

Knowledge deserves a fair test



Andrea Trierweiler

Tests — they're an essential, yet dreaded, part of the college experience. Some of us prefer multiple choice to essay questions, or vice-versa. Both styles have the potential to be accurate examinations of a student's knowledge, but only if designed fairly.

With so many different learning styles, it's impossible to accommodate everyone's abilities with every test. While there are benefits and drawbacks to multiple choice and essay testing, whichever type is administered must measure a student's content knowledge, rather than test-taking ability.

The main advantage to multiple choice tests is the consistent chance of getting a question right when you have to make a guess. But multiple choice testing has some disadvantages. In particular, answering multiple choice can involve recognizing a correct answer by process of elimination, but mere recognition doesn't necessarily prove a student has knowledge of a subject, according to fairtest.org.

Furthermore, with a restricted number of answers to each question, multiple choice tests might send the message that there are only so many right answers to a question that could be open-ended. Thus, multiple choice testing works better when there is a single right answer to an objective question — for instance, a math test asking the correct solution to an equation.

Multiple choice tests sometimes end up testing a student's ability to take a test rather than how much information is learned. I've gone into a test feeling confident, only to get tripped up by questions like, "Choose the more correct answer," or those with options like, "all of the above," "none of the above" and "both A and C." These questions can make students second-guess the knowledge they spent so much time studying. Lengthy multiple choice exams tend to test a student's ability to finish a test within a certain time limit,

which is unfair to students who require more time to think through the answers.

But perhaps the most important downside of multiple choice tests is they do not require application of knowledge. Essay questions are a much more appropriate way to test if students have studied the information thoroughly.

The main advantage to essay questions is they are open-ended. They allow for more creativity, and there often is no single correct answer. Essay questions allow students to demonstrate how much they have made connections with a topic, which seems more fitting of Truman State's liberal arts mission. Essay questions also test a student's ability to articulate an idea clearly through writing, according to the Center for Innovation in Teaching & Learning at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While this gives students with good writing skills an advantage, it can encourage those who struggle to improve this essential ability.

The main downside of essay questions is the issue of subjective grading. Even the handwriting, neatness or punctuation can influence the grade a teacher gives, according to the CITL. One way to make grading essay questions fair is to instruct students to submit work anonymously, such as by writing their names on the back of the test so the teacher doesn't know who wrote it until after it has been graded. Professors also could assign anonymous numbers to students and have a third party translate the graded tests into grades for each student.

Although both types of testing have advantages and disadvantages, both types can be effectively used to measure the same content knowledge, according to the CITL. While the type of test given depends strongly on subject matter in many cases, perhaps the best way is to give a test that combines different styles. A good, fair test could contain multiple choice or true-false sections paired with short answer questions and longer essay responses.

Finally, teachers should remember some students take longer to process and think about information than others. Diligent students must be considered as well as the quick ones for testing to be fair, so don't make tests too long.

There are various formats educators can use to structure a test. While there is no single correct way to create one, the important thing is they are fair assessments of all students' knowledge.

Andrea Trierweiler is a senior Romance language major from Columbia, Mo.

From the *desk* of the *Editor*

Our View Smoking ban is not necessary

The Truman State Board of Governors recently passed a campus-wide ban on smoking, which will go into effect July 2015.

We, the Index Editorial Board, disagree with this decision, as we think it unnecessarily limits the freedoms of students, faculty and staff with no significant benefit to the health and safety of others.

The presumable rationale behind the existing campus-wide alcohol ban is threefold. First, the alcohol ban discourages illegal activity on campus, as many students are not of legal drinking age. Second, it protects the health and safety of others on campus, as alcohol impairs the consumer's judgment. Thirdly, it protects the University from liability should the intoxicated individual damage University property, or injure themselves or others.

We do not think any of these rationales apply to the campus-wide smoking ban. Virtually all students, faculty, and staff are at least eighteen years old, the legal age to possess and smoke tobacco. Additionally, "the evidence of harm to non-smokers on the beach or in a park from someone smoking is virtually non-existent," according to Ronald Bayer, professor at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, quoted by a July 2013 PBS News Hour article. Finally, tobacco smoking does not impair judgment, so the University is not at greater liability for property damage or injuries while the smoker is on campus.

Although we fully support the ban on smoking indoors, as smoking indoors endangers the health of others, we do not condone a move by the Board of Governors that seems to be more geared toward garnering a positive public image for the University than toward protecting its students, faculty and staff.

Editor responds to misunderstanding

My Feb. 6 column titled "Radio stations should play a greater variety" was written as a lament about the lacking musical variety and unfortunate prevalence of Top 40 format favored by the radio broadcast industry.

While KTRM intentionally was excluded from the column to avoid any confusion — my column about commercial radio was not a comment about our campus station — it since has been brought to my attention that some KTRM employees perceived this exclusion as an attack against them.

This was not my intent. However, as a member of student media, I am familiar with the sentiment that our work often goes unappreciated or is disrespected, and I understand the concerns raised.

I stand by the points made by my column, but I also recognize the importance of accepting responsibility for any distress caused by the editorial. I apologize for the misunderstanding.

