

## Sri Lankan students share culture and cuisine



Scott Skarvan/Index

Students and faculty choose from Sri Lankan dishes Tuesday night during the Sri Lankan Student Association dinner, which provides community an opportunity to experience Sri Lankan culture and taste authentic foods from different regions of the country. This year's theme reflected the sacred Sri Lankan city of Kandy.

## State universities pursue gender-neutral housing

BY KAITLYN DANIELS  
Staff Reporter

Student efforts across the state have begun encouraging universities to consider gender-neutral housing, a policy Truman State administrators consider only on a case-by-case basis.

Truman's current housing policy places students together in on-campus housing according to same sex, yet some students see the benefits of changing the policy to make housing gender-neutral.

John Gardner, Director of Residence Life, said he was a member of a panel about gender-neutral housing two or three years ago that Student Senate put together and he said there wasn't much interest regarding the issue during that time.

"I've had discussions with random students here and there but I don't think it's been something that has had a lot of energy put behind it from the students," he said.

Gardner said there is value to gender-neutral housing in the fact that if a student is a transgendered individual, gender-neutral housing provides more options.

Truman's housing is not set up well for those particular individuals, he said, because Truman has a limited number of single rooms to offer.

Gardner said gender-neutral housing is dependent on whether or not the students and the institution are ready for it. He said this is because it is a cultural shift to offer gender-neutral housing. People generally see gender with a simple spectrum of either male or female and see it as synonymous to sex, Gardner said. For people to shift away from that view would require them to think about it differ-

ently, he said

"I've always told the students who've talked to me about it, if they are interested in this I think it's worth exploring, but the students have to be the ones to initiate it," Gardner said.

Aside from Truman's policy of placing students according to their biological sex, he said Truman offers housing for men and women who are married. Truman also offers housing if they are a student with a child labeled as a dependent.

Gardner said putting students of the opposite sex in the same room is the next step for Truman to take if the university is interested.

"We have had a couple of other instances where students have shared that they are transgendered and are looking for a different housing option and we work with those students on a case-by-case basis," he said.

Gender-neutral housing could benefit the university by potentially recruiting more students and encouraging students to stay on campus, Gardner said. Gender-neutral housing could also negatively affect the university because, while students might be prepared for it, parents might not.

"While we may recruit some students who are interested in that option whether they are an upperclassmen, there may be other students that [lose] interest in Truman because that doesn't fit their values," Gardner said.

Rose Viau, Director of Residence Life at Northwest Missouri State University, said her university's gender-neutral policy is only available to upperclassmen, which includes sophomores, juniors and seniors. Viau said Northwest

Missouri thought upperclassmen would be more equipped to make the decision of living with someone with a different gender. Freshmen are coming right from home, and Viau said they need more structure due to the inexperience of living on their own.

Northwest Missouri's policy allows for other options, not special treatment for any one kind of population, Viau said. She said students all have had a positive response so far and there have been no roommate conflicts.

Viau said universities considering gender-neutral housing should make sure there is enough space in on-campus housing because this was one of the issues Northwest faced.

"If you had a four person suite and [the students] were interested in gender-neutral housing and one of [the students] had to leave the university for whatever reason, we didn't have enough spaces for that one space to be sitting empty," Viau said.

Viau said college students today are different from college students 50 years ago. The university needs to be able to provide things that are acceptable for the university and what the students want if they want students to remain on campus and spend their money on campus, Viau said. People of the opposite sex live together off campus all the time, Viau said, and no one knows about it.

"There are different needs and different interests and I think one other thing to consider is that our students are going off campus and spending their money elsewhere and however they want," Viau said.

At Truman, senior Brandon



Eychaner, PRISM president, Truman's gay-straight alliance organization, said he knows at least three transgendered students who might benefit from gender-neutral housing.

"That's not a huge number but just because it's not a large group doesn't mean that we can ignore them," Eychaner said.

Eychaner said he thinks people at Truman are mature enough to handle gender-neutral housing.

"If they do something like Northwest and they do gender-neutral housing for upperclassmen I feel like that would be fine and then we could set aside specific space for people to ask special situation people," Eychaner said.

