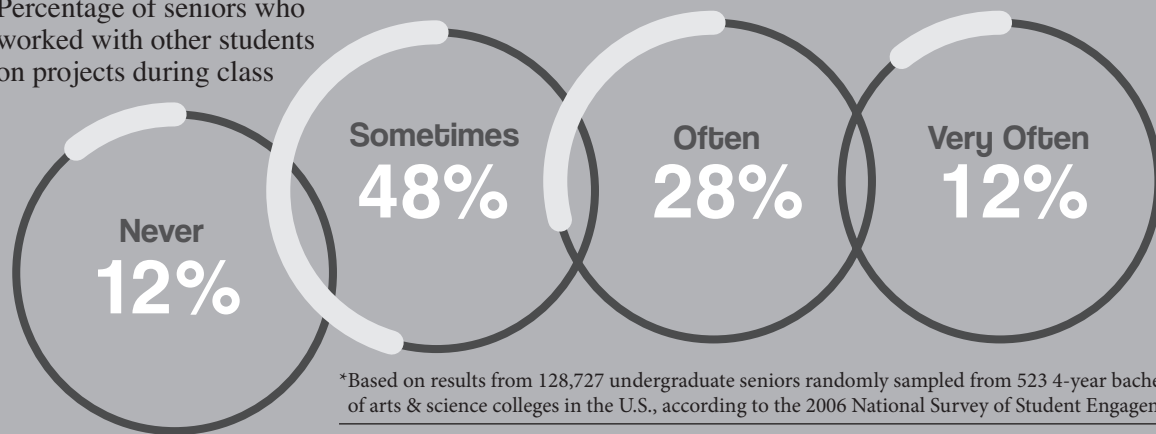


## U.S. undergraduate students regularly participate in group projects

Percentage of seniors who worked with other students on projects during class



\*Based on results from 128,727 undergraduate seniors randomly sampled from 523 4-year bachelor of arts & science colleges in the U.S., according to the 2006 National Survey of Student Engagement.

\*Source: [nsse.iub.edu/NSSE\\_2006\\_Annual\\_Report/docs/NSSE\\_2006\\_Annual\\_Report.pdf](http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2006_Annual_Report/docs/NSSE_2006_Annual_Report.pdf)

Guest Column

## Be aware of your situation



Thomas Johnson

When I was asked to write this column, I thought, “I could talk about the typical things you hear in relation to staying safe on campus.” You’ve heard them before — lock your doors, don’t leave your valuables lying around unattended, let others know where you are going, make sure you have your cell phone with you and charged — the list goes on and on. Instead, I thought I would take a different direction. The real way to stay safe on campus, or anywhere else for that matter, is to be aware of what is going on around you and to be engaged with others.

When it comes to staying safe, the more you are aware of what is happening around you, the better prepared you are to do what needs to be done. I’m not talking about always looking over your shoulder to see what is behind you. What I am talking about is being alert about what is ahead of you. I call it “situational awareness.” We like to think we are in a relatively safe place, and I don’t disagree. Most of the time, we are not in any danger of being harmed. There are times, however, when we need to be aware of what is happening around us so we can avoid having bad things happen to us. I often tell people, “If something doesn’t feel right, then it isn’t.” That’s part of what I’m talking about.

The other part of the conversation is to take action. When you feel something is not quite right, you need to do something to decrease the chance of being hurt or having someone else get hurt. It might be as easy as saying something to somebody who can help — such as the police, a person in authority or a friend or person nearby. It might require you to move away from the danger or help someone else get away. Once again, be aware of what is going on around you.

Think about it. You already do these things. Remember all those fire drills you had to do in high school? Be aware, stay safe.

*Thomas Johnson is the Chief of Police at Truman State’s Department of Public Safety.*

## Group projects are annoying but useful



Trevor Hamblin

Group projects have two sides — they can be beasts, but if they are handled with patience, cunning and teamwork, they can end up being very rewarding. The hows and whats of group projects often make them annoying and confusing — yet group projects can be surprisingly enlightening because they can teach students valuable life skills. Still, despite the many benefits to group projects, I don’t have to like doing them.