Emily Battmer
Index Editor-In-Chief

Typical Truman Test		Megan Archer
<p>1. How does your textbook define OCD?</p> <p>a) "A mental disorder characterized by obsessions and compulsions"</p> <p>b) "A mental disorder characterized by compulsions and obsessions"</p> <p>c) "A disorder that is mental in nature and is characterized by some combination of compulsions and/or obsessions"</p> 	<p>2. On page 112 of your textbook, there is a section describing some possible causes of autism. What is the last word of that section?</p> <p>a) all</p> <p>b) future</p> <p>c) truth</p> <p>d) The premise is false. The section was on page 113.</p> 	<p>3. The name of the author of the third article referenced on page 110, when written backwards, brings to mind which mental illness?</p> <p>a) The correct answer to #5</p> <p>b) The second incorrect answer to #7</p> <p>c) It is currently still undiscovered. Make up your own name for it here!</p> 
		<p>I think I should at least get partial credit for finding the only psychologically healthy way to deal with this test.</p> 

Letters to the Editor

Students should vote in local elections

Generally, student publications encourage peers to better understand northeast Missouri. But, at a time when more civic engagement and service is needed, your columnist in the February 13, 2014 Index attempts to use logic to encourage student voting absenteeism. "Think twice before voting," by Sarah Muir, does not encourage Truman students to use their critical thinking skills to prepare to vote by reviewing the local issues and the candidates.

Instead, it encourages students to refrain from learning about the community or from helping to choose the best city council. Unfortunately, the writer did not encourage her peers to better inform themselves on local issues. Rather, she offers students a negative, isolationist approach to find reasons not to vote here, where they spend their savings and where they are frequently experiencing for the first time of their lives different forms of community life.

As a former city council candidate, I share admiration for the increasing number of socially engaged students who participate in the life of Kirksville, inform themselves and vote conscientiously in local elections, because

they recognize their responsibilities to the people with whom they live and to the generations of students who will come after them. Our quality of life is helped determined by every one — however limited the number of years they are here in our community. But, unfortunately, the socially and politically engaged do not represent the majority.

Most of us do not forget the trauma of this community earlier this school year when the city council refused to accept the anti-discrimination ordinance that was to make discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation illegal, because the city council member voted into office two years prior, in fact, had announced his opposition. I ran myself in the city council elections of 2010 and 2011, in opposition to the two opponents to the anti-discrimination ordinance. A good number of students did vote those two years.

But many others were concerned solely with student elections, until a little later when many of the same student community of Truman came up against the anti-discrimination ordinance. Had the wider body of students been encouraged to take an interest in what was happening in their own community sooner, they could have effectively avoid-

ed nearly losing the second vote on this ordinance. Now, an Index columnist is turning back the clock and encouraging students to retreat as they had before, which, as we saw, nearly had devastating consequences for assuring a healthy, inclusive community.

As a city commission member, I differ strongly with the columnist as well regarding the irrelevance of planning and zoning issues to Truman students. Before we vote in public hearings, we need every perspective as to how rezoning a piece of property will affect the community, negatively or positively. Frequently, it is vital to understand the perspective of students, as they profoundly influence the local economy and business; their needs and quality of life reflects our own.

Students, let no one tell you that you are not essential to helping Kirksville build a better future. We need your voice and your vote to create a stronger, inclusive environment, to diminish poverty, homelessness and unemployment, and to honor all community life, progressively enlarging across former boundaries of exclusion and merging with every passing generation, including yours.

Betty L. McLane-Iles
Professor of French

Criticism is not disrespect

"Mutual respect does not require mutual support — it does, however, require that we do not disparage each others' accomplishments." While I agree that mutual respect on a college campus fosters an environment of productive and accepting learning, navigating one's way through disparaging comments or criticisms allows members of the academy (in this case, members of the Index staff) to understand the tensions that can develop on a campus. Do not idealize or reduce — Truman possesses a welcoming, vibrant community of students, faculty and staff, but alas these thousands of people come from different backgrounds, with complex values and evolving tastes. What we have as a group, united by the structure that is Truman State University, seems to be the chance to learn not only from our positive experiences.

Instead, look around at the issues and difficulties that face this campus and city — a tension between residents and students, rural poverty surrounding the area, a meth problem moving through households, potential state funding cuts (every year, may I add) and the list goes on. An essential facet of the learning experience that is "college," coming to terms with the new freedoms and responsibilities of moving onward in life, is understanding how to approach negative situations. In this case, it is unfortunate that copies of your paper (or ought I say, our paper?) were defaced, but please descend from

your pulpit. Do not lecture the entire campus (faculty, staff and students, as well as Kirksville community) because you are offended by the actions of a few. Consider the "mutual respect" that you call for as something that you, as writers and editors have the chance to welcome and support. This respect does not require support, that is correct. "Mutual respect," in fact, does not require a "lack of disparaging comments" (see the history of the academy for this — people seem to enjoy bickering to say the least). In order to mutually, genuinely respect your peers on campus, accept their positions, accept their actions, but do so critically. If something comes to your attention as immature or inappropriate, engage it, but do not do so superficially.

You have taken the high road here, but failed to understand what taking the high road means. Do not pretend that any organization is free from error, intentional or otherwise. And, when it comes to "encourag[ing] student organizations to implement policies the require mutual respect for others and good citizenship," you are in luck — those policies are in place, dare I say, in all university sponsored groups. Advocating for censorship, fortunately, is not a central principal within most of those organizations, so despite your Orwellian demand, I shall not worry.

William J. Rhys
Truman alumnus

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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The Index welcomes letters to the editor from the University community. Letters to the editor are due by noon the Monday before publication and become property of the Index. Submissions are subject to editing, must contain a well-developed theme and cannot exceed 500 words except at the discretion of the Editorial Board. Letters containing personal attacks will not be published. All letters to the editor must be typed, double-spaced, signed by at least one individual and include a phone number for verification. They must be submitted by e-mail to index.opinionseditor@gmail.com or on our website at http://tmn.truman.edu/theindex. Include the words "letter to the editor" in the subject line of the e-mail. The Index does not publish anonymous letters to the editor. No individual may submit more than one letter per week.

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