



April won't make a fool of the Index

As writers, communicators and journalists, we tend to think we're pretty funny. If you were to walk into the Media Center during any given Monday or Tuesday night, you'd likely hear office banter, laughter and good cheer.

But as we've learned from the journalists that came before us, everyone has a different sense of humor. It's challenging — if not impossible — to ensure humor translates properly from the page to the reader.

After plenty of deliberation, we've decided not to publish an April Fools' issue — lest we make fools of ourselves, our readership or this University.

Trust us, it wasn't an easy choice. We had glorious visions of publishing an Onion-esque edition with reports that Harry S. Truman had risen from his grave to walk the sidewalks of our campus. Our design team yearned to Photoshop University President Troy Paino into all sorts of dastardly, embarrassing situations.

Although we thought a parody issue sounded hilarious, we understand why the Student Press Law Center cautions against these sorts of editions — the list of successful April Fools' journalism is short and the list of publications that failed miserably at April Fools' humor is very, very long.

For instance, the editor of Boston University's student newspaper, BU Today, was forced to resign during April 2012 after publishing what she termed a "callous and ignorant" spoof issue that contained irreverent stories of Disney characters in lewd and graphic situations — including one story that implied the Seven Dwarves had drugged and raped Snow White, according to the Student Press Law Center.

That same year, Fordham University's president denounced the student newspaper's April Fools' issue, calling it "offensive to every member of the University community," according to the Student Press Law Center. The newspaper, called The Ram, had published an article titled "Jesuits Gone Jewish" that was filled with derogatory stereotypes of Jews.

Perhaps most infamously — and only 90 miles south of Truman — the University of Missouri's The Maneater changed its masthead for its April 2012 issue to "The Carpeteater" — a derogatory slur toward lesbians. The issue also contained other profane and derogatory slurs toward women. The editor issued an apology, claiming she did not know the term had a derogatory connotation, according to the Student Press Law Center.

While we think these newspapers had — and ought to have — the constitutionally protected freedom to publish any derogatory, insulting April Fools' stories they wished, we don't wish to repeat their errors. Just because disrespectful speech legally is protected doesn't mean it is within the realm of human decency.

Although we certainly could have published a humorous article that wasn't disrespectful, insulting or indecent, we didn't want to test those boundaries. Student journalists — like all other individuals and organizations — must choose their battles carefully. If an attempt at humor in the newspaper were to fail miserably, we risk falling from the graces of those that support and assist us.

We're learning along the way, and it certainly is not outside the realm of possibility that we might accidentally publish something in any given issue that requires others' good humor to gloss over. During the past, we've called upon our adviser Don Krause, University attorney Warren Wells and various professors to assist us in difficult situations.

Perhaps even more importantly, this newspaper's news coverage depends on strong relationships with our sources — professors, community leaders and students alike. To publish an April Fools' issue in poor taste might permanently damage our relationship with these sources.

If we are to remain a respected campus publication, we must be sensitive of the various backgrounds of our readership — the chance that we accidentally would insult or offend a subset of that readership is quite high.

In the end, we decided the risk of running an April Fools' issue in poor taste vastly outweighed the laughs we might get from publishing a truly amusing spoof issue. Although it is with a marked regret that we publish a serious issue like adults rather than vying for chuckles among our largely college-aged readership, we think it is for the best.

You're welcome Don, we know you were holding your breath — better luck getting fired from the Index's shenanigans next year.

Letter to the Editor

City council member clarifies her policy platforms

I am grateful, along with the other candidates for city council, I am sure, to the News Editor Bethany Boyle, for her March 26, if back page report of our televised debate last Monday of writing.

I am, however, as the sole avowed, non-conservative or progressive candidate and as a university teacher interested in ideas, perturbed that you did not, as Channel 36 TV full debate viewers can see for themselves by the time this letter appears, really give the details of policy platforms.

The essence of my forward-looking campaign consists of such proposals in line with my belief and that of my supporters in activist or what I call "friendly local government" with its huge multimillion budget which all of us in TSU live under. It matters, too, that readers know our program is not only

reasoned but costed as far as we can determine from the Finance department, after my election.

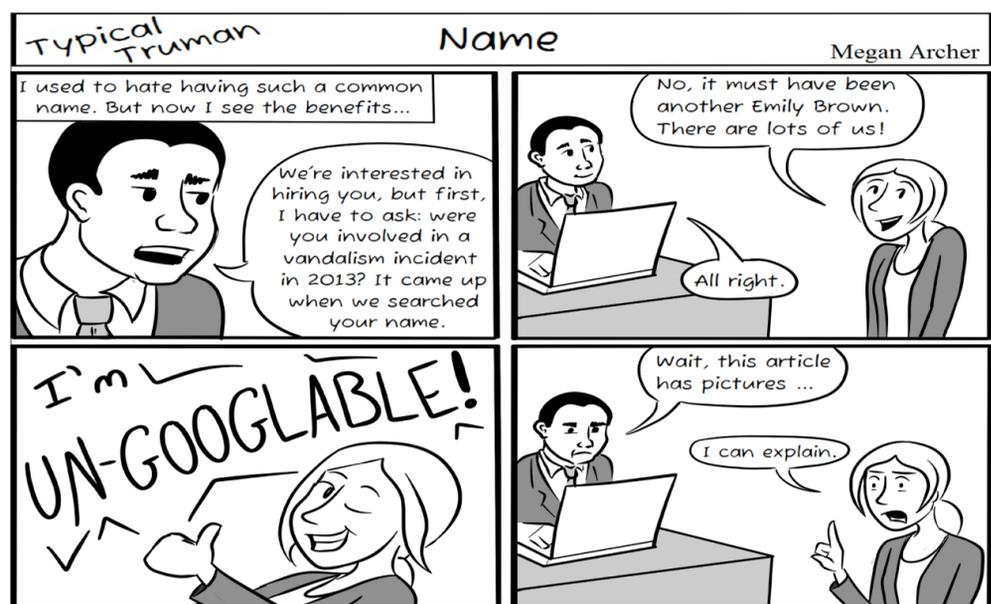
So when I talk about an expanded Tourism Department, rather than the two excellent existing officers, I do mean small business, expansively. I believe that the hiring of, say, high school diploma graduated students or temporarily unemployed Kraft workers to this department would be self-financing. For example, such new staff could digitalize and coordinate all the U.S. Civil War papers and artifacts presently randomly dispersed in such semi-volunteer collections as Pickler Library, Adair Public Library, Adair County Historical Society and so on, so that we could all reap the online charged global access results of their work in the manner, for example, that enables The New York Times to charge worldwide researchers all over the world for such access. Indeed, the same kind of digitalization and accessibility, modernization

