badly, they will send you a request. I don't think anyone will actually be deterred by a locked profile and choose not to follow someone. If anything, they will admire you for your conscious effort to not be stalked.

Not having proper privacy settings in place could lead to many other bad situations as well. For example, after finding out the name of the Truman student who posted the anti-Semitic statement on Twitter, JIDF searched her

name and falsely identified her as someone else on MySpace. The organization then spread through their Twitter where she worked, the city she currently lives in, where she's from and other information about her, when really it was a different person with the same name, causing another person to feel the repercussions of this event.

Yes, we can argue that we have free speech, and Twitter doesn't have a hate speech policy in place yet. But we can't base our reputations and privacy solely on free speech amendments and whether there is a policy protecting spontaneous anti-Semitic statements within whichever outlet we choose to use for communication. Being more conscious of who is reading what you write other than the friend you send it to is important. Unless a direct message is sent on Twitter, everyone can see whom you reply to and what you say and can re-tweet it to anyone. It's permanent the moment you press "update."

It's just something to think about. So update your privacy settings or be willing to accept the consequences. You can delete it, but somewhere, it's still there.

"Being more conscious of who is reading what you write other than the friend you send it to is important."

Alex Boles is a senior communication major from St. Louis, Mo.

Blackboard redesign creates even more confusion



Brenna McDermott

I'd consider my fellow classmates and esteemed faculty to be — for the most part — technologically savvy. For our generation, it comes as second nature. We learned how to operate the Internet, navigate Microsoft Office and peruse Craig's list easily.

Yet Blackboard has stumped even the savviest of us.

Teachers and students alike have expressed more than angst for the program, which touts itself as a prod-

uct that "provides a familiar, intuitive environment for your entire community," according to blackboard.com.

But I have to say, Blackboard, I simply do not buy the idea you are trying to sell me.

"Intuitive environment?" How many times did I sign on to add to a discussion board in a class and get lost on the way there? And was that the group discussion board I was supposed to contribute to, or was it the regular discussion board? And I know I am not alone in the dozen or more times I logged on to take a quiz or test, only to be told upon completion that my test was not completed or saved. A certain professor of mine had so much trouble with Blackboard that she called the company with the difficulties of her students, only to be left without any assistance by the friendly folks at Blackboard.

My Blackboard confusion esca-

lated when I discovered the "new and improved" version this semester. It looks fancier, more aesthetically pleasing, but all I see is double the confusion with even more "Tools" I don't understand, like what is the difference between "Collaboration," "Discussion Board" and "Groups"? Seriously, those three things sound exactly alike to me.

Let's not forget the "helpful" tutorials that Blackboard has provided us, their self-proclaimed "Quick" tutorials. I wouldn't call almost 50 tutorials "quick." I want one simple video that will tell me how to work my way around Blackboard. I won't watch 50 videos on how to navigate a Web site, and I think I can speak for my fellow students as well when I say that. I would rather simply give up on Blackboard than invest any more time in it than I have to.

Some might argue that I have no

choice. I must give in and put in the time to figure out this mess of a Web site community because professors use it, and let's face it, it's impossible to hold off the inevitable evolution of classroom interaction through technology. That is true. I don't think there is a way to stop technology from entering our lecture halls. But aren't we smart enough to pick the right kind of technology? Do we simply have to accept the level of simplicity or complexity offered by the current product in use? There are other products out there to use. G-mail even offers some similar applications, such as Google Docs, which I've used on many group projects, as opposed to the group pages on Blackboard. I don't want to resist the revolution of technology in education. I'm simply opposed to poor technology and confusing methods taking up time that I should be devoting to my studies.

Time after time, history has shown that not all new ideas and products last. The segway was not the revolution of the pedestrian. New Coke could never compete with the nostalgic taste of Classic Coca-Cola, and Blackboard is not the tool that will revolutionize education. Something better will come along. I can only hope, for my own sake, that it comes along before I've finished my education.

Blackboard is great in theory. It's a way to connect students with each other and faculty wherever they go. It should foster discussion, make grades available and help with collaboration on group projects. But ultimately, users have to understand Blackboard to utilize it effectively.

Brenna McDermott is a junior communication major from St. Louis, Mo.