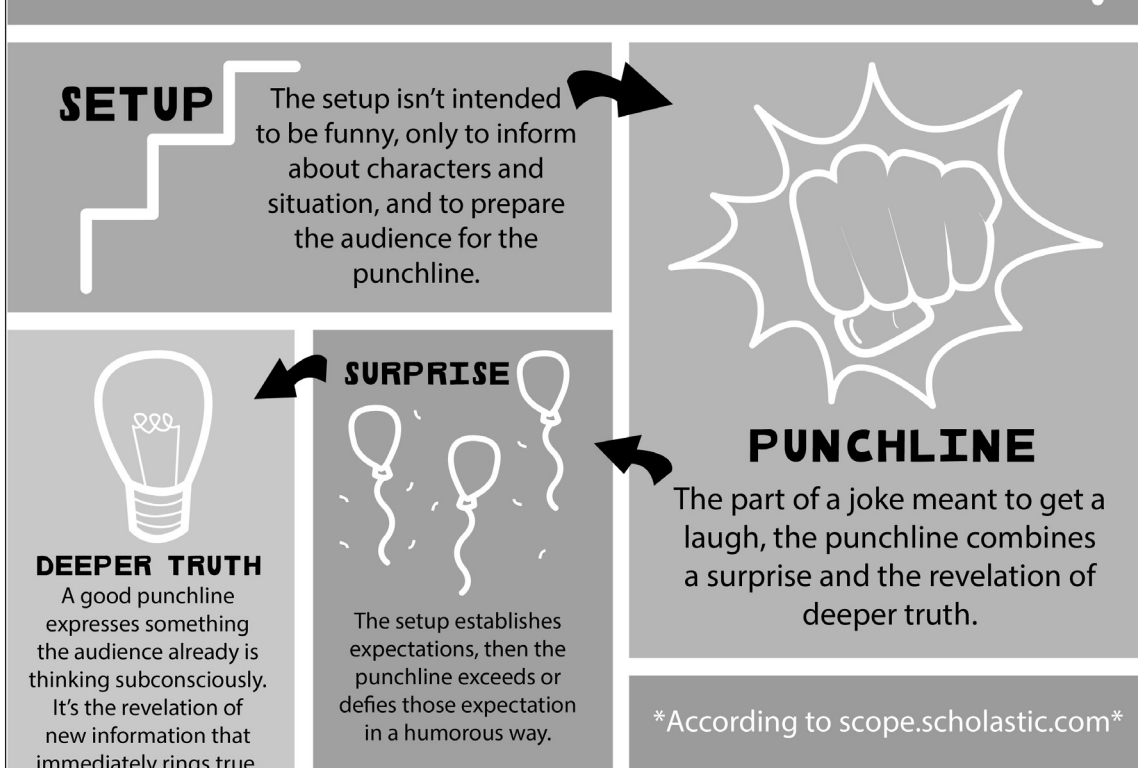


## WHAT MAKES A JOKE FUNNY?



## Truman State should seek cleaner comedy acts



**Jessica Hack**

For Truman State's Welcome Back Weekend fall semester, SAB presented comedian Eric Neumann with Ron Nobles as his opening act. Nobles opened Neumann's show with the typical uncensored jokes, throwing profanity in each bit. He took his jokes too far when he began to make jokes about a male teacher friending a female student on Facebook because the teacher knew the student would grow up to be attractive. Students let out awkward laughs as they squirmed in their chairs with discomfort. While Neumann's language was not as vulgar as the opening act, the subjects he presented were based around drugs — mostly marijuana. He even went as far as to ask students who had smoked weed recently and asked who could 'hook him up' with some drugs. His jokes did receive laughs from the audience, but they left many feeling uncomfortable. Freshman Leslie Hickman said she felt frustrated.

"I was raised in a house where cursing and crude jokes weren't allowed, like many of my friends," Hickman said. "These types of subjects always make us uncomfortable. I should have known that college wouldn't be like high school, but I didn't expect a school-sponsored event to allow something so overwhelmingly crass ... Because of the first comedian I went to, I didn't want to go to any others and even became skeptical of other non-comedian events."

