

Occupy The Quad for democracy



Will Chaney

I think we all can remember our third grade history class, with its American flag coloring books and “Schoolhouse Rock!” videos. We were told to be proud of the country we live in, because it is a democracy — rule for the people by the people. What we must learn later during life is democracy is not a solitary institution that stands firmly after it has been built. Instead, democracy is a process only kept alive if its citizens are active participants. This especially is important during 2015, while higher education in the United States faces an unprecedented financial crisis. As students — and citizens of a democracy — we actively must communicate our dire situation to the rest of society with a unified protest. Standing by without making noise simply is an invitation to be stepped on.

Many college students shy away from political involvement. According to a 2014 U.S. Census Bureau report, 18-24-year-olds vote less than any other age group. We often do not think politics are relevant to our lives, and our votes and opinions don’t matter to the rest of society. The fact that this opinion is prevalent should not be surprising. How many of your friends care deeply about foreign relations with Syria or the national debt? Probably not many, because a majority of the issues our political parties talk about are not applicable to our daily lives as college students. Political apathy does not mean we exist in a vacuum, devoid of issues and conflict. Instead, the problems we face are different from many other members of society. In addition to Truman State’s economic troubles, college students across America must face the issue of increasing debt.

Student loan debt in the United States has risen 84 percent since 2008 to an astounding \$1.2 trillion, which averages to almost \$30,000 per person, according to a September 2014 CNBC article. This debt is not forgiven if you file for bankruptcy

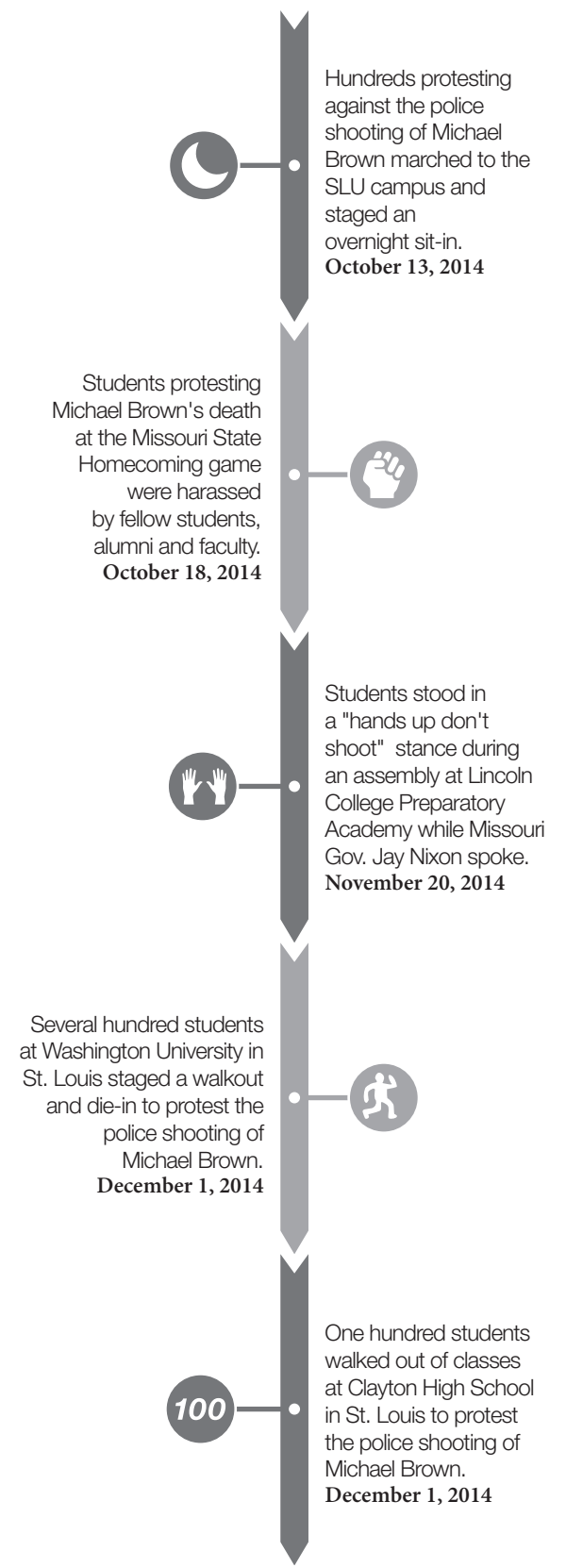
during the future, and can take decades to pay off. People with debt this large often are forced to postpone buying a car, a house or even getting married. Despite the ominous situation confronting our generation, the legislature continues to defund higher education. Missouri’s state government has decreased its contribution to your education from 75 percent 30 years ago to 44 percent today, according to Dave Rector, Truman Vice President of Finance. The other growing 56 percent appears in your Truview account.

It now is clear the government is not representing our interests as students. Change only will come if we follow the example set by other universities and politically organize ourselves to send a clear message to the legislature. During January, Ohio State University students marched through campus to protest tuition increases, according to Ohio State’s school newspaper, The Post. Activists at Ohio State have organized rallies, teach-ins and comedy shows that focus student attention on the debt crisis. Similar protests also have taken place in New York City, Wisconsin and Iowa according to an April 2012 Reuters article. Demonstrations like these are an important first step in any society-wide movement, because they put the problem at the forefront of our consciousness and allow those affected to gather together in solidarity.

