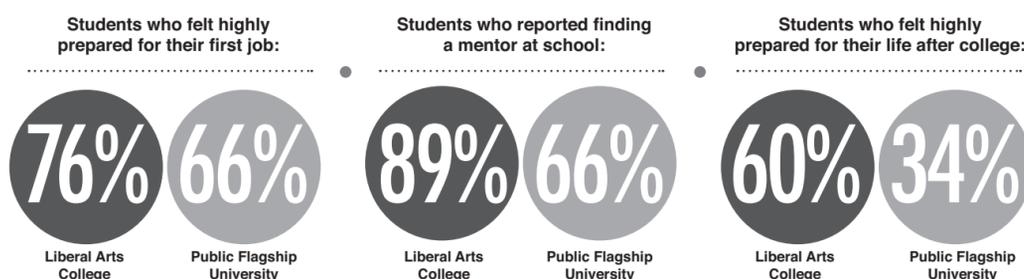


Liberal Arts College vs. Public Flagship Universities



According to <http://collegenews.org/news/2011>

The liberal arts are dangerous



Connor Stangler

Freshman take heed: beware of the liberal arts.

There was a time when I was just like you. I arrived as a freshman, giddy with anticipation. With freshly sharpened pencil and magnificently blank notebook in hand, I was ready to experience Truman. Three years later the pencil is blunt and the notebook is frayed and Truman's curriculum has left me empty and lost.

This is the home of the liberal arts, the signature curriculum meant to train you in tolerance, freedom and interdisciplinary thinking. You will read books that you never imagined yourself finding interesting. This will be an intellectual revolution. But like any liberation, you have to be careful and think about whether the thing you create is worse than the original. In short, contrary to what you will hear, too much freedom can leave you directionless in a mental wasteland.

The liberal arts destroy your sense of superiority and decimate your most ardent assumptions. They require the surrender of all superlatives. Unless you

understand something in the context of culture, history or the individual experience, then you cannot deem it morally better or worse. The liberal arts is intended to crack your mind open wide enough to admit nearly everything. At first you feel empowered, armed to the teeth with multidisciplinary knowledge. You can glide seamlessly and confidently from history to biology to philosophy. You feel, to your pleasure, in control.

But then you reach a point of saturation: your mind is too open and too much has rushed past the levy. Afterward, you feel intellectually empty, like the roots to your calm center of control have been ripped out of the soil. What, you ask yourself, is true if every theory, approach, discipline and opinion is just as valid as the next? What is conclusively better and what should be tolerated? What should be our standard if everything is relative?

I admit I am a victim. The liberal arts have worked their best on me. Suddenly, there is an argument for everything. Limits on discourse or lifestyle or choice are arbitrary because no one has the right to determine the good for someone else. As a result, I feel arbitrary and without standard. What can I say is worthy of national movement or support? More importantly, how can I tell people what is worthy?

At its essence, the liberal arts are a process, a means of analyzing and learning. The University's Mission makes several references to the mechanism: "critical thought," "celebration of difference and diversity" and "intellectual integrity." The means are the ends. But

the means can spin out of control. We are so focused on how we are moving that we don't see where we are moving. It's hard, though, to control this intellectual freedom. It is better than the alternative and makes the student feel good. The liberal arts intoxicate, and Truman is not in the business of sobriety.

The problem is that the ends matter. Society, government and life all require ends. We constantly seek and judge what is, according to the University Mission, "best." But how can we determine what is best if we are presumptive in deeming so? Within the structure of the liberal pursuit, we must have limits, standards and goals. Sometimes, we can't be afraid to say something is unworthy or dangerous, that perhaps the individual interpretation is wrong. Without ends, we could not have ended slavery. Without ends, we could not have established what each American deserves or what our national aspirations are. The liberal arts teach us to ask the big questions. If we are not careful, our oppressive freedom will stop us from answering them.

For four years, the liberal arts curriculum is probably the best choice you could make. But in true liberal arts fashion, nothing is absolutely good. Just as we analyze our own assumptions and those of others, we must consider the implications of the education itself and make sure it doesn't produce what we hoped to avoid.

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

Our View

Don't wait to apply your education

When you think of how you'll apply your education from Truman State, you probably imagine yourself doing so after graduation. Junior Aaron Malin, president of the Student Association, along with his roommate, senior Monica Nelson, have gone above and beyond simple classroom discussions and are not waiting for graduation to start making a difference: they've created a political action committee known as Missourians for Equality to legalize gay marriage. Whether or not you agree with their mission, we can all appreciate their ambition. Why wait until you've graduated to change the world?

We have no doubt you've been encouraged to put your education to practice. How many of you, though, have actually made an effort to act upon those beliefs? Whether your efforts are successful or not is irrelevant. Sure, success is sweet, but failure to change something you disagree with isn't necessarily complete failure. Most importantly, others are motivated to question their own stance on an issue, whether they agree or not.

Missourians for Equality aims, by the November 2014 election, to have nondiscrimination and marriage equality laws on the ballot for voters to decide on. November 2014 is quite a while away, but consider the sweeping difference the PAC is seeking in how Missouri defines marriage. If anything, the fact that Malin and Nelson are committing their time for a minimum of another two years shows a deep responsibility and drive to make the world a better place. Regardless of personal feelings on the issue of marriage equality, their commitment is commendable.

Their dedication to this ideal also speaks to the character of Malin and Nelson. Imagine, provided Malin and Nelson are successful, how many lives they will affect for the better. They will receive little or no thanks for their support and no compensation for their work. Political views aside, we can all appreciate that dedication to fellow human beings.

If you feel "lost" in college and aren't sure what you want to do with your life, our advice to you is to be adventurous. Pick something you care about and use the skills at your disposal to make the world a better place. And if at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

What class are you looking forward to most and why?

