

Zero tolerance means unfair punishment



Robert Overmann

Monday, a Boston-area high school student was punished for doing what she thought was right.

North Andover, Mass., student Erin Cox had volunteered to drive her friend home after her friend had consumed a few too many drinks, according to an Oct. 13 CBS Boston article. On the way home, she was stopped by police, who determined she had not been drinking and cleared her of any potential charges. Thanks to zero-tolerance policies, however, her high school was not so reasonable. Simply for being associated with underage drinking, she was demoted from her position as team captain of the volleyball team and forced to sit out five games.

Though the motivation behind the school's zero tolerance policy — decreasing teen drinking and drunk driving — is well-intentioned, zero tolerance policies have destructive real-world effects. A zero-tolerance policy is one that allows literally no exception, regardless of extenuating circumstances.

Rarely, if ever, are situations in real life black or white. Zero tolerance policies punish those who are not necessarily guilty along with those that are clearly acting wrongly. Zero tolerance policies punish equally a student who starts a fight and a student who got hit without ever throwing a punch. They punish the student who brings a knife to school with the intent to injure others the same as a student who brings a knife to cut the apple in his or her lunch.

Every potential wrong in life has surrounding circumstances. When punishing, an individual's intent must be considered. The degree to which they violated a policy must be determined. Perhaps most importantly, the degree to which they do or do not harm others must be recognized. To punish all violators of a single policy with a single mandatory sentence equates Erin Cox's actions of driving her intoxicated friend home with her friend's irresponsible alcohol consumption.

Zero tolerance policies are dangerous — they often discourage well-intentioned acts. When somebody confiscates an illegal weapon or a drug from a friend who might harm themselves or others, they are indeed guilty of possession of that illicit item. However, confiscating that item might very well have decreased the overall risk of harm. Unfortunately, zero tolerance policies prevent mediators from recognizing such good intent.

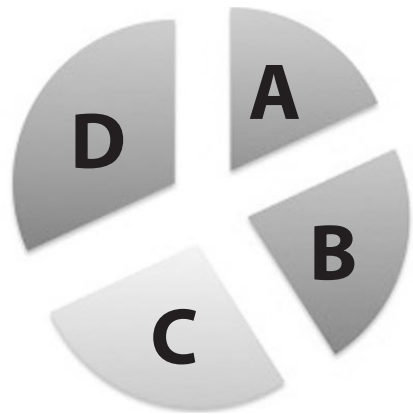
Superficially, zero tolerance policies seem appealing. Institutions that invoke zero tolerance policies claim themselves to be "tough on crime," and punishers of "the bad guys." A closer look reveals, though, that not all those trapped in the wide-sweeping net of zero-tolerance policies are "the bad guys." In fact, these policies often serve to discourage those with good motives from acting in ways that might be deemed questionable.

We owe it to those upon whom we render judgment to consider each case individually. When judgment is rendered mechanically, we cease to treat each other like human beings with differing situations. We cease to acknowledge that all of us have unintentionally found ourselves in questionable situations. We stop putting ourselves in each others' shoes and strike a blow to human fairness.

Robert Overmann is a senior English major from Cape Girardeau, Mo.

Web Poll

Do you submit evaluations of professors through Truman State's faculty evaluations or other websites? How often?



A: 18% Yes, at the end of every semester for every class.

B: 23% Yes, at the end of every semester for some classes.

C: 27% Sometimes, it depends on the class and semester.

D: No, I never submit reviews for professors.

Out 22 of votes.

Letter to the Editor

Thanks greatly for Andi Watkins Davis' report and tribute to the late communication professor Dr. Al Weitz, a summer cancer victim. I would be totally a derelict in homage duty if I did not add from the wider community surrounding his memory a few points too where he majorly impacted upon we radicals elsewhere.

Firstly, at a time of real danger and abuse to be a radical, the second gulf war at beginning of last decade, Al took his part in several ways. He quietly but cheerfully from the back took part in "NOT IN OUR WAR NAME" rallies on the quad and other places dissident faculty and those of us in community Amnesty International chapter addressed against the appalling TV media spectacles of "shock and awe" raining missiles down on a largely defenseless Iraq. Secondly, both in his old office and on his final Barnett Hall front door he equally defiantly displayed a poster saying by my UK Russian Liberal compatriot, the late Sir Peter Ustinov, to the effect that "terrorism" was and is all too