We, the students of Truman, must now engage our democratic system and realize the benefits of living in the United States. To send a message, we don’t necessarily have to belong to a political party or become informed about all the issues. Instead, I encourage you to join other Bulldogs to discuss the challenges we face during an open forum discussion 4:30 p.m. April 27 in Baldwin Hall 156. Your ideas, personal stories and debt complaints will be welcome. Students from many organizations also will gather 4:00 p.m. May 1 to occupy The Quad and protest Missouri’s defunding of higher education. Student debt affects all of us — Democrats, Republicans, LGBTQ individuals, math majors, musicians, Leaguers and bikers. Protests are vital to democracy, because individuals are not as loud as the voice of a crowd. This especially is true of college kids, who rarely are given a microphone.

Will Chaney is a freshman economics major from Bridgeton, Mo.

TIMELINE OF STUDENT PROTESTS



Categorizing too much is fruitless



Megan Archer

When I was in grade school, I always wanted to be factually correct. So when I heard the often-quoted tidbit “tomatoes are actually fruits,” I set out to incorporate it into my knowledge database as much as I could. When I did a project about nutrition, I categorized marinara sauce with my smoothie — after all, I figured they both were blended fruits. I mercilessly ridiculed VeggieTales for featuring a fruit, discrediting its own name. I thought the masses were under the mistaken impression that tomatoes were vegetables and those who knew were the enlightened ones. But as I grew up and learned more about the world, I saw my error not just in forcing tomatoes into a category, but in forcing the rest of the world into discrete categories as well. Categories only should be used when they are useful for interacting with the world — there are parts of reality that cannot be put into categories.

This realization began when I took an introductory biology class as a freshman in high school. Our plant unit covered the topic of plant reproduction — specifically fruits. My previous food categories completely were obliterated by the facts I learned during that unit. Yes, a tomato is biologically a fruit, but so are cucumbers, pumpkins and peas. The only requirement of foods under the “technically a fruit” label is to have developed from a plant ovary — or, more simply, to contain a seed. Not only were a lot of foods I had considered vegetables actually fruits, but foods I had thought of as singular fruits turned out to be bizarre fruit mashups — oranges and other “splittable” fruits easily were believable, but I couldn’t believe how seemingly solid fruits like strawberries or apples were collections of fused fruits. To top it all off, I couldn’t find anything that biologically was a vegetable — plant foods not covered as a type of fruit biologically were leaves, roots, stems or flowers.

Baffled, I turned away from biological definitions — those seemed only to be based on plant reproduction and not human consumption. However, the nutritional and culinary definitions didn’t make the line between fruit and vegetable any clearer. Fruits have a higher sugar content than vegetables, according to some nutrition sources such as the Jillian Michaels website. Although this generally might

be true, I found a vegetable with a higher sugar content than a fruit — sweet onions contain seven grams of sugar per 100 grams, versus cranberries, which contain four grams, according to the USDA.

Suddenly, my hunt for the true category of the tomato was making me rethink everything. So much of my education had been built on determining the best way to categorize things. In my ecology class, we categorized ecosystems. In my political science class, we categorized ideologies. In my English class, we categorized genres. But I found that no matter how obvious categories and their differences seemed, when examined closely, the edges would blur. When does the desert switch to the grassland? What’s the difference between a left-leaning centrist and a moderate liberal? When is science fiction so soft that it’s fantasy? I realized how arbitrary the way we think about the world is.

Why do humans feel the need to categorize everything? The answer lies in human evolution. The ability to categorize items originally was very useful when humans needed to distinguish between categories such as “predators and food animals” or “poisonous or edible plants” to survive, according to psychologist Alfonso Caramazza of Harvard University in a February 2010 Scientific American article.

However, this trait now is so pervasive in our culture and ways of thinking that

it has grown beyond its usefulness — it now can be detrimental. Trying to keep track of the types of nutritional groups we consume throughout a day to monitor our diets is useful, but arguing over the categorization of the tomato is just a waste of time.

More than a waste of time, categorization actively can be harmful, especially when people are the ones being categorized. In any categorization of people, there will be cases where categories blend together, or cases that fall outside the generally recognized categories altogether — a few of the more controversial ones are race, ability, sexual orientation and gender.

In these cases, it’s important to remember this lesson — things exist first and are categorized second. Sorry, Plato. The world is incomprehensibly complex, so human-made categories always will fall short. If you keep in mind how arbitrary the lines we draw are when you are interacting with the world, you will live a more enlightened existence than if you try to force everything into a category.

So is a tomato a fruit or a vegetable? It really doesn’t matter. Tomatoes don’t care what they’re called, and neither should you.

Megan Archer is a senior computer science major from Morrison, Colo.

AROUND THE QUAD

What is your favorite fruit and vegetable? Why?

Pomegranate and broccoli. I just like them.

Andrew Neugarten
Freshman



Peaches and celery. It goes well with peanut butter.

Lindsey Forker
Junior



Bananas and broccoli. That’s what I think tastes best.

Oliver Dubois
Senior



Strawberries and green beans. My grandma makes the best green beans.

Amanda Barringhaus
Freshman

