

INDEX EDITORIAL

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Thursday, October 8, 2009

OUR VIEW

Disaster protocol needs more discussion

Fire drills were the best part of a day in high school. Hearing that alarm meant missing 10 to 15 minutes of class, seeing friends on the way to the parking lot and laughing as we stood outside the building. Everyone knew what a fire drill meant. Here at Truman, evacuation policies and safety precautions are a bit of a blur.

A slew of fire evacuations in Centennial Hall this week brings up concerns that the evacuation policies for fires aren't known.

Residence Life's Web site generally outlines evacuation policies, but a more detailed protocol would be helpful. In the event of an evacuation, students should "use the stairs, close all doors behind you, turn off all electronics, evacuate in groups, provide assistance to others, and evacuate in a safe and orderly manner," according to the ResLife handbook. Elaborating on this policy would help deter confusion. When the Index was on the scene of a Centennial Hall fire Saturday, (see story, page 6) students stood around, unsure of what to do. The policy should outline how far away students should stand from the building, whether they should meet up with their student advisers at a rendezvous point to account for students, or where to wait to hear updates from firefighters or student advisers. The evacuation guidelines should leave almost nothing to chance.

However, no matter how in-depth evacuation procedures are, fire drills in a university setting never will be as smooth and never will be something everyone experiences, simply because of the college lifestyle. Students stay in the library until 1 a.m., party through the night, sleep over with friends and find many reasons to avoid their residence hall rooms. Some students

who have lived on campus for four years never have participated in a fire drill. But when a real fire starts, no one wants to be unclear about what to do or where to go.

Maybe it seems like common sense, but the policies for evacuation and "in case of fire" protocol need to be talked about — frequently. Going over evacuation guidelines once during freshman week isn't enough. How about posting evacuation information in every hall, on every floor, including any change of evacuation protocol for specific parts of residence halls, including dining halls? All emergency doors should be available for exit in the event of an emergency, no matter where students are, even if they are in the midst of eating.

And students shouldn't have to wait in a line while I.D. cards are being collected on the way out of the cafeteria so Sodexo doesn't lose money. All personnel and students should know the safest and quickest way to evacuate the building. Student advisers should remind students during hall meetings. And low attendance at meetings shouldn't be an excuse for advisers to have uninformed residents. This is the kind of information that could save a life. Everyone should know evacuation policies, even if they only spend 15 minutes a day in their rooms. Posters, word of mouth, hall meetings — there is no such thing as too much discussion of safety policies.

The exciting days of high school fire drills and evacuations are over. They aren't fun anymore — they are a pain. They interrupt the flow of life and there aren't always figures of authority around to bark directions during the evacuation. Knowing what to do and how to handle potential life-threatening situations ahead of time will save lives.

CORRECTIONS

To submit corrections or to contact the editor, please e-mail index@truman.edu, call us at 660-785-4449, or send a letter to Index, 1200 Barnett Hall, Truman State University, Kirksville, Mo, 63501.

- The column on page 5, "Student initiated courses create opportunities," incorrectly titled Grant Berry's course Introduction to Semantics. The course is actually Introduction to Semiotics.
- The column on page 5, "Home sprinklers will cause problems," misnamed city council member Todd Kuhns as Tom Kuhns.
- The title of the news story on page 8 should read "On campus, alcohol decreases while drug and rape reports increase."

CARTOON

By Alex Boles



Letters to the Editor

Tray story skews student opinion

The "Students take trays to Ryle" article in the Sept. 24 issue of the Index ignores the overall message of trayless dining and glorifies the inconsequential actions of a few students.

As a member of the Environmental Campus Organization who has worked on the "Away with the Tray" initiative during the past year, I understand that some students are hesitant to dine trayless as it is slightly inconvenient at first if one is used to dining with a tray. I am all for news being reported as it happens, the article amplifies the discontent students feel and ignores student support for the initiative.

The article paints the picture that all students feel that their "right" to a tray is being taken away and ignores that on the Spring 2009 Sodexo survey, roughly 75 percent of on-campus diners voted that they either totally supported, or held a neutral opinion about trays being removed from the dining halls.

The article was a misrepresentation of student opinion and support for the initiative, ignoring crucial facts and providing only those against the initiative with a chance to air their grievances. I am in no way saying that discontent about trayless dining should be masked or not reported by the Index, but I do believe that any such discontent should be written about in proportion to actions taken by students, and two students taking trays into Ryle does not seem like it should warrant a large article on the third page of the news section.

Erika Halsey, student

Student-initiated courses demand time, effort

I was generally pleased to read Shawn Shinneman's column on Student Initiated Courses (SICs) last week. This initiative is one that deserves attention.

Though Mr. Shinneman made attempts to contact me shortly before his deadline, we were unable to have a proper interview — perhaps the editor will be so kind as to allow me to elaborate on SICs here.

I currently teach "Introduction to Semiotics" (not Semantics, as was quoted in Thursday's paper), which is one of the SICs available this year. Semiotics, the study of signs and sign interaction, was a subject in which I became interested during my JINS course in fall 2008. I studied the theories of various semioticians, talked with faculty members in the English and Linguistics department, and decided that this subject was one that would benefit Truman's liberal arts and interdisciplinary-rich curriculum — it needed to be taught. Since Truman offered no such course, and since I plan to ultimately become a professor (after obtaining a Ph.D. in linguistics and doing other work/research), Student Initiated Courses were the perfect opportunity for me.

That is not to say, however, that my course was whimsically approved and developed. It took a significant amount of effort. Mentors had to be acquired, syllabi had to be developed and extensive proposals had to be filled out and reviewed. I began the proposal process in October 2008, and now, a year later, I find myself teaching. Should Truman students be so bold as to attempt an endeavor such as this, they must take into account two important factors: preparation and appropriateness of the course in question. Do you have time

to feasibly tease out the intricacies that teaching a full undergraduate course entails? Is your course one that would benefit Truman's curriculum? To say that the process is "not an easy one" is a significant understatement.

The amount of time I spent designing the course itself was easily more than a hundred hours, and this does not take into account the revisions made to my syllabus, the development and subsequent revision of lecture notes, the writing of tests, etc. The implementation of the course itself also requires a great deal of effort (especially with a 17 hour schedule), but, for those who really love education, it is incomparably rewarding. Blending "teacher" and "student" roles is a remarkable sensation, and it is one I would like more people (students and professors alike) to experience. With regards to the appropriateness of a SIC, Jackie Gonzalez addressed this topic in the Oct. 30, 2008 issue. Although I disagree with her argumentative development and supporting evidence, she does discuss the idea of "Easy A classes" and gives a possible SIC on a Rubik's cube as an example. Considering the workload mentioned above, the probability that a course like this would ever make it past the prospective stage is essentially null. To have a SIC approved, a course must be innovative and compelling. It must bolster Truman's curriculum while providing novel opportunities to its students. A service learning component is also desirable, though not required.

Student Initiated Courses are incredible opportunities whose benefits to a driven, dedicated undergraduate student know no parallel. Though they require a tremendous amount of work and time, the end results are the development of a new, intriguing academic opportunity for the students and invaluable teaching experience for the student instructor.

Grant Berry, student

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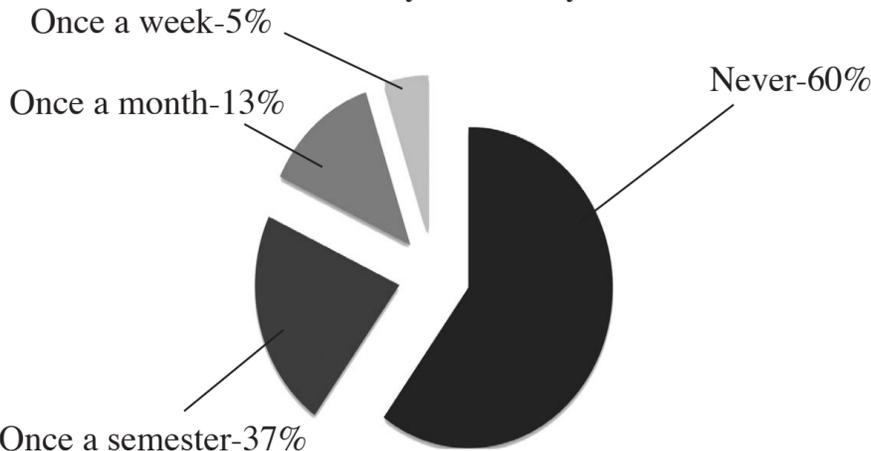
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