"Literature of the American South: It's a topic I love very much."

Benjamin Batzer
English major
senior



"American Romanticism: I heard the teacher is really awesome."

Meghan Crider
Communication Disorders major
sophomore



"Greek 1: It's a whole different alphabet and a different way of thinking"

Jordan Dillon
Classics and Philosophy/
Religion major
sophomore



"Native American Languages: I've always wanted to learn about the languages"

Cory Frank
Linguistics major
senior



AROUND THE QUAD

Consumer politics are unavoidable



Robert Overmann

A couple weeks back, as I'm sure you remember, the United States seemingly went berserk because Chick-Fil-A CEO Dan Cathy stated the company supports traditional marriage. Suddenly, chicken sandwiches were handheld, edible political statements. Both supporters and detractors of marriage equality staged protests at the restaurants across the country and mayors of cities throughout the country were advising Chick-Fil-A to stay away from their city. And then, a third party declared food-politics ridiculous and was upset the issue had come up at all. I'm not here to debate gay marriage: I'm here to support what I refer to as consumerist politics. Cathy had every right to state his views about gay marriage. Furthermore, his pocketbook probably appreciates that he did.

Consumerist politics aren't new. Basic marketing dictates that a product should make a statement about its purchaser to be successful. Products and services sell because they take stances, political

or not. Companies love to make their product seem charitable, such as stating money will be donated to a given cause with each purchase. Consumers buy the product both to feel good about themselves and to make a statement to others about the kind of person they are.

The poster-child vehicle of environmentalists, the Toyota Prius, has been successful because of how it was marketed. Many Prius owners have the vehicle they do because of the political statement it makes about them: purchasing a Prius signals to everyone who comes in contact with you and your "hippie car" that you support environmental protection. We all engage in consumerist politics because it's so deeply ingrained in us that our "stuff" speaks to who we are; including, but not limited to, our political beliefs.

Consider the reaction when Cathy declared his support of traditional marriage. Yes, some picketed and boycotted Chick-Fil-A for their stance, but the same happens in our Toyota Prius example. Many will never drive a Prius because of what it says about them. That, however, is irrelevant from a business point of view, the statement sold sandwiches. In fact "the company reported 'an unprecedented day' of sales... Many locations nearly ran out of food," according to an August 6 article in the Huffington Post. People who previously had no interest in Chick-Fil-A's sandwiches suddenly were purchasing them simply to make a statement about themselves.

I'm not going to argue that I think I support defining ourselves by our things, but in such a pro-capitalist soci-

ety, consumerist-politics are unavoidable. Our wallets are intimately tied to our politics. Even if one disagrees with Cathy, does his opinion really matter when deciding whether or not to buy Chick-Fil-A? His company is comprised of independent franchises that aren't going to refuse service based upon sexual orientation. Many franchises employ openly gay people. Purchasing a sandwich isn't going to sway the battle over marriage equality one way or the other.

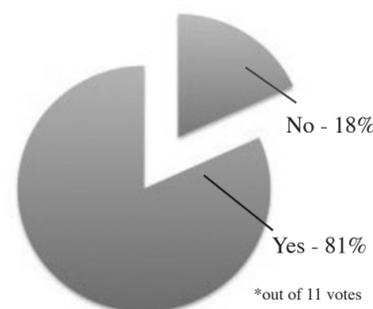
All Cathy did, intentionally or not, was employ a deceptively successful tool to market his product, as do most other successful marketers. Cathy - through one statement gave his product an image. Suddenly, the product was a bullhorn to announce to the rest of the world who the consumer was. If you are among those enraged by the fact politics ends up in our products, blame human nature. We all want to be recognized for what we stand for as individuals. I contend that the resulting economic stimulus and public awareness of the central issue easily justifies the harmless controversy stirred by the marketing tactic.

If you're passionate about the issue of gay marriage, I encourage you to investigate more productive ways to further your cause than whether to buy a chicken sandwich or not. Deeply controversial social issues aren't, and never will be, solved by the simple purchase of a product or service.

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

Web Poll

Are you ready for summer to be over and return to Truman?



Editorial Policy

The Index is published Thursdays during the school year by students at Truman State University, Kirksville, MO 63501. The first copy is free, and additional copies cost 50 cents each. The production offices are located in Barnett Hall. We can be reached by phone at 660-785-4449. The Index is a designated public forum, and content of the Index is the responsibility of the Index staff. The editor in chief consults with the staff and adviser but ultimately is responsible for all decisions. Opinions of Index columnists are not necessarily representative of the opinions of the staff or the newspaper. Our View editorials represent the view of the Editorial Board through a majority vote. The Editorial Board consists of the editor in chief, managing editor, news editor, sports editor and opinions editor. The Index reserves the right to edit submitted material because of space limitations, repetitive subject matter, libelous content or any other reason the editor in chief deems appropriate. Submitted material includes advertisements and letters to the editor.

Letters Policy

The Index welcomes letters to the editor from the University community. Letters to the editor are due by noon the Monday before publication and become property of the Index. Submissions are subject to editing, must contain a well-developed theme and cannot exceed 500 words except at the discretion of the Editorial Board. Letters containing personal attacks will not be published. All letters to the editor must be typed, double-spaced, signed by at least one individual and include a phone number for verification. They must be submitted by email to index.opinionseditor@gmail.com or on our website at www.trumanindex.com. Include the words "letter to the editor" in the subject line of the e-mail. The Index does not publish anonymous letters to the editor. No individual may submit more than one letter a week.

Advertising Policy

For up-to-date information on current rates or to inquire about the availability of classified ads in the Index, contact our advertising department at 785-4319. Our fax number is 785-7601, or you can e-mail us at tsu.indexads@gmail.com.

Corrections

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