I, too, felt uncomfortable during the Neumann show, but even more so during the presentation from Saturday Night Live's Vanessa Bayer. Bayer made some clever jokes that brought a roar of laughter from the audience, especially regarding the plane ride to Kirksville, saying she never had to be weighed to ride a plane before. But Bayer also made some crude, inappropriate jokes regarding some of the different races, ethnicities and religious views of the audience, calling them out and essentially making fun of these students. While the jokes got laughs, it was at the expense of the students at the butt of the joke. These are not good jokes — they harm others.

What makes stand-up comedy funny? It is funny because of the perfectly thought out and well-timed jokes. Vulgarly has nothing to do with the comedy behind the joke. According to a March 2013 Wall Street Journal article, re-

nowned comedian Jerry Seinfeld said when vulgarity is not present in a joke, that's how the comedian truly knows if the joke will obtain the desired response.

"If you have a bit, and it's got swear words in it, and it gets a huge laugh, it may or may not be funny," Seinfeld said. "But if you have a bit that has no swear words, and it gets a huge laugh, it's definitely funny."

By the standards set by Seinfeld, who reliably could be called a comedy expert, the comedians Truman has sponsored this year are not funny. They are rude and crass. Truman should do a better job sponsoring comedy events for students who don't think offensive content is funny. Many students on campus won't tolerate vulgarity and inappropriate jokes because of their culture and upbringing. There should be more options for these students to enjoy their time on campus.

Comedy is something everyone can enjoy, but not when there aren't options for all students to enjoy it. There is no need for extreme vulgarity or crass humor when clean comedy can bring laughs from the whole audience without causing any discomfort. Everyone enjoys a good laugh, but not everyone enjoys it at the expense of others.

*Jessica Hack is a sophomore computer science and economics major from St. Louis, Mo.*

## Values should not rule public discourse



**Sarah Muir**

I try my hardest not to stick to my values.

According to Jon Stewart and his quote on posters around campus, "If you don't stick to your values when they're being tested, they're not values — they're hobbies."

However, this type of thinking that is pushed by the political parties is harming political discourse. A person's values can contradict, so they shouldn't be the sole basis of decision making. People should refrain from making political decisions based on strict values political parties arbitrarily assign to issues.

Personal values and political decisions should be kept separate. Political parties often use and rely on individual's personal values to appeal to voters and this is when personal values become political decisions.

The first problem with using values as a decision making model is it oversimplifies the issues. Take the abortion debate, for example — there are people who are pro-choice and people who are pro-life. The basics of those value-based labels and arguments are weak at best and completely misleading at worst. They don't even begin to cover the complicated reality of the issue.

Multiple values often are involved in political issues and conflicting with each other. Reducing the issue to one value and saying that value takes precedent over every other ignores many aspects of the issue. Even if we evaluate abortion on a purely value-based level, making it a dichotomy between choice and life doesn't address things like when the mother's life is at stake or when the pregnancy was the result of sexual assault. Talking in only broad terms of life and choice and pretending like there is nothing in between ignores the nuances of the debate about abortion, but that's exactly what political parties do.

The second problem with making decisions based on values is it polarizes issues and makes compromise hard. Values often are presented in black and white. You either are pro-choice or pro-life. There isn't much middle ground there. This causes extreme polarization between people, which becomes problematic when polarization prevents any political action from taking place. It would be

fine if the two separate sides actually talked to each other, but the polarization is so extreme the so-called "debate" usually results in name-calling instead of real discussion. If we were to remove the issue from the polarizing rhetoric and value framework, people still might not agree, but at least real debate could happen.

People also start to consider their current values as a necessary part of their identity. As a result, they refuse to change, regardless of how many reasons they are given to support the opposite position. The idea that you have to stick to your values, regardless of how they are challenged, is really one of the core problems in American politics. Opinions should change when new information is given. Otherwise, we all would still believe in the divine right of kings. Changing your stance about something doesn't mean you don't have any values or that you have weak values, it means you are intelligent enough to constantly evaluate the world around you and take new information as an opportunity to grow.