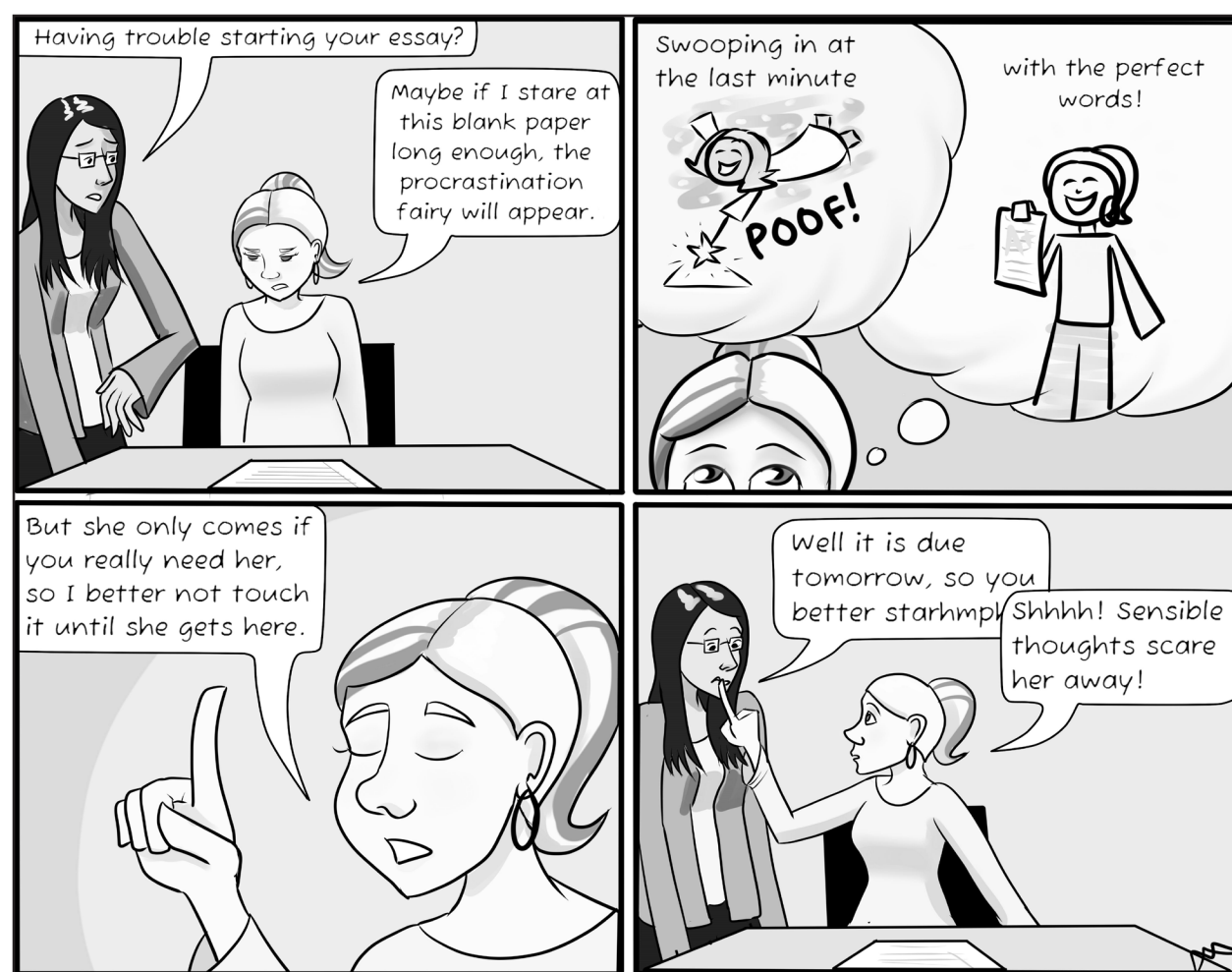
often the last unheeded cry of despair left to the world's dispossessed. A parallel to one by Gandhi he also was poster display fond of in puncturing complacency when Gandhi famously rebuked a London reporter by claiming "Western civilization" sounded like a good idea if it ever really existed.

Lastly, Al was delightfully a conversationalist about his love of continental North American travel and good furniture, as his final office immaculately in fine interior decoration showed. It's more than a sadness, not only his pain-ridden departure, but also that his strict grading and teaching legacy was not as properly rewarded as their accomplishments and his sterling character uncensoriously merited.

Yours Sincerely,
Larry Iles
Kirksville Resident

Cartoon

By Megan Archer



Be more productive



Sarah Muir

Hi, my name's Sarah, and I'm a chronic procrastinator.

This shouldn't be surprising, considering recent research shows 80 to 95 percent of students procrastinate, and 50 percent do it regularly, according to a January 2007 CNET article.

Procrastination might seem like a fact of student life, but that doesn't mean students shouldn't try to fight it. Procrastination leads to stress and lower well-being, according to an April 2013 Psychological Science article.

Procrastination can be overcome, but to truly fight the problem, it must be understood.

Two main theories exist about why people procrastinate. The first is the temporal motivation theory — or TMT — and the second is present bias.

Temporal motivation theory states motivation and procrastination can be explained with an equation, according to a study published in the 2006 issue of the "Academy of Management Review." In this

equation, motivation equals the product of expectancy multiplied by value, divided by the product of impulsiveness multiplied by delay, according to the study.

The top half of the equation is about reaching the most plausible and pleasurable outcome, while the bottom half is about how long it will take to reach the outcome and how long the individual is willing to wait, according to the study.

In short, people who have low confidence in their ability to finish a task, or find the task unpleasant, or who are more impulsive and have more time to work on a task, are more likely to procrastinate, according to the study.

Piers Steel, one of the authors of the study, provides two strategies for overcoming procrastination on his blog "Procrastinus." First he suggests using unscheduling, a technique of scheduling time to do the things that normally distract from working, according to a May 2011 Procrastinus article.

For example, my biggest distraction is watching TV. So to lower my chance of procrastinating, I should schedule time to watch TV during the day. The idea is I will satisfy my desire in a predictable and scheduled way that won't interfere with my work time later.

Additionally, energy regulation is important to reducing procrastination, according to the article. Energy regulation is about finding the best time to work during the day. Some people work better during the

morning and others work better at night, but discovering the best time to work is key to increasing productivity, according to the article.

The second theory of procrastination is called present bias, which is the inability to understand that what you want now is different than what your future self will want, according to an October 2010 "You Are Not So Smart" article. When people procrastinate, they rely on their future selves to get work done and give into the immediate gratification of delaying work, according to the article.

The future is seen as a place of infinite possibilities and that is why, during the current moment, procrastination makes rational sense, according to the "You Are Not So Smart" article. The key to overcoming this is realizing the future self can't be trusted. The future self won't want to do the task the current self is putting off and then the future self will procrastinate, too. Once we realize the future self isn't reliable, it becomes harder to push tasks off until later.

Procrastination doesn't have to be a constant problem. Using these two recent theories, students can implement strategies to overcome procrastination — at least some of the time.

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

Editorial Policy

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