

Our View

Violence is desensitizing our society

Threats and acts of terror have become much more common place. In fact, there have been more than “two-dozen incidents since 9/11 and there appears to be a growth in anti-government extremist activity,” according to a May 15 report to the U.S. Congress, issued by the Federation of American Scientists. Ironically, we live in a society of constant fear which is becoming rapidly desensitized to that fear.

There are no longer any people or places out-of-bounds for the targets of terror. Schools and churches now commonly are victims of bomb threats. Just last month, the University of Texas-Austin and North Dakota State University received bomb threats in the same day, according to a Sept. 14 USA Today report. Concealed carry permits steadily rising, according to an April 5 ABC News report, and pepper spray commonly can be found in pockets and women’s purses. Our society seems pervaded by fear of one another.

However, at the same time, these constant threats rapidly are causing us to lose our fear. Bomb threats and incidents of senseless violence seem almost old news. Terror levels have become the norm, and some forms, such as “lone wolf” terrorism, actually are on the rise, according to U.S. Homeland Security Director Janet Napolitano during a Dec. 2011 CBS article. Almost every building now has an alarm system. In cities such as St. Louis, a day without reports of murder and rape are an abnormality — 81 homicides were reported during the month of Aug. 2012 alone, according to the St. Louis Post Dispatch.

Is this culture of simultaneous fear and lack of fear one we want to pass onto our children? An emotional reaction toward the loss or potential loss of human life is natural — caring for the lives and well being of one another is what makes us human. Emotional apathy toward terror and violence is nearly as dangerous as the incidents themselves.

As with everything in life, a fear of violence is natural only in moderation. If it’s too much to ask to settle our disagreements non-violently, let’s at least agree to settle them without atrocities. Bomb threats and violent attacks on innocents in schools, churches and homes not only are destructive to human life, they’re destructive to our common humanity.

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.

The infographic on page 3 of last week’s issue was intended to have represented new students, but instead it reflected the total enrollment for 2011 and 2012 international students.

What personalities does each residence hall tend to attract?

AROUND THE QUAD

“I lived in Centennial. It often attracted a lot of Magic (The Gathering) fans; they were up until two in the morning.”



Junior

Grace Holthaus

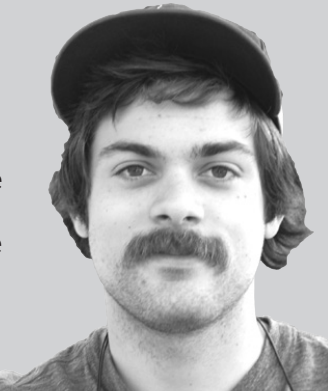
“From what I’ve heard, Grim attracts a lot of gamers, Ryle has a lot of sophomores and Dobson has a lot of freshman athletes.”



Freshman

Breanne Durovic

“I’d say that since West Campus is more expensive, there’s more snobbish people there. I see more people move into Ryle in groups.”



Junior

David Lemon

“Kids from Missouri [Hall] are pretty outgoing and curious about the world.”



Freshman

Morgan Ramsey

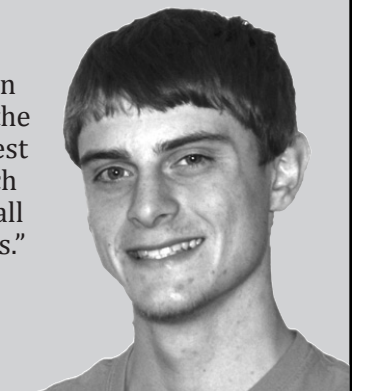
“There’s more athletes in Dobson. BNB also seems to be more distant than other halls.”



Senior

Josh Day

“Weird people live in Grim, Ryle is where the popular kids live, West Campus is full of rich kids and Missouri hall has a lot of artsy kids.”

