



English major has many uses



Robert Overmann

If you've ever been taught that there are no stupid questions, you've been lied to. In the context of the classroom, perhaps the most flagrantly offending questions are variations of "When are we ever going to use this?" As a student attending a liberal arts institution, this is a question you should never, ever ask.

Because it is my area of academic expertise, I'll frame my denunciation of the previously stated question in the context of the English major. During what contemporary situations could the completion of a Marxist analysis of Defoe's "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders" prove useful? When could you possibly need to identify uses of synecdoche during your future career? What practical benefits possibly could result from an aptitude for short story writing?

English majors, you likely will use these skills every day, many times per day, for the rest of your lives.

The English major is more than a study of the English language and literature — it's four years of learning to analyze complex arguments often made by dense, antiquated texts, then formulating and concretely communicating one's own ideas. These are skills vital to professions ranging from law to medicine to business. Even for an individual working in applied science, the study of English can lend useful and unparalleled research and communicative skills to that individual's repertoire of abilities.

If you still don't understand when these skills ever could prove useful outside of an academic setting, consider how an English background could benefit a legal professional. When a legal professional is analyzing a client's legal case, he compares it to arguments made and rulings rendered in similar cases — he is analyzing the case from a structuralist critical perspective. When a legal professional drafts documents to other lawyers, judges or individuals, his grammatical structures must be perfect and his statements clear and concise. When a legal professional considers how to present his arguments to a court, he must structure his arguments in a logical and compelling manner.

How would a corporate marketing agent use his background of literature and writing? A marketer essentially is presenting an argument for why potential customers should purchase their product. Customers must feel like they can identify with the product and values associated with that product. Easily applied to a marketing campaign, women's and gender studies, queer theory criticism, Marxist criticism, disability studies and critical race theory all are concerned with how a text favors, identifies with and privileges a particular demographic or marginalizes another. An understanding of the nuanced connotations of different words is essential for a successful marketer.

How might a professional chemist benefit from the study of English? If you've ever read a scientific study, you know the masterful grasp of the English language these scientists must possess. To effectively communicate with other scientists, chemists must present their findings logically and coherently. They must be able to extrapolate real-world meaning from the results of a study performed in a controlled laboratory setting.

Roughly, the vocational equivalent of English is the field of communications. English better prepares an individual for the communications field than the communication major itself. While one can be taught narrow vocation-oriented skills relatively quickly, the abilities to adeptly research, analyze and express cannot be so hastily learned.

The English word "vocation" comes from the Latin root "vocari," meaning "to be called." When you consider your personal calling, which skillset will be more useful to your intended vocation — one that offers narrow instruction for how to complete a particular job's tasks, or one that lends the broader abilities of critical analysis, research and self-expression? The individual who wishes to excel and advance in their career undoubtedly will choose the latter.

Those who fail to see the practicality of abstract skills fail to understand their all-encompassing nature. Abstract abilities are the most useful type of skills because they're not narrowly tailored to a particular profession. Their broad applicability and difficulty to grasp are exactly what makes students of liberal arts majors of interest to employers. Instead of asking "When will I ever use this?" perhaps the better question, for these students is, "When won't I be able to use this?"

Robert Overmann is a junior English and biology major from Cape Girardeau, Mo.

Welfare proposal is flawed



Lacy Murphy

Many elementary school students might spend their time thinking of new excuses to stay home sick from school, but if HB 1040, proposed by Missouri Rep. Steve Cookson (R-153), is passed, children whose parents are welfare recipients will be doing quite the opposite. The bill, introduced April 2 to the Missouri House of Representatives, has a proposed effective date of Aug. 28, 2013. This means the bill, whose full text reads, "School age children of welfare recipients must attend public school, unless physically disabled, at least 90 percent of the time in order to receive benefits," would start affecting students during the 2013-14 academic year.

Although this bill only has had two reads and is not on the House schedule, I urge Missourians to contact their representatives and speak out against this bill. There is no reason to let it get farther in the legislative process than it has.

First of all, the bill is poorly written. HB 1040, which is only 25 words long, is too short and leaves too much room for interpretation. At the very

least, Cookson shouldn't underestimate the intelligence of his constituents. If Cookson wants to pass a bill, he should be less vague.

The bill places too much responsibility with the children of welfare recipients. Welfare is supposed to make a child's life easier by enabling parents to provide a healthy environment for their families. By passing this bill, we would be telling these families that their safety and security depends on their child. What happens if their child gets a mononucleosis infection?

I understand why some people might think this bill is a good idea. It widely is acknowledged that building a good foundation in primary education can lead to success in secondary education and, in turn, post-secondary education. This is key to breaking the cycle of poverty. A 2004 study conducted by the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community examined the role of post-secondary education in welfare recipients' paths to self-sufficiency and determined college graduation is associated with lower rates of return to welfare. Missouri currently is ranked 13th throughout the U.S. for amount of welfare recipients, according to statemaster.com.

Therefore, ensuring children of welfare recipients are in school makes perfect sense in order to lower Missouri's welfare rates. However, we should institute programs that encourage attendance through positive, not negative means. Who is to say ensuring a child is in school will increase his or her chances of success? Even if we institute this policy, to some extent, the child still is in charge of their own success. It will be up to the child and their family to make sure the

child is keeping up with homework and paying attention during class.

What will be next? Will we require students to maintain a 3.0 GPA to receive welfare? You can't force academic success. If anything, Cookson should spend more time thinking of ways to instill an ideology that emphasizes education as a means of success. Change occurs at a personal level. This bill would just be a Band-Aid for the larger problem of academic apathy among young children.

Cookson has a knack for sponsoring poorly thought out legislation and I'm starting to question his decision-making. He is the same representative who sponsored HB 2051, otherwise known as the "Don't Say Gay" bill, which "prohibits the discussion of sexual orientation in public school instruction, material or extracurricular activity except in scientific instruction on human reproduction." Although it doesn't promote bullying, it certainly doesn't discourage intolerance toward these groups. We need representatives who want to pass helpful, fair, well-researched and well-written legislation.

Welfare is not meant to be a permanent crutch. Like most people, I would like to see fewer people receiving welfare. I am not debating whether or not more hurdles need to be added to keep unworthy individuals from receiving welfare — those decisions are far more difficult to make — but a bill tied to something as unpredictable as a child's health is irresponsible and harsh legislation that should be stopped in its tracks immediately.

Lacy Murphy is a junior French major from Springfield, Mo.

What do you think of tying welfare recipients' benefits to school attendance rates of their children?

"I think it's a good plan. There might be a little more overhead, but it seems pretty easy to implement."

Zach Brand
sophomore



"It's kind of stupid. It's legal in Missouri not to go to school — you can be homeschooled. And what if your kids are sick?"

Chris Standfuss
senior



"Parents can't realistically control their children past age 14. Other children in the household might be punished for one child's actions."

Kirsten Penberthy
senior



"I don't think it's fair. Some kids have health problems and have to miss school."

Marissa Fabbri
junior



AROUND THE QUAD

Penalties for violent crimes should be reduced



Sarah Muir

Missouri hasn't had a major reform of its criminal code since 1979. Senate Bill 253 finally is trying to make changes to how Missouri defines and classifies crimes and sentences lawbreakers. An overhaul is long overdue and would bring several benefits to Missouri's criminal justice system.

The bill, which is sponsored by Missouri State Sen. Jolie Justus (D-10), is based on the Missouri Bar Criminal Law Committee's 2013 Criminal Code Revision, according to the Missouri Bar Association. The bill is more than 1,000 pages long, which has

slowed the process of passing it, according to the Feb. 9 KSHB article.

SB 253 still is in the hearings phase, according to an April 4 Kansas City Star article.

Some of the changes are simple and attempt to update the language of the law, including changing definitions to become more gender-neutral. Some changes are focused on bigger issues like sentencing and classification of crimes. Two criminal classes would be added to help fill gaps in the current classification system. The bill adds a class D misdemeanor, which would result in no associated jail time, and a class E felony. A class D misdemeanor would be for common, low-level first time offenses such as marijuana possession and petty theft. A class E felony would give prosecutors more flexibility in charging crimes by creating another tier by which to classify crimes, according to a Jan. 22 News Leader article.

The bill also would change the possession of controlled substances other than marijuana from a class C felony to a class E felony, which carries a maximum of four years in jail as opposed to the current maximum of seven years. It also would change the possession of marijuana from a class A misdemeanor to a class D misdemeanor, which would only carry a fine instead of a potential one year jail sentence. Another

example of a class D misdemeanor would be a first time stealing offense for property valued less than \$150.

The sentencing changes would benefit Missouri practically and fairly. Missouri should strive for a smarter, not more difficult, approach to criminal justice, and this bill achieves a smarter system. Missouri taxpayers spend an average of \$22,350 for each inmate, according to a 2012 report by the Vera Institute of Justice. The current emphasis on hard punishments for all crime, including misdemeanor marijuana possession, is costing the state money. Changing certain crimes to a class D misdemeanor makes the state money through fines.

Aside from saving money, the bill could impact Missouri's crime rate. Texas enacted similar changes and saw a 20 percent drop in crime and a 10 percent drop in incarceration rates, according to an April 9 CBS article.

Another noteworthy change raises the age a person becomes eligible for the death penalty from 16 to 18. It also eliminates the mandatory sentencing of anyone younger than 18 who commits first-degree murder. Currently, the sentencing must be life without possibility of parole. However, the Senate bill would expand the range to a minimum of 10 years up to life imprisonment.

Greater flexibility for sentencing makes the system more just. In the status quo, even if a prosecutor doesn't believe a 16 year old deserves life imprisonment, he's forced to try the case that way. Prosecutors and judges would be better positioned to make case-by-case decisions regarding sentencing than the current law allows. No one knows the details of a case better, yet their opinions are often disregarded. Reform allows for better judgment of what sentence is appropriate.

The bill makes a change to an outrageous law. I was shocked to learn Missouri law allows 16 year olds to be charged with the death penalty. Sixteen year olds aren't even legal adults yet according to the state, but the state can sentence them to death. When only nine states even conduct executions, the death penalty for adolescents seems especially unjust.

Less than six weeks are left for Missouri's legislative session and it would be nice to see our senators make a greater push toward passing this reform.

Sarah Muir is a freshman political science major from Lee's Summit, Mo.