Eychaner said the environment at Truman is open-minded enough that people know what they are getting into when they

go to a liberal arts college.

More people would want to stay on campus if they were able to do gender-neutral housing, Eychaner said. He said catering to students will make the university more money which might be one incentive for making gender-neutral housing.

Eychaner said he agrees with Northwest's policy about gender-neutral housing being only available to upperclassmen.

"Right when you get out of high school I don't think the maturity level is high enough to handle living with people of the opposite gender in most cases," Eychaner said.

Students interested in pursuing gender-neutral housing for Truman can find ways to get their voice heard through organizations such as Student Government, Student Senate or the Residence Hall Association.

## Agricultural science department forms partnerships

Department uses partnerships to create new courses for Truman State students

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Truman State's agricultural science department is working to increase student options through online courses partnered with other universities.

Department chair Michael Seipel said the department is considering several possibilities through grants and partnerships to increase the amount of courses available to students and improve the program.

He said one opportunity is a partnership with Southeast Missouri State University and several other universities throughout the state, including Missouri State University and Northwest Missouri State University.

Seipel said the U.S. Department of Agriculture Capacity Building Grant Program is expected to award Southeast Missouri State University a \$30,000 grant. With that grant, he said, SEMO has planned to work with the partner schools to begin creating online courses, which students from all the universities can participate in.

"The idea is that each school in the consortium would offer one or more online classes to students from the other universities," Seipel said.

The grant will provide money for

travel and materials for faculty from the participating universities to meet and work on the project, Seipel said. He said if the planning stages go well, the universities will apply for a larger grant to work on course development and the transition to online classes.

Seipel said Truman's agriculture program is considering changing some classes to an online format to better use resources other schools provide. He said this program will allow Truman to offer more upper-level classes that only a few students take because the classes will be filled by students from other universities.

"[The program] allows universities to each emphasize their strengths but still offer courses to their students that they wouldn't normally get," Seipel said.

It has not been determined which classes might be offered online or how those classes will be formatted, Seipel said. One option is to have students do much of the coursework online and then travel to a location to complete hands-on aspects of the class. He said the department is considering moving the agricultural marketing class and the basic animal science class to an online format.

Seipel said he expects planning for the SEMO grant to begin next semester and for it to last about a year. He said Truman will have no formal costs for this planning process.

The agriculture department also is working to develop an online plant breeding class through a different Capacity Building Grant and in partnership with Missouri State University, Seipel said. He said this program is being handled by agricultural science professor Mark Campbell.

Campbell said he was contacted by Missouri State about partnering with the school to apply for this grant to create plant breeding classes and research at both universities. He said Truman currently does not have a class solely dedicated to teaching plant breeding. However, he said he conducts plant breeding research through Truman.

There is a plant and animal breeding class.

He said Truman's agriculture department wants to use this opportunity to capitalize on a branch of agricultural science that not a lot of other schools work with. This new program will include a class about plant breeding with

online components to connect the two schools, Campbell said, and opportunities for students to participate in an exchange between the schools during the summer to conduct research.

Specifically, the class and research will focus on breeding grape plants because of the need for diversity of grape plants used for Missouri's expanding wine industry, he said. It also will allow students to work with the breeding of cereal crops such as corn.

The class will be offered for the first time next semester at Truman and students will begin conducting research during the summer, Campbell said.

"This is unique because the two schools will form a partnership where there's really nothing but synergy that can make both of our schools more competitive in an area where it's very difficult to get training in anymore," Campbell said. "There is a large demand for people with these skills in the industry right now."

Garrett Grider, senior agricultural science major, said the online courses will be a great opportunity for students to expand their knowledge and have access to classes not usually taught at Truman.

He said there are many classes he has taken that would work well with an online format, however he said he thinks it is important for students to still actively participate in classes through hands-on experience.

He said he also thinks the program would benefit from an increased focus on sustainable agriculture techniques.

New classes through partnerships might involve:

Online coursework

Field trips to perform hands-on activities

Summer research programs