Finally, it's acceptable to support ideas that appear to conflict with each other. According to a November 2003 Yale study, voters will disregard facts and even their own beliefs about an issue and instead vote for what their party supports. This is a problematic effect of political parties assigning values to issues.

People should be able to support gay marriage, but be against abortion, support higher minimum wage and also think that the government should spend less money. However, when political parties assign values to these issues, they make it seem like you are either "pro-Democrat values" or "pro-Republican values." This is another false dichotomy — there's no need to make broad judgments about a multitude of issues when instead you can take an individual look at each issue and come to your own decision.

As much as I love Jon Stewart, I urge you to question your values, examine them. Don't fall into the trap of following party-assigned values.

*Sarah Muir is a sophomore political science major from Lee's Summit, Mo.*

## What did you think of the How I Met Your Mother series finale? [spoilers]

"I did not [see it], but I know ... it sucks. Because the entire thing led up to a relationship we were excited about, then ruined it."

**Erica Klagues**  
Junior



"I have mixed feelings on it ... the main theme throughout is that Ted's going to find his one girl, his destiny ... I felt like she wasn't part of his life."

**Jonathan Gilmore**  
Junior



"I did not like it. I thought it was very anticlimactic."

**Summer Santos**  
Sophomore



"I thought it was a very fitting end to the show ... I like that [Ted's relationships] came full circle."

**Michael Fentress**  
Sophomore



## AROUND THE QUAD

## Defend your opinion, but only after scrutiny



**Laknath Gunathilake**

I write a biweekly column for the Truman State Index. Lately, however, I have had doubts about expressing my views this way. I have become concerned about my own opinions and begun to investigate the process of how opinions are formed. I have written about issues that concern me, topics that interest me and subjects for which being a spectator of unfairness and stupidity was impossible.

I have realized my opinions are formed as a result of experiences, insights, social interactions and many other factors. But I also have begun to realize opinions tend to be transitory and often change with time. Maybe 10 years from now, I will look back at what I have written and realize how wrong I was. As ironic as it might sound, I have begun to have second thoughts about writing this column.

Writing a column is relatively easy. Essential requisites include having a strong opinion, understanding the audience and articulating an argument that spurs discussion and maybe reactions. Although I like to convince myself I always have been right, almost all opinions have a margin for error. After all, I don't know the full truth behind everything I write. I have been told truth has

multiple perspectives, and any one of them alone is a lie.

Just like me, most Truman students tend to be highly opinionated individuals. Whether it's about volatile issues such as abortion or gay marriage, or highly politicized issues such as welfare or climate change, students voice their opinions in the classroom as well as more informal settings such as social media.

I have met staunch liberals, die-hard feminists, environmentally conscious tree-huggers and, occasionally, conservatives. I have had some stimulating conversations with these individuals and profusely enjoyed these discussions.

Being a highly opinionated individual, however, could have negative consequences in certain situations. For instance, I have observed some individu-

als who are so convinced of their opinions, presuppositions and worldview, they fight relentlessly to save their position without ever considering a flip-side to the story.

At times I have been one of them. It's easy to become so convinced by grand theories that we begin to pin down the world around us to simple assumptions. We criticize, argue and defend our position about certain issues without considering what it would be like to be in the shoes of those we criticize.

However, a liberal arts education is meant to challenge one's worldview. Intellectual progress is achieved by adopting a stance where our opinions are provisional and open to revision. Such an education should foster the humility necessary to investigate alternatives and accept counter

arguments when we realize our own convictions are wrong. This does not mean we must remain passive and tip-toe around in an attempt to remain objective and avoid offending anyone.

As a senior during my second-to-last semester at Truman, I have begun to realize how little I know about my own area of expertise. I have spent more than three years taking various political science classes only to realize I merely have been scratching the surface of my subject area.

After spending all these years at Truman I have learned one thing — I have learned that "I don't know."

*Laknath Gunathilake is a senior political science major from Colombo, Sri Lanka.*