techniques could be applied to the great potential for extensive agricultural tourism with our nearby farmers' cooperation and participation and to researching study archives on famous forgotten Kirksvillians like 'method' actress Genevieve Page or British alleged spy and osteopath Dr. Stephen Ward.

Likewise, when I detail as we are doing on the doorsteps in real canvassing teams, our proposals for weekly blue recycling collection instead of every fortnight, many people tell us that this would be great. This is because it would not only be environmentally clean but actually bring in money in line with new initiatives such as the city's belated idea of transmuting glass products that are wasteful into such profitable resources.

Thank you for the opportunity of a reply to your report.

Betty McLane-Iles
French professor



Target moderates in debates



Conor Gearin

During debates about hot-button science issues, perhaps we would be more effective at changing others' opinions by focusing on people with moderate opinions rather than doing battle with ideological enemies.

Journalist Joel Achenbach asked why "many reasonable people doubt science" in a March 2015 National Geographic article. The cover of the magazine's issue had an eye-catching headline — "The War on Science."

Hard-wired cultural beliefs keep intelligent people from accepting scientific discoveries such as evolution, climate change or even moon landings, Achenbach wrote. We often trust a friend's story rather than what a scientist found about a topic simply because we trust familiar people more than strangers, he wrote.

While I agree many cultural attitudes can lead people to doubt science, I think Achenbach blamed the audience too much. At least part of the problem lies with the strategies of science communicators and journalists who explain research findings to the general public in an accessible way. The strategy of such communicators often has focused too much on attacking ideological opponents like religious fundamentalists.

Presenting popular debates as happening only between two groups of staunchly opposed people has limited value. Bill Nye "The Science Guy" debated creationism and evolution with Christian author Ken Ham at the Creationist Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, according to a February 2014 NPR article. While this debate gave Nye the chance to demonstrate many problems with biblical creationism in a highly public way, I thought the structure of the debate was not ideal.

I certainly agree with Nye's views. I interpret the creation stories in the Bible metaphorically, not literally. However, we should design debates to reflect the range of opinions in a population. While the United States certainly includes people with extreme opinions — including extreme scientific skepticism and extreme religious fundamentalism — I strongly suspect many more people exist somewhere in the troubled middle than we usually acknowledge.

Perhaps there are many people who accept scientific answers in some areas, but use religion to answer other

questions. I can think of many such examples among my friends and family. And perhaps I and others who are interested in improving science communication should focus on persuading such moderate people of the value of the scientific answers to issues such as climate change.

I think this strategy could be more effective than carrying on endless debates with people who have decided to stop listening to their opponents. This kind of effort sometimes makes me feel like peoples' opinions never change. But what can we learn from times when views shifted dramatically?

We can see the effects of focusing on moderates in another social issue where science played less of a role. The U.S. population has gone through a rapid change in opinions about same-sex marriage, according to a September 2014 Pew Research Center report.

Notably, 57 percent of surveyed Americans said they opposed same-sex marriage during 2001, according to the survey data. But during 2014, 52 percent of Americans surveyed said they support same-sex marriage, according to the same source.

Digging into the report's data, I found that shifts among moderate people played a significant role. While liberals and conservatives began and ended the period from 2001-2014 with basically the same opinions on same-sex marriage, people who identified as politically moderate shifted from 41 percent supporting same-sex marriage to 62 percent supporting, according to the data.

In addition, while evangelical Protestants continue to oppose same-sex marriage by significant margins, mainline Protestants and Catholics shifted toward supporting same-sex marriage from 2001-2014, according to the report. More than 15 percent of those individuals changed their views during those years.

The conclusion I draw from this data is same-sex marriage activists successfully made their case to moderate people who did not have strong opinions about the issue. By convincing this part of the population, the movement to legalize same-sex marriage gained broad support and momentum, even while extremists on both sides of the spectrum remained where they started.

I want to have this mindset next time I try advocating for scientists' findings on climate change. Perhaps I will focus less on making examples of fundamentalists who consistently ignore evidence and spend more time considering public figures whose opinions on other scientific topics, such as evolution, recently have changed.

But this is just a hypothesis — I need to test it to be sure.

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Editorial Policy

The Index is published Thursdays during the academic 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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