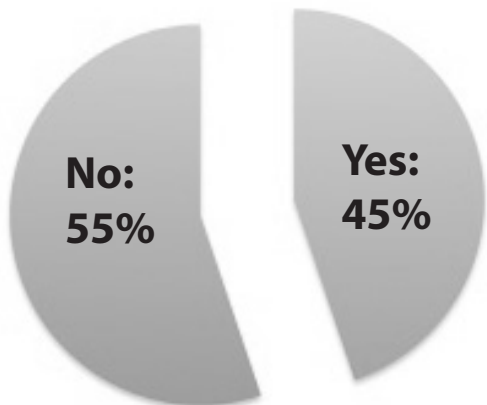


Freshman

Alex Hoos

Web Poll

Did you see the Truman theater department’s production of “Rebel Voices”?



*out of 29 votes

Graduate school narrows education



Connor Stangler

“What are your reasons for graduate study? Please describe your current degree goals and your reasons for selecting your program(s).” This is the prompt for my graduate school application that requests the concise, moving and convincing summary of my past, present and future self. It also could be the ironic obituary of my liberal arts education.

If I could, in about 1,000 words or so, narrow myself after four years of widening, define myself after four years of identity crisis and project myself after four years of short-sightedness, that would be great. Unfortunately, my liberal arts education prevents me from doing any such thing. It has trained me to equivocate with the best of them, to indulge in subjects as diverse as art history, chemistry and health science. No Truman State student, whatever the pressures to specialize, should lose these abilities. A graduate or professional program should never turn these four years into an anomaly. They should be a foundation.

If the Truman curriculum were applying for graduate school, its application would be quickly dismissed by an admissions committee. Its personal statement

would be a rambling and vague road-map that jumps around from subject to subject and lacks any clear purpose other than an indulgence in its own content. Truman would have fantastic recommendations, a solid GPA and competitive standardized test scores, but readers would wonder whether it knows what it wants to do. Sure, it can quote Kant and comfortably discuss the fragile state of the international order, but can it settle on one thing? Can it free itself from this intellectual ADHD long enough to find something it really likes?

Are Truman students doomed to be generalists who like so many things that when a graduate program finally does force them into an academic straitjacket they lose not only perspective, but also a little bit of spirit? There’s a strong possibility. For four years administrators encourage us to sample different disciplines not only in the hope that we’ll find something we really love, but because it’s good for us. It’s good for us to see the world like a biologist one day and a historian the next. We are trained to avoid certainty and professionalization because that will inevitably come later.

What emerges, however, is a strange paradox. Throughout four years we take such diverse classes that we only taste the surface level of each. At the same time we’re broadening our horizons, we’re supposed to be limiting them in preparation for a job market that scorns generalists. If we take a few classes in one subject and a few in another, is that really enough to tell us what we want to do for the rest of our lives?

If Truman has taught us anything, it’s that that question is not the important one to ask. We’ll ask it of ourselves over and over again as we ponder the thousands

of paths we could take. We’ll question whether our interest in law is just a fleeting fancy, something that was great for a weekend, but would kill us during three years. The important questions, however, are the ones the conventional student wouldn’t normally ask, the questions the non-liberal arts students never get a chance to ask. Is this the best way to live? Am I right in assuming this about other people? Does another perspective on this issue open up an entirely different world?

These questions, and not the ones about what classes will translate into a higher-paying job, are the important ones to ask. Everybody confronts the career and money questions, but not everybody gets the opportunity to struggle with the bigger ones.

In many ways, graduate school is the anti-liberal arts program. It will encourage exploration but within strictly defined borders. It will inspire you to ask questions, but only the ones that take you to certain answers. Before graduate school eliminates the liberal arts spirit, before it squeezes every last ounce of intellectual adventurousness out of you, recall and permanently remember what these four years were supposed to do. The liberal arts aren’t meant to be a break from the real world — they’re supposed to be your introduction to it. They’re meant to tattoo your consciousness so that every project you work on, every decision you make and every relationship you form has a trace of their influence. They should never become a good dream in the longer nightmare.

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

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