

## Help fight American ignorance



Sarah Muir

It's easy to get caught up in events that happen close to us. Being an informed citizen about the events that directly effect us are important, too. However, so are world events. In a world that is increasingly interdependent, understanding what happens throughout the Middle East is key to understanding why local gas prices have gone up.

To combat ignorance, increase empathy and make Americans more responsible citizens, local news sources — print, broadcast, radio and digital — should report regularly about national and global issues.

Americans are shockingly uninformed. Twenty-nine percent of Americans can't name the Vice President, according to a March 2011 Newsweek article. American performance on questions about international relations is abysmal, according to the same Newsweek article.

This widespread ignorance is important for a couple of reasons. First, it means Americans probably are not very good at electing leaders. You can't really know who the best candidate is until you understand what's happening in the world around you. The second problem is it puts American citizens behind other countries in political knowledge of the world. Yet America is one of the most active countries on the world stage. It's like America is playing a game its team doesn't know the rules to.

One possible solution to this problem is increased exposure to news about the world. The best place for this to happen is at the local level.

One of the benefits of global news in local media is it makes news from across the world seem more relevant. It can be easy to tune out national newspapers talking about the Middle East, but when even the local paper is reporting about it, it makes the event seem closer to home and more important. It personalizes the story by putting it on the same level of importance to the reader as local events being reported on.

Local news can reach people who might otherwise ignore national or global news. Local newspapers might be the only source of news for people in rural

## How ignorant are Americans?

Of 1,000 U.S. citizens surveyed by Newsweek — March 2011

**29%** could not name the U.S. Vice President

**73%** could not correctly say why the U.S. fought in the Cold War

**44%** could not define the U.S. Bill of Rights

**6%** could not circle the U.S. Independence Day on a calendar

**68% of Danes**  
**75% of Britons**  
**76% of Finns**  
**58% of Americans** } could identify the Taliban

Source: [newsweek.com/how-ignorant-are-americans-66053](http://newsweek.com/how-ignorant-are-americans-66053)

areas who don't have access to national newspapers or access to other national media.

Additionally, more exposure to news reporting, particularly reporting that makes use of a storytelling technique, can increase empathy, according to a June 2012 Futurity article. Combined with the heightened sense of relevancy through local news reporting, this can be a great tool for increasing the feeling of community with people across the globe. A local paper reporting about Syria can make the readers feel more empathetic for people who otherwise seem worlds away.

This could mean more people might pressure their leaders to engage with broader, further-reaching issues. It could lead to a greater understanding of different cultures. It could help people relate with one another regardless of where they are from.

Not including national and global news stories in local news outlets contributes to the perception that what happens there doesn't effect what happens here. This type of ignorance is especially dangerous, since it dismisses the importance of things not happening in the immediate vicinity, even though what happens in China definitely can affect what happens here in Kirksville.

The good news is this ignorance easily can be solved. By including more national and global news stories in local news, outlets can help spread the information necessary to defeat American ignorance once and for all.

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

## AROUND THE QUAD

### What non-Truman Kirksville events have you been to?

The farmers' market downtown — I got some food.

Zechuan Shi  
Senior



I went to the Red Barn Festival.

Emily Hahn  
Junior



I volunteered with the disaster awareness response team.

Mitch Williams  
Sophomore



I listened to the Busted String Band at the Aquadome.

Kellen Weiss  
Junior



## Kirksville's culture should be nourished



Adam Rollins

I don't get out a lot while in Kirksville. Every once in a while, my girlfriend and I will swing by the movies and we sometimes stop at restaurants or thrift stores on The Square.

But once in a blue moon, I find the motivation — school assignments — to visit places of a more "cultured" variety. Art, music and self-expression set Kirksville apart as Northern Missouri's cultural center, and it is important that Truman State staff and students recognize the significant impact the University can and should have on the growth of art and expression throughout Kirksville.

I've been inside the Kirksville Arts Center and the Aquadome once or twice each. Although I'm not a

frequent patron of the arts, I thought the art on display at the Arts Center Gallery was as interesting and provocative as art at any other gallery I've visited. I was surprised to find such quality work out in the middle of the rural Midwest.

In the case of the Aquadome, I was interested to learn that bands traveled from towns throughout the region to play shows in Kirksville. I was skeptical about their quality until about five minutes into the performance of a band from Columbia, Missouri, that I thoroughly enjoyed.

I realize now that I had fallen into a mental trap. Passing comments, idle chatter and my own misconceptions had led me to think, without even realizing it, that creativity and talented self-expression don't exist outside of major cities and the far-flung universities that cater to the children of those areas. That was an arrogance associated with my own hometown near St. Louis.

But, the ability to be creative, expressive, "cultured," if you will, exists in every person. So how could I have come to such a false conclusion that good art and good music didn't exist in Kirksville?

Maybe it's because so much of what I consider "cultural" activities — music, dance, international festivals, theatre, painting, sculpture, design — is contained within Truman's campus and hasn't spread into the surrounding community to the same degree as in other college towns. The Aquadome, and more recently Rural Felicity, are great examples of Truman students creating meaningful interaction with the Kirksville community through music, poetry, comedy and more, but they seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Truman mostly seems to host events on campus by students, for students.

I suggest Truman's administration modifies the University's vision statement to include that graduates will become educated, thoughtful and creative community leaders through actual interaction with the community.

Let's work together with the Kirksville community to plan public art, music and theatre events. Let's encourage departments to work with regional schools, so the creative students at Truman have a chance to

mentor the next generation of artists and thinkers. Let's sponsor one-act plays on the courthouse lawn! Or, at least we can do more to advertise campus concerts, plays, recitals and festivals to members of the community and invite them to become a bigger part of what we're doing here.

Some departments already have successful programs that bring students together with community members — these could be models we use to establish community outreach as a priority for Truman students. After all, creating a richer "Kirksville experience" could improve the city's identity as the cultural center of the region and benefit the health of the whole community. Any lasting Truman legacy is empty if we can't say that we nurtured creative diversity and enriched the community which for so long has been home to this University.

*Adam Rollins is a senior communication major from St. Charles, Mo.*