

## Our View

### Truman State portfolio system requires attention

At Truman State, students are required to compile a senior portfolio of their best essays, art projects or research completed while attending the university. This portfolio is meant to reflect students' academic progress in areas including critical thinking, research and creative endeavors.

Unfortunately, many students do not learn about this significant undertaking until late in their college career. As a result, many don't take it as seriously as they should. Instead of treating the senior portfolio project as a last-minute hassle before graduation, students and faculty alike should place greater focus on the project throughout the students' college careers.

Students, how many of you are consciously compiling an academic portfolio as you work through your coursework? If you're like many college students, you're probably just grateful to have the particular project or essay finished as you struggle to stay on top of your coursework. Be conscious of your senior portfolio — all Truman students are required to submit one. Why not eliminate this stressor during the end of your senior year while compiling a portfolio you can be proud of?

Professors, how often do you mention the senior portfolio during your classes? Do you assign coursework with the intent of helping students build their critical thinking skills, research skills or creativity? Placing greater emphasis on projects that will contribute to students' senior portfolios will help students get the most out of their college experiences.

Let's begin a conversation on campus about these portfolios. The portfolio project is an evolving system, according to Truman's website. With input from students and faculty alike, we can transform this project into one that allows students a concrete way of tracking their progress in skills essential for life and the job market. Let's stop seeing this project as a hassle and start viewing it as a tool to better ourselves.

## Corrections

Last week, the Index page 6 calendar incorrectly listed the date of the "Not So Fat Tuesday" event.

To submit corrections or to contact the editor, please email [index.editor@gmail.com](mailto: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.

## Letter to the Editor

In his column, "Political Gridlock Is Unavoidable," Robert Overmann gives a very astute description of why our politics are the way they are. Americans say they want compromise, but they will gladly punish those who do compromise at the ballot box for supposedly lacking principle. (If one wishes to see what a "principled" politician looks like, look no further than the Tea Party members of Congress, whose "principle" almost led America to default on its debts in 2011.) He concludes that the problem has largely become engrained in our system, making it very difficult to change.

I, however, take a somewhat less dreary view than Mr. Overmann. I believe our current ailments are not forever set in stone. Two wonderful books came out last year addressing these issues. The first, entitled "It's Even Worse than It Looks," was written by two Congressional scholars who propose very pragmatic, systemic fixes to our legislative branch to make it at least somewhat more functional. The other, "Our Divided Political Heart," by Washington Post columnist, E.J. Dionne, addresses our constant

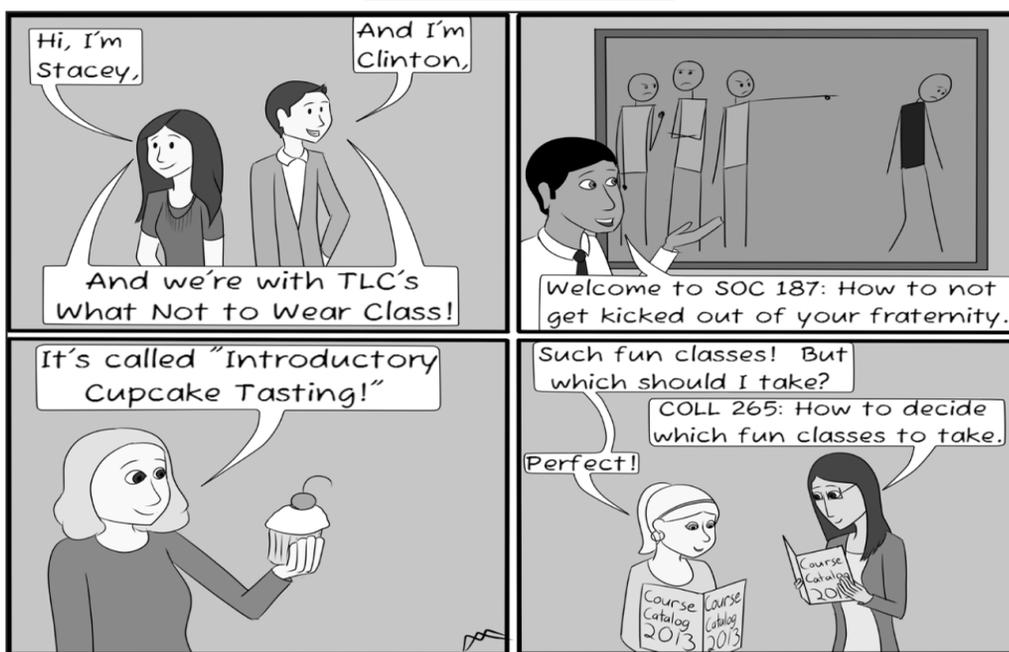
struggle as a body politic to balance our individualist nature with our support of the public interest (or the collective).

Not all of the suggestions given by these authors may be perfect. But it begins a much needed discussion. It is incumbent upon citizens who are frustrated with their government, and who, as Mr. Overmann correctly asserts, are to blame for the current gridlock, to read these works or others. In a democracy, citizens must take an active part if they are to hold their elected officials accountable; one vote at the ballot box every four years does not suffice. Learn from our mistakes. Explore ways to become more effective citizens. Become aware of how our system works, because if we are unwilling to sacrifice a little bit of our time to become more involved in our democracy, then we deserve what we get.

Michael Baharaeen  
Truman State senior

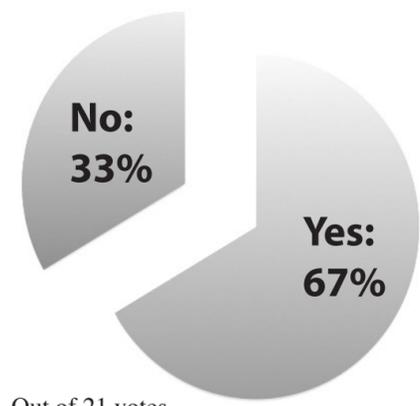
## Cartoon

By Megan Archer



## Web Poll

Would you support a Missouri voter identification bill requiring a government-issued photo ID to vote?



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## Morality education is necessary



Connor Stangler

Every college student has to take introductory courses. Some do biology, English, journalism or business. What about humility?

New York Times columnist David Brooks is teaching a course at Yale University titled "The Course on Humility." The syllabus articulates a simple class theme — "Everyone says character is important to leadership but few people know how to build it. This course will survey one character-building tradition, one that emphasizes modesty and humility." The textbooks range from autobiographies of social activists to psychology books on decision-making.

Truman State should offer courses like this.

If we have courses about music, exercise science and history, why not about character, respect and courage? Why don't we teach virtue and morality, which are as much part of the professional world as our required technical knowledge?

The reasonable objection to such a proposal relates to definitions and standards. Prior to the Enlightenment, religious and political authorities defined virtues. They used deities, monarchs

and heroes of myth or history as moral standards. These standards were aimed at conformity and left little room for challenges. With the rise of skepticism, science and reason, standards began to break down. Former authority figures lost their grip on moral centrality. As liberty and individual reason replaced deference and community obedience as social foundations, citizens and scholars challenged definitions and fought for interpretation rather than commandment.

Today, the trend toward freedom has accelerated. Skepticism is our creed. Critique is the status quo. We question conventional standards throughout every realm of life — family, education, government, relationships, art, etc. We lend an ear to few authorities other than ourselves. We've stolen the moral compass from the top of the social hierarchy and claimed our rightful ownership. We ask whether there are any true standards and then proceed to liberate individuals from the few remaining.

Opposition to conventionality, however, would not be an obstacle to these courses. These would be exploratory, not directive. The professor would not establish a single definition of "kindness," "empathy" or "self-awareness." Instead, as Brooks does, he or she would track the various conceptions of morality from mythological roots to post-modern decentralization. Students would track the evolution of virtue and the reason for change. The professor would welcome skepticism and dogma alike. Whereas lessons about virtue were previously restricted to mainly religious texts, this course would introduce secular as well theological foundations of morality. Students would discuss altruism's usefulness, selflessness's practicality, and sympathy's applicability. By the end of the course, the

students would hopefully have some notion of where these virtues fit into modern society.

The point of these courses is to rescue virtue and morality from the anarchy of individualism. Hundreds of years ago, scholars challenged authority's orders, not because they wanted to steal morality from one unreflective prison to place it in another, but because they realized we had been talking about it in only one way for a long time. They didn't want to scatter discussions of virtue. They wanted to liberate it from blind arrogance.

Today, we've imprisoned virtue once again. By leaving it out of public discourse, we've committed the most flagrant cop-out of modern philosophy. Individual freedom has become as blind as authoritarian direction.

"The Humility Course" works because Brooks recognizes that if the modern individual is not challenged, we can never fully understand one another: "Personal opinion" is the trump card. Everyone can justify their individual morality according to their own terms and experiences. This, however, does nothing to increase understanding or tolerance, the original goals of the Enlightenment liberators.

Instead of claiming amnesty from interrogation, let's put these virtues center-stage. Let's look at their value and place in the modern workplace and family. The moment we begin to rope off virtue from the sensitive torment of the public space is the moment we begin to sink back into the apathy we were once so proud to escape.

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

### 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 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.

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