Recently, I’ve been working on three group projects back-to-back. Since I’ve started writing this article, I’ve finished one, started another and am in the planning stages of a third. It’s a topic I’ve been thinking about a lot during the past few days. Although I have made progress, it hasn’t been pleasant.

Reconciling schedules to find meeting times, divvying up work so no one carries too much of the burden and trying to intelligibly consolidate work all are challenges one must face while working on a group project. It’s difficult to find any part of this process fun. The group project grade determination adds to the stress — you aren’t just

working for your grade, everyone’s grade is on the line. Conversely, your grade is affected by the work of your groupmates.

One of the worst parts of a group project is being stuck with a topic, a part of the project or group members you don’t want. It makes an already unpleasant experience even worse.

All of that said, group projects are not without benefits. In fact, it’s difficult to think of any educational downsides to them. Perhaps most importantly, group projects provide practical experience with some important life skills, including working in groups, schedule reconciliation and organization.

Ellen Sarkisian, the Emerita Associate Director of the Derek Bok Center, lists quite a few benefits of group projects to students, according to an online document from [harvard.edu](http://harvard.edu). Among them are finding alternative solutions to problems, mutual student teaching and the ability to work on problems in a practical setting. She even gives suggestions to help with some of the more annoying parts of a group project, although many can be covered by the overarching idea that everyone should actively be included in the conversation at a moderate pace of work, according to the document.

While not my favorite thing, group projects are important educational tools. They provide life experience and allow students to work with the class’ topic in a real, collaborative way. It just doesn’t make them any more enjoyable.

*Trevor Hamblin is a freshman English and communication major from Moberly, Mo.*

## Research professors before registration



Bill Townsend

Some professors really suck. I’d be lying to you if I wrote that I adored every teacher I’ve had at Truman. In college, just one bad professor can make your life a nightmare.

While we all know there are bad teachers out there, many students don’t think hard enough about the professors they pick during registration.

Many will say the key to success in college is a mixture of work ethic and natural intelligence. While this

statement has some truth to it, picking the right teacher also can be important. You can have all the brains in the world, but when a teacher demands hours upon hours of studying each night and has unrealistic expectations of their students — often forgetting students have other classes, work and extra-curriculars — it can drive one mad.

There are several ways you can gain foresight about what certain classes will be like. The most obvious one is by word of mouth. Asking friends in the same department as you for advice can be extremely helpful when determining which professors to take.

Another approach is to check [ratemyprofessors.com](http://ratemyprofessors.com). This website has comments about and ratings of just about every professor. With this website, you can check your classes to see which professors have better reviews and likely are better at teaching. While this site is not always

completely accurate about a teacher’s abilities, it at least can give you a clue about what you can expect.

Finally, when you are looking at the course search page within the Truman Student tab on the top left of TruView, you can click on “Browse Faculty Evaluation.” This will let you know what will be expected of you during a course and whether you’ll be completing more tests, essays or homework assignments.

Some classes are difficult no matter who teaches them. Courses such as organic chemistry, advanced calculus and econometrics simply are challenging courses.

However, there’s a difference between a class that is difficult by nature and those that are made unnecessarily difficult because of a poor professor. When a professor is highly disorganized or terrible at telling students how to go about tackling class work, that class can become utterly miserable. When

professors don’t properly prepare students for exams, they are making many lives difficult. Students — save your mental sanity and your academic career by avoiding these kinds of professors.

Remember — above all else — to keep your heads high and give an honest evaluation of your teachers at the end of every course. Future students will be thankful.

I’d like to end by giving a special shout out to a few professors. While I can’t write down every great professor I’ve ever had that truly affected my life in a positive way, communication professor James Cianciola, English professor Cole Woodcox and economics professor David Gillette all are brilliant in their professional fields and amazing people to sit down and talk with.

*Bill Townsend is a senior economics and English major from Monett, Mo.*

## AROUND THE QUAD

### How do you decide which professors to take?

If I’ve had them before, I take that into account.

**Erin Hutchison**  
Junior



I look at the reviews online, and I try to ask friends what they’ve heard or experienced.

**Emily Stobbe**  
Freshman



I usually use Rate My Professors.

**Melanie Roberts**  
Junior



Talking to anyone who’s taken that class previously.

**Anastasia Steblina**  
Sophomore

