

Sophomore year deserves equal excitement



Connor Stangler

Having witnessed the horrors of the inferno, Dante and Virgil emerged from the underworld and found themselves in sophomore year.

College might not be "The Divine Comedy," but this has to be purgatory.

As a second-year student, I belong to a group that has been lost to relative oblivion. We are the middle child, overshadowed by the effortlessly mature seniors and replaced by the charmingly innocent freshmen. Few programs serve us as a demographic. Freshmen

enjoy the assimilation spotlight while seniors plan their departure with the help of seminars, advisers and extensive literature. Even juniors have a share in the services offered to the seniors. To bridge the gap between the beginning and the end, sophomores deserve something better than convention, something other than a textbook that can open their minds. We deserve an experience.

Much of the attention paid to the other classes is circumstantial: The freshmen are undergoing one of the most significant transitions of their lives, and I do not envy what juniors and seniors face. None of this is discriminatory: Sophomores are free to participate in almost any program they want. Entering this year, I knew sophomore status implied autonomy. We would neither be coddled as we were last year, nor would we have earned the privileges of upperclassmen. I suppose, in this way, college

loosely reflects life — people celebrate when you arrive and mourn when you leave. The middle part is hard. You aren't greeted at every birthday with parades in your honor. Years pass, some without what seems like even the slightest significance. At certain points, "doldrums" might seem like a weak descriptor because the tedium and the monotony are actually painful. As bleak as that might sound, so far, sophomore year is a lot like it.

The newness of freshman year has worn off, and the future offers nothing but routine. The question, "Didn't I just do this?" becomes laughably commonplace. I'd like to say that I'm facing this phenomenon, notebook in hand, as any brave and lonely soul who stares into the abyss would, with staunch perseverance. But what am I doing instead? I'm escaping. I am studying abroad in Ireland in the spring, and I'm not looking back.

If sophomore year is mid-life, I'm

obviously succumbing to the proverbial crisis. Maybe that's the way to escape the doldrums. Maybe the crisis is the answer. Sophomore year, instead of being a boring continuation of over-intellectualized schoolwork, should be a year of exploration. It should be a time to accumulate experiences.

I won't endorse the elimination of sophomore year. Besides enormous amounts of administrative legwork, the subtraction of an entire year would require a thorough reformation of age-old U.S. university nomenclature that would rival only the numbering of hotel floors in terms of confusion (Everyone knows about the thirteenth floor conspiracy, but would we convince ourselves that we're juniors or still just be sophomores?).

Truman should instead create a program designed specifically for sophomores that encourages or perhaps mandates students to do something out of the ordinary. It

would be an enrichment program that pushes them to escape academic isolation. This could include an internship, a study abroad experience, an attempt at entrepreneurship or, hopefully, something completely original. The point is experience. The means is the end, which I know is part of the professed philosophy of a liberal arts university, but alternating the means may be just as important.

The program would serve a dual purpose, activating parts of the mind that would be otherwise dormant in an environment dominated by theories and "-isms" and preventing intellectual stagnation. After an experience like that, maybe I can finally enter Paradise.

Connor Stangler is a sophomore English and history major from Columbia, Mo.

AROUND THE QUAD

How do you feel about the Internet on campus?



"I don't really understand how it works when I come on campus from my home off campus."

Claire Reynolds
junior



"It can be really slow, but I can't complain because it is available all over campus."

Mamie Cox
freshman



"It could always be faster, but I have no real complaints."

Chad Horne
senior



"It is really slow, especially at night when everyone is on."

Ryan Johnson
sophomore

Sustainable structure offers new way forward



Zach Vicars

I never really thought of roofs as being alive — or green, for that matter. In my experience they're usually a slate-black color and altogether dead. But in the next few months, Truman will have a chance to change that — or at least change that for one structure on campus.

Students taking the Grassroots Environmental Solutions Course are currently creating a proposal for the construction of a green-roof shed for the Bike Co-op, according to an article in the Sept. 30 edition of the Index. This shed would not only provide space for the Bike Co-op's inventory, it would also represent a paradigm shift in the way this University develops its property. A green roof would be a radical statement on the part of the campus administration and a new step forward for our University.

For those who don't know, a green roof is basically a small lawn or garden on the top of a building. Instead of shingles or galvanized tin, the roof of a structure is covered by grasses and other living things.

