

Our View

Grades must come second to learning

We hear it all the time — a professor will go on an intellectual tangent during class, and, invariably, a student pipes up with “Will this be on the test?” If the answer to that question is “no,” attention dissipates and apathy takes over. Instead of promoting intellectual rigor, this test-oriented American education system risks creating a high-stakes learning environment where learning comes secondary to earning a grade.

Testing is necessary for a formal education system seeking to serve the masses. Without assessment, it’s near impossible to determine who learned the information presented during the class and who didn’t. If we did not assess students’ learning, there would, of course, be those who would receive credit for a class without learning anything. That clearly is unfair to those students who took the time and effort to understand the information presented.

But we also must be aware of the environment we’re creating with this test-focused style of education. When students place such emphasis on tests, the rest becomes unimportant. Everything that can’t be operationalized into a test question suddenly is unimportant. Teachers often use the common threat, “this is going to be on the test,” as an incentive for students to pay attention, but it has become a crutch for students who require an incentive to learn rather than having an inquisitive nature. With this unforgiving pass or fail environment, many students’ natural reaction is apathy. These students cease to care, and thus cease to learn.

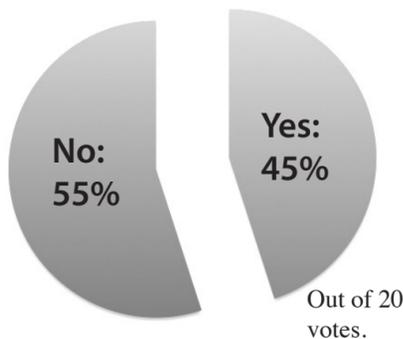
We must find a balance between assessing students’ mastery of the material and cultivating an environment that does not induce apathy amongst inarguably bright individuals. The classroom must thrive on intellectual curiosity, not fear of a poor test grade.

This balance is undoubtedly difficult to achieve. Professors must pique student interest in the material and create a low-stress testing environment that is designed to assess learning, not penalize. If appropriate, students should be allotted as much time as they need to complete the exam. If tests are administered during a subjective, discussion-based class, the test must also be subjective, allowing students to explain themselves rather than filling in bubbles on multiple choice questions.

There undoubtedly are easier routes to a post-secondary degree than Truman State’s rigorous liberal studies program. Truman students should want to learn. Although we understand the importance of assessment, the ultimate value of an education lies with the acquired wealth of information, not the letter grades gained during the process.

Web Poll

Should the words “under God” be omitted from the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance?



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Corrections

On page 5 of the March 7 Index, Lacy Murphy’s “Sex offender bill is flawed” column incorrectly was edited to state that Missouri HB462 was introduced to Congress. The bill actually was introduced to the Missouri Legislature.

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.

Letter to the Editor

Discrimination is, by definition, unfair treatment. Here in Missouri, we have established a set of laws called the Missouri Human Rights Act to prevent discrimination in housing, the workplace and places of public accommodation. However, protections provided under this act do not extend to all our citizens. We must also ensure that people cannot be fired or denied a place to live based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. To do so, we need to add these protections to Missouri’s non-discrimination policy. Missourians for Equality is attempting to make this happen.

A non-partisan grassroots organization made up of an amazing group of dedicated young activists, Missourians for Equality is working to prevent this discrimination by putting the issue on the ballot in the November 2014 election. By working for this policy change through the ballot initiative process, we can give the people of Missouri the

chance to stand up for justice and equality where many of the politicians in Jefferson City have failed to do so. I fully support this effort.

The time is right for this change to happen. Cities and counties around the state have taken matters in their own hands and passed ordinances to prevent discrimination because of sexual orientation and gender identity. Governor Jay Nixon has extended this protection to employees of the state executive branch. Missourians all across the state deserve equal treatment.

I encourage everyone to sign the petition to help put this issue to a vote of the people. Getting to the ballot is the hard part. Missourians are ready to pass this measure. I know that once we ask the voters to decide, they will vote for equality.

Susan Montee

Former Chair of the Missouri Democratic Party

Cartoon

By Megan Archer



Pledge must not endorse religion



Robert Overmann

President Dwight D. Eisenhower proposed a change to the Pledge of Allegiance during 1954, at the height of McCarthyism. The Pledge, written during August 1892 by Francis Bellamy, originally read “I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” Eisenhower had attended a sermon during 1954 by Rev. George Docherty, who suggested “under God” be added to the pledge of allegiance, according to religioustolerance.org. Eisenhower agreed, and he signed this resolution into law during June 1954.

The time has long passed for “under God” to be removed from the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance. This is a clear violation of the core principles of the U.S. Constitution and is disrespectful to the many non-Christian citizens of the U.S.

We can look to history to learn why the Pledge was revised. The change was motivated, at least partly, by Eisenhower’s desire to portray communists as Godless heathens, according to religioustolerance.org.

By declaring America to be “one nation under God,” Eisenhower was effectively implying, because of the culture of the time period, that communists also were atheists. He hoped this would stigmatize them further in the heavily pro-Christian atmosphere of 1950s U.S. culture. The Cold War ended more than two decades ago — surely we can all recognize this irresponsible propagandizing is no longer necessary.

The constitutionality of the words “under God” previously has been debated in the courtroom. During 2002, the 9th Circuit Appellate Court ruled the entire Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional because of the words “under God,” according to a June 2002 ABC News article. Judge Alfred T. Goodwin wrote in the Opinion of the Court, “A profession that we are a nation ‘under God’ is identical, for Establishment Clause purposes, to a profession that we are a nation ‘under Jesus,’ a nation ‘under Vishnu,’ a nation ‘under Zeus,’ or a nation ‘under no god,’ because none of these professions can be neutral with respect to religion.”

Consider how upset Christians throughout the U.S. would be if the government-sanctioned Pledge of Allegiance to their nation included the phrase “under Vishnu.” Of course, this change would never be implemented because, as I’m sure you’ve heard argued before, the United States is a nation founded upon Christian beliefs and ideals.

Except it’s not. The U.S. was founded on the idea that each of us have the right to worship and believe as we please. The U.S. Constitution’s Establishment Clause states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an

establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

A government-sanctioned Pledge of Allegiance declaring the nation to be under the deity of a single religion is implicit government sanctioning of that religion.

When the 9th Circuit Court’s decision was appealed to the Supreme Court, the Court sidestepped the issue on procedural grounds — the Supreme Court reversed the decision because the case’s plaintiff lacked the original right to bring the suit to court, according to a June 2004 Washington Post article. In my opinion, this is because the Court would have been forced to find “under God” unconstitutional, but realized the social constraints and massive unpopularity of such a decision.

Of course, we each have the decision to remain silent during the Pledge of Allegiance. The government cannot compel our participation. But, for those 23 percent of U.S. adults who are not Christian, according to a December 2012 gallup.com article, this creates the difficult choice between pledging one’s allegiance to their government and remaining true to one’s own beliefs.

Ultimately, this issue comes down to one of mutual respect. If we wouldn’t like to be forced to make that choice between pledging one’s allegiance to their government and falsely stating their religious beliefs, then we must recognize that we cannot, in good conscience, impose it upon others.

Robert Overmann is a junior English major from Cape Girardeau, 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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