

Seize opportunities that challenge your assumptions



Will Chaney
Opinions Editor

Even before my first semester began at Truman State University, I was warned about Kirksville's lack of things to do — a view many students have during their entire stay here. Tour guides, counselors and professors often brush over this supposed reality with a joke about how students are forced to concentrate on academics or by reminding us that Columbia is a short drive away. However, after five semesters at Truman, I find this belief to be not only inaccurate, but it also becomes a self-defeating obstacle to a successful college experience. We are here to have “transformative experiences that foster critical thought, daring imagination and empathetic understanding of human experiences at home and around the world,” according to Truman’s Vision Statement. In 2017, this is more than just a sweet sounding, advertisement-friendly ideal — it is an obligation for every one of us who made it into a four-year university. In 2017, the world faces more challenges that are increasingly complex and will require creative solutions that previous humans were unable to figure out. For this reason — in addition to all the fun that comes with it — I encourage you to seek out opportunities on campus and around town that will challenge your existing assumptions about the world.

Of course, most learning in college comes in the form of structured, time-sensitive and prepared bundles of time called class, usually led by a real adult and organized according to a very large book. Many of these classes offer the opportunity to challenge our existing outlooks — one such class I had the pleasure of taking was philosophy professor Lloyd Pflueger’s “The Buddhist Tradition,” which I signed up for on a whim with a couple friends. This course taught me much more than just the history and principles of Buddhism — it made me confront questions that challenged my assumptions about reality, which were based on a Western Abrahamic culture. I was raised to believe everyone has one life and that there might or might not be an afterlife. This is very different from the Buddhist tradition, many sects of which believe everyone experiences multiple lives on Earth and are reincarnated after death. I had to confront the fact that I believed everyone has one life for the arbitrary reason that I was born in Missouri instead of Nepal or India. The material raised an even deeper issue — does the answer to that question even matter? When asked about the afterlife, Buddha responded with silence. Buddhism teaches that becoming too focused on questions that cannot be properly answered might cause more suffering than they are worth, but my Western-trained subconscious resisted asking such a question. I gained a new appreciation, respect and understanding of billions of people’s base assumptions about reality by stepping outside my bubble.

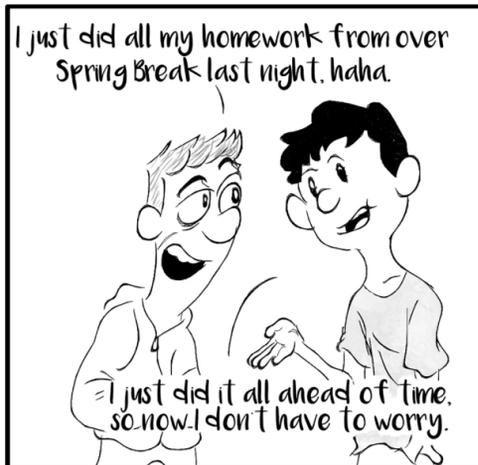
While this course and many like it have the ability to transform its participants’ outlooks, classes are often limited to repeating normalized information and methodology without challenging their foundations. Universities in capitalist societies serve a purpose beyond what they publicly endorse as virtues of education — they must prepare individuals to work for existing employers, which too frequently do not prioritize discovering new ways of thinking about society. How can we stop climate change, end racism or decrease poverty if we are using the tenth edition of the same textbooks that informed previous generations? Despite the efforts of the Liberal Studies Program, most fields of study develop within their own bubbles, carrying their own assumptions, without examining the contributions of other fields. The field of economics typically assumes human beings make decisions that maximize their quality of life, while the field of psychology contests this claim, yet there is no clear resolution in the curriculum. Many of the problems our society faces require new and creative solutions not discussed in coursework, but which can be found in other places within academia and society.

We can also become trapped within cultural bubbles — listen to the same type of music, participate in the same holidays and read the same types of books. We cannot hope to have an appreciation or respect for others’ cultures without a base knowledge of their practices. This ignorance becomes dangerous when society’s major leaders — Republican, Democrat and those who pull their strings — form their policies around the exclusion of groups of people from less dominant cultures. If we are unaware of the conditions people face before they decide to migrate to the United States, we might support overly harsh immigration restrictions. We might even — consciously or unconsciously — give lower priority to problems the others experience once they move to a country with a completely new and different culture. Many Truman students, myself included, are guilty of poking fun at “townies” — a derogatory term for Kirksville residents — without attempting to understand why they do the things we mock. Fostering ignorance about others creates divisions that are unavoidable and harm our social interactions.

Fortunately, Truman and Kirksville offer a plethora of opportunities to find new perspectives that might

Planning

by August Davis



Letter TO THE Editor

Contrary to what a February 23rd Letter to the Editor would have you believe, the Northeast Missouri Region is awash in electric power. According to a member of the Board of Directors of Associated Electric, Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative has exceeded their goals for the requisite amount of electricity to power the region. Just last month, the other electric giant in the area, Ameren, sent out a rate increase notice that touted decreased demand among their reasons for requiring higher compensation from their ratepayers. The fact is that absolutely none of this adds up to our friends and neighbors painstakingly lighting candles to make it through their evenings or shivering through winter without the lights on. Were that the case, the entire community would be fighting tooth and nail for more electric infrastructure and not just paid employees, a very few people looking to make a quick buck off an easement and people who completely misunderstand the issue.

This next brings me to the definition of the word, “many” which Merriam Webster considers to be: “consisting of or amounting to a large but indefinite number.” The number of people who have signed easements is quite definable and is somewhere in the neighborhood of 20. This is out of the approximately 400 signatures needed to complete the project. Doesn’t seem like too “many” to me.

Throughout the acquisition of the signatures they do have, scandals of fake substations listed in literature, misleading elderly landowners into thinking the project has been approved, and kicking local residents out of public open houses for asking too many questions lead me to wonder how many of these easements have been gained through deception. There is nothing altruistic or magnanimous about a giant corporation, who is already in the works to receive a \$92 million budget increase paid by members of our community, taking even more to provide very little power to a region that already has more than enough.

Sarah Van Hala

seem hidden but are easy to find. Many student organizations provide cultural events we might not be familiar with, such as the African Student Association’s “Sights and Sounds” acrobatics show several weeks ago. If you’re like me and are unfamiliar with opera, the music department is performing Hansel and Gretel tonight, March 23, through Sunday, March 26. Other organizations, like the Global Issues Colloquium — see the calendar on page 2 — and the Interfaith Center host presentations and forums for the purpose of exposing new points of view. If you want to learn more about the “townies” culture, you can attend a local auction, one of the many craft shows, the annual Round Barn Blues Festival or visit a local church. Direct cultural experiences humanize their participants

and produce a deeper understanding than we can obtain through books.

Even though it is a particularly diverse country, the United States is currently divided and becoming increasingly unstable. We must rid ourselves of ignorance about other people’s perspectives and see them as full and equal human beings by subjecting our own assumptions to relentless criticism. This is not a task society often compels us to do — it’s our responsibility to make it happen, and as college students in 2017 there is no better time than now.

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