At first, I was skeptical of these new-fangled green roofs, especially on Truman's campus. But as I began to do research, the numerous benefits of a green structure began to change my mind. Plants absorb the weathering of snow and rain better than a traditional roof, increasing the life of a building, according to research by Penn State University. Through the process of photosynthesis, green roofs remove carbon from the atmosphere and add fresh oxygen to the air, and green roofs cut down on residual heat, especially in heavily developed areas (urban heat islands). In short, green roofs provide a longer-lasting, cleaner and cooler alternative to traditional construction methods.

But a living roof on top of a tiny bike shed might not seem like it's going to make much difference. And the hard truth is, it won't. One living roof is not going to patch the hole in our ozone, stop the cycle of desertification or bring back the passenger pigeons. But a green roof does provide a way forward, and it represents our institu-

tion's willingness to think creatively about sustainable development.

Right now, our campus seems to demonstrate a three-step plan when it comes to building design and maintenance:

Step 1) Build an attractive, cutting-edge dormitory or academic hall (think of recent additions like Magruder Hall, West Campus Suites and Pershing Building). Step 2) 30 to 50 years later, gut the building and renovate it or destroy it completely (Missouri Hall, Dobson Hall, Ryle Hall, Grim-Smith Hall, etc). Step 3) Repeat.

This development model works great when you have infinite resources and no real need to think about the future. If we don't consider the economic, ecological and ethical problems of the cycle of expand-build-destroy, then there's nothing to stop us from doing just that.

We are in a financial crunch, though while our reputation as an academic institution is growing nationally. Such a crisis constitutes a change, and a simple 14 x 14 structure at the southern end of campus might be the catalyst for the change we need.

What the University needs to see is that there are sustainable alternatives to developing our campus and unique construction avenues to explore. I've spent my last two Sundays at the Possibility Alliance in La Plata, helping new friends of mine build their home — you might have read about it in the Sept. 16 edition of the Index. It's still in the works, but their home will be made completely from locally acquired materials, will cost them less than \$2,000 to complete and have an estimated life of a few centuries. Yes, centuries, not decades. Two zeros, not one.

Now, it will be a while before the campus starts taking such radical steps as building walls out of mud and straw — it might even be a while before we see solar and wind generators on top of the residence halls — but this green roof can be an important step in that direction. Something as simple as a green roof questions whether the western-model of expansion can really sustain our academic community. A green roof flies in the face of our consumer-culture but awakens our ethical-conscience. A green roof affirms the idea that another world is possible.

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

Polygamy defines many cultures



Tyler Retherford

Polygamy's been getting a bad rap in the media lately. There's been no shortage of polygamy-based television shows, from HBO's "Big Love" to TLC's "Sister Wives" and all the news coverage about the real-life stars of the latter.

Regardless of whether these shows are trying to increase tolerance of that lifestyle or call them out as crazy people, they are doing serious damage by the incredibly narrow western view in which they're presenting polygamy.

The news and popular television shows are presenting polygamy as something practiced by a few small religions and some crazy people, but that's just not true. Historically, polygamy is the norm. In many societies, both past and present, having multiple spouses and a large family was simply a necessity. When the family is the basic economic unit and all of your food production depends on working together with your spouses and children, it makes sense to have larger families.

This, of course, is not the angle taken by most television shows, which are exploiting polygamy for

controversy-inspired ratings boosts. Rather, they focus on the very limited polygamous population leading otherwise fairly regular lives in the U.S. The average American's primary exposure to polygamy isn't in environments where it's common and makes quite a bit of sense, but rather in the exceptional cases where it's being practiced for primarily religious reasons. It's no wonder then that most Americans have an incredibly negative view of polygamy. But it isn't necessarily polygamy that is so clearly ridiculous. Rather, it is the pairing of American culture and polygamy.

In America, family just isn't important. Having a family to work with isn't a factor in being able to survive. In fact, having a family is more of an economic hindrance than a boon. So here, polygamy isn't really helpful and, consequently, isn't popular. In different places with different conditions the situation is quite the opposite, and so polygamy is not only functional but widely accepted. Before large-scale agriculture became common, most of the world's population accepted polygamy because it just made sense.

Aside from disliking polygamy because it's simply not what's practiced here, many people view it as harmful because they think it hinders women's rights. First of all, not all polygamy is polygyny, where one man is married to multiple wives. Although much less common, polyandry, where one woman has multiple husbands, is practiced in some places. Secondly, the man in the polygynous

marriage isn't always the one with the most power. In some places, polygyny serves to make sure that the wives aren't unfairly treated by their husband, because they both outnumber him and usually control the food production or processing and can work as a sort of marital labor union. Again, the stereotype of women being powerless within polygamy stems from the highly publicized polygamous cults here in the U.S., which are exceptional cases.

There are cases where women in polygamous families are being horribly mistreated, and that is a serious problem. However, the culprit isn't polygamy, but rather the individuals who are exploiting it to abuse others under the pretense of following some religious doctrine.

While polygamy doesn't make a lot of sense within the culture in which we live, we should be mindful that it isn't the same everywhere. Being members of a global society means looking at concepts and situations from other people's points of view rather than strictly imposing our own, fairly arbitrary, morality onto them. Since most news agencies and political pundits do an increasingly poor job of separating concepts, institutions and ideologies from the way a few individuals implement them, it is important that we take the time to think about them for ourselves.

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

Healthcare bill increases hardship for workers, employers



John Hitzel

I work in food. I get treated like dirt by people I don't know. I stress about stupid things like timers and adhering to the corporate image. I smell like burnt grease and flour. I schedule my day around a few hours spent making money — some for me, more for my boss. It's a living. I understand you have to make sacrifices to live well, work hard to play hard, pay your dues and such. I get that businesses are out to make money, not to create a great society, save the world or provide health insurance for the ailing. But this is ridiculous.

The rumors surrounding the healthcare (euphemism for "going to

the doctor") bill passed in March cast it variously as demonic, impressive, ineffective and a cure for all the dilemmas surrounding medicine in America. After doing some research, I am still confused. Government for the people and by the people? Please. This legislation overflows with financial lingo, investment jargon, dollar signs and percentages. Why can't I go to the doctor yet?

The bill is actually two bills, the Patient Protection Act and Affordable Care Act, which together attempt to extend health insurance coverage to the millions of Americans who lack it. The bills also aim to stop many practices of HMOs and insurance companies that deny coverage based on the profit motive instead of legitimate medical reasons. Businesses are encouraged to participate in the new program by receiving a tax credit that covers a portion of the health insurance costs of their employees.

The bills do not mandate that all employers absolutely must provide, or pay for, health insurance for all their employees, but it does fine certain employers who don't. And before the

decade is out, everybody, worker or loafer, will have to buy health insurance or be fined if they don't. This provision is currently being challenged in several states, including Missouri, on grounds of being unconstitutional.

The government shouldn't be able to penalize me for not buying something. If it is, that's rather revealing about what kind of people are actually in charge, isn't it?

But has anybody stopped to think about the effect on the employee or on small businesses of the sort we have in Kirksville? I mean, really small businesses? Many small businesses don't approach the benchmark numbers set in the bill, such as 50 or more employees, 25 full-time workers, so many dollars a year in revenue. Can these kinds of businesses, even entrepreneurial start-up businesses, afford to exist with the new fines and expenses mandated by the distant yet omnipresent federal government?

What if employers can't afford to offer health insurance but have to shell out money for a fine anyway? I'm sure they'll opt for whatever's cheapest, pro-

viding that the law doesn't get repealed for being unconstitutional.

Somewhere in this bill exists wording which makes an employee's hours per week important, deterministic of full-time or part-time status. The more full-time workers you have, the more health insurance you have to provide and the bigger the fine for not providing it. So, for a business that needs to cut corners, like, well, all of them (the recession still lives), the bill provides a motivation to have as few full-timers as possible.

The bill defines "full-time" as 30 hours per week, on average, per month. So this gives employers an incentive to cut hours across the board. This effectively eliminates the position of middle management in businesses where the purse strings are tight. It makes a lot of entry-level positions look more and more like dead ends, presenting little opportunity for demonstration of dedication and therefore advancement.

Under the new system, if I wanted to be full-time, I'd have to be management, and those positions would be less accessible than before. If I wanted full-

time hours, I'd have to seek another job where the dilemma would be similar. I'd need to be part-time at two jobs whereas before this "revolutionary change" occurred, I could be full-time at one.

So what did this bill accomplish? It looks like the government is creating more problems than it solves. Imagine that.

Why can't we have universal healthcare? Why can't I just go to the doctor when I need to? Boost national sales tax, decrease doctor salaries, reduce military spending, offer more tax credits to hospitals, anything, just let me go to the doctor. I'm sick of this. When the bills kick in, both HMOs and the government stand to profit from illness and lack of patient coverage. Great job, guys. Vote Independent this November.

John Hitzel is a senior communication and English major from St. Louis, Mo.