OPINION

THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Alison Kepner
Editor in Chief

Megan Janke
Business Manager

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EDITORIAL

College 101

Seminars should mix basics, outlook

As undergraduate representatives and Penn State faculty prepare to evaluate the freshman seminar program, it's a good time for all students to think about what worked — or is working — and what hasn't, since this brand of classes expanded to become a requirement a few years ago.

What most people can agree on is that these small, discussion-focused classes for first-year students have been positive additions to the offerings at this large institution.

Close course contact with tenure-track faculty and well-respected instructors here lets students get to know top professors at an early stage in their college careers. The smaller enrollments involved — some classes have as few as nine people — can foster long-lasting friendships that start in the seminar room and go beyond.

The best seminars, we've found, have been those that introduce freshmen to the resources of the university, while focusing on interdisciplinary topics and giving them a hint of what they might expect to see in upper-level classes within their majors.

We have valued the variety of course topics offered, and don't think those choices should be watered down to over-standardize the program. Give freshmen the basics, but also give them specific content to help them decide if this is the college or major where they want to be.

Instructors should be flexible in designing their seminars. They should be open to engaging the ideas and concerns each student brings to the seminar table. And they should be sensitive to the fact that some among us adjust to college life more quickly than others.

Scheduling the bulk of freshman seminars in the fall semester would increase the effectiveness of activities designed to help students settle in — such as going to the library, visiting campus museums, learning about Penn State history or just having a fun forum to complain about dorm living. By the spring, many are past the basics and would find some of these aspects boring.

Also, keep seminars informal to make students feel more comfortable about opening up and talking about the questions they really have about attending university.

We understand that last-minute changes force some instructors to be thrown into leading these seminars, but most of the teachers for these class periods should really have a passion for making them varied and exciting.

We look forward to seeing how this good program gets even better.

Who we are

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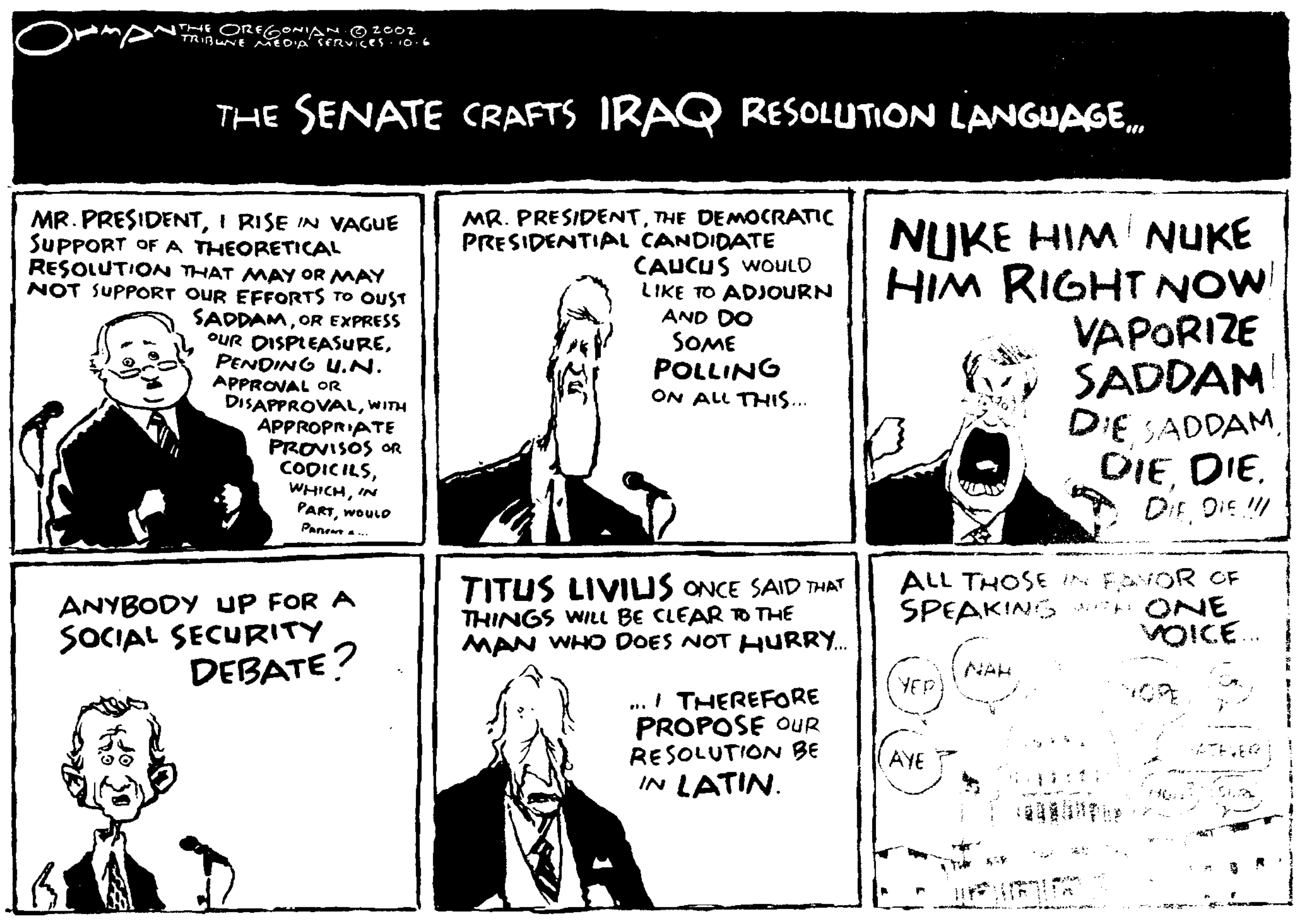

COLUMN

Seek a real challenge in studying abroad

By Daniel Moore

MY OPINION

In her latest column on Oct. 1, my fellow Collegian columnist Ellen Tappen relished her recent experience of living with an international student from "such a different culture" as her own. Ms. Tappen recounted several "deep debates" with her British roommate, Heather, including a clash over the appropriate colloquialism for a genre of music that stoops to include the likes of Britney Spears. Ms. Tappen favored the expression "pop," while Heather much preferred "cheese." (In my opinion, the most fitting expression is a synonym for "unadulterated excrement.")

Ms. Tappen then implied that in jousting against opinions that "completely contradict[ed]" her own, she was thankfully bucked off her horse named Ignorance. As the fairy tale goes, she miraculously matured to "become more open-minded and grow as an individual."

If Ms. