

Head to Head: Attendance during bad weather

Canceling wastes time, money



Zach Vicars

Truman needed an ark last Thursday. When the city's drainage system finally reached its capacity, the streets turned into rivers, the Quad disappeared under a pile of mud and Red Barn Park formed a provincial swimming pool.

Fortunately, the rain ceased before too many roads or bridges were inundated, and most classes took place as usual. However, I've heard complaints during the last week from students who wished school had been canceled for the day — a few students even suggested a revised attendance policy for inclement weather.

Canceling class for inclement weather is not the solution. It helps no one. Instead, students and faculty should be allowed to decide for themselves if it's safe to attend class. There should not be some wide-reaching administrative order to make that choice for the Truman community.

Many of you probably are wondering how I can be saying this — how I can call myself a college student and still want to go to class. How can I be voting against the coveted "Snow Day?" I admit, a day off would be nice once in a while. I, too, long for rainy days to catch up on homework, reading or Hulu videos.

But that's what weekends are for.

The week should be devoted to attending class, to studying, to learning. Students should be spending time investigating the topics that interest them, absorbing the knowledge of their professors and challenging themselves and their classmates to be great. That's why we're here, after all. Inclement weather should not stand in the way of our scholarly pursuits.

If students are just looking for a way to laze around without responsibilities, they shouldn't cut class. They should drop out of school and pick up an Xbox controller. That's a much cheaper and more efficient way to be lazy than going to college and pretending to be interested in academics, but really just wanting to bum around all day.

Canceling class does more than

just promote the laziness that so easily ensnares college students. Canceling class also robs students of precious class time they won't get back. For those of us who take learning seriously, and I consider that to be a large majority of the Truman student body, this is a serious offense. It's simply unfair to take away class sessions — even just one — when students have invested so much time, energy and resources into that class.

I'll use my Calculus I class from last semester as an example. My professor was challenging, fast-paced and thorough. Our section met five times a week, and we still needed every class session to cover the required material. Even one day of canceled class would have meant we'd have trouble on the final or in Calculus II. I also took a course on the New Testament last semester, which met only on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The broad corpus of literature that we had to read every night demanded that we have as many sessions as possible for discussion and analysis. Again, missing one session would have put the class's progress in serious jeopardy. Neither of these professors would have canceled class due to inclement weather, but if the administration passed the order, then our abilities to learn and succeed academically would have been threatened.

Not only that, but canceling class robs students of learning opportunities they've already paid for. College is an investment, mainly of time but also of a significant amount of money, and it's unacceptable to let that go to waste. If students decide not to go to class, they're wasting their own time and money, but when the administration cancels class, they waste the time and money of thousands of students who are eager to learn, grow and succeed.

School closings, especially in higher education, and especially at a serious institution like Truman, should only occur under exceptional circumstances — like several feet of snow. Otherwise, students should be encouraged to brave the elements on their way to class — to walk, bike or drive carefully — for the weather is the least of a great number of challenges that the serious student must overcome.

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

Canceling policy can be in students' best interests



Brenna McDermott

There are a few special days every year when I open my inbox in the morning and sitting there is a beautiful e-mail titled "NO CLASS TODAY." These are the mornings when I believe in God.

But when I woke up last Thursday and set out to pick up my copy of the Index and a coffee, I felt less like a Truman student and more like a fisherman from "Deadliest Catch," trying to stay afloat.

My roof was leaking, my basement was flooding and my sidewalk was un-walkable. I needed an e-mail that day.

I waited and waited for one, hoping I wouldn't have to swim to class, but I never got one.

Instead, I got soaked.

This is why our campus needs to enact a school-wide policy for attendance during inclement weather. I don't think it is necessary to cancel school on days when the sky is falling, but students only should be expected to come to class if they can safely get there. If, like me, you would've had to pull a Michael Phelps to get to Island Barnett, class

should be optional.

Some critics of this proposal say there is no reason to miss class — that students paying thousands of dollars to miss class is counter-intuitive and a waste of money. But because I pay thousands of dollars to attend this school, I want the school to consider my safety and the safety of all students on crazy weather days. I want the University to think of how hard or dangerous my trek to class is going to be or how frustrated and stressed I'll be if I miss a session of class because it wasn't safe for me to walk out my front door. Calling off class isn't a waste of my money — it's making sure my money is well spent.

I know there are those out there who say that because I enjoy the occasional canceled class, I'm lazy or unfocused or an idiot. But I think I have the majority of the student body on my side when I say that canceling class from time to time, especially when the weather or other circumstances make it difficult for me to walk or bike there, can be a life-saver. It doesn't mean I don't care. Adults are happy when work gets called off — does that mean they aren't devoted to their jobs? No. It just means that in this day and age, when humans are taking classes, working, texting, Facebooking, doing homework, doing chores and going through the tiring process of living, an afternoon when one of your obligations says, "Hey, we know it's crappy

weather out. We want you to be safe. Stay home and take care of yourself instead of killing yourself to get here," can be the best thing in the world. Forget about money for a second, forget about missing one class period. When all hell is breaking loose outside, it is better to sit inside and catch up on homework for a few hours than drown in Red Barn Park or slip on icy streets.

This isn't an argument to avoid going to class anytime it's sprinkling outside. Attendance is an integral part of learning and grades, and our unique view on attendance puts us above students at big schools where taking attendance is unheard of. Going to class is essential, but we are old enough and hopefully responsible enough to know when we should stay inside for the day.

Enacting a policy that considers students' safety first and classes second is the smartest and safest way to deal with inclement weather, which we, here in the Kirksville tundra, deal with on a regular basis. Although I don't support enacting this policy at any drop of snow or rain, knowing it's OK if I stay home during a tsunami makes me feel like the University knows I want to be in class, but that I only want to get the Splash Zone experience if I'm at Sea World.

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

AROUND THE QUAD

What big city business do you wish Kirksville had?



"Pizza Street pizza buffet."

Dylan Rohr senior



"It'd be nice if they had a big sporting goods store."

Josh Milbrandt freshman



"Michael's Craft store"

Becca Fels sophomore



"Target."

Raishelle Johnson sophomore

Shared academic positions would help learning process



Tyler Retherford

October's Faculty Senate meeting featured an interesting discussion item: the possibility of shared academic positions. The issue originated with the Physics department when it wanted to hire a husband and wife team for a single teaching position, but there simply wasn't a policy in place to support such a hire. There are some complications to deal with to solve this "two body problem," but given the fact that one of the major draws of Truman is the small class sizes, the administration should try out shared academic positions to see if it can be worked into a feasible option.

I know our high faculty to student ratio has drastically improved the quality of most of my classes, especially those that are discussion-based or feature hands-on work. Having two faculty members teaching a single class would allow for larger class sizes without getting rid of the personal feel and interaction of smaller classes. This especially would be helpful for classes that are required for popular majors, keeping registration less stressful for students without sacrificing the quality of the class itself.

Another major advantage of shared academic positions is having two knowledgeable profes-

sors with differing points of view teaching a single course. With the huge emphasis the University places on interdisciplinary study, finding a way to present classes from two unique perspectives and backgrounds would be a boon to many subject matters and fit with our liberal arts mission. Several of the classes I've taken have benefitted immensely from the input of students from other disciplines, and I would imagine a second professor with a wealth of experience also would be incredibly constructive.

Several classes already take advantage of this with existing professors.

A few communication classes have professors with different specialties co-teaching classes, and my research design course next semester has both an anthropology and a sociology professor. Given the interdisciplinary nature of JINS courses, they also would benefit greatly from paired professors from different fields, and the fierce competition for the few available seats in JINS courses also would be eased if there were larger classes as facilitated by having two professors.

There are, however, some logistical constraints with shared academic positions. Providing benefits for both faculty members means higher costs for a single teaching position. This would theoretically be less of a prob-

lem when hiring married couples because most benefits would cover both, but then a policy for divorcing co-professors would be even more horrifyingly complex. Performance reviews for a pair of professors would be problematic as well, especially if the position is eligible for tenure. Given the current budget problems the University is facing and the subsequent hiring freeze, these limitations make shared academic positions unfeasible in the short-term, but an established policy now would make the process easier in the future when it would be in the best interest of the University.

Shared academic positions would mean a little more money being spent on faculty, but the benefits would be well worth it. More professors would mean more advisers and research mentors with different interests and varying areas of expertise. Being primarily an undergraduate institution, the ability for undergrads to do research is another major selling point for Truman, so the more professors to help students in this regard, the better.

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S.A.D. deserves attention, sympathy



Shawn Shinneman

You almost had me, Mother Nature.

I stepped outside my house on the first day of November to a gorgeous fall day. The leaves tossed and turned in a slight breeze. The air was unusually warm, climbing to 67 degrees later in the day. This, I thought, could be the foreshadowing of a mild winter. I was filled with optimism. Maybe this year Old Man Winter would arrive late and leave early.

Then, I made the mistake of doing research. The Farmer's Almanac, it turns out, is predicting a beast of a winter for the Central plains. Kirksville falls in the "Very Cold and Snowy" category and can expect above-average precipitation and below-average temperatures.

And just like that, another trying winter waits around the corner. Although it is easy and common for many of us to walk around grumpy as the cold weather rolls in, it can become more serious for others. It is important for all of us to be extra sensitive to the needs and concerns of our peers during these late fall and winter months.

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD), according to mayoclinic.com, is a form of depression that occurs at the same time every year. It most commonly begins in the fall and continues through the winter, causing symptoms like anxiety, hopelessness, loss of energy and social withdrawal.

At a time of year when many are feeling a little less chipper, it's hard to tell depression from the "winter blues." This is why it is so important to show compassion to everyone you come across. You never know who is in dire need of a compliment, a smile or just a friendly conversation. Simple interactions can go a long way in helping those in trouble.

Although the causes of SAD are unknown, speculation surrounds the idea of reduced sunlight playing a significant role. A study done by The American Journal of Psychiatry showed light therapy to be an effective antidepressant for those suffering from SAD. The lesson learned is to take some time out of your schedule to soak up a sunny day. The time you spend will come back to you as you are able to refocus and increase your productivity behind a better mood.

If nothing seems to pull you or someone you know out of a funk, it might be time to seek the help of a professional. At its worst, SAD can lead to substance abuse and suicide. At its best, it will still negatively affect some part of your life, whether it be at school, at work or at home. There are medical treatments available for SAD, so don't be afraid to call your doctor.

While winter will never stop coming, learning to cope with its effects can make the colder months more enjoyable. As Mother Nature gathers snow, ice, wind and brutal cold to send our way, make sure you are empathizing with the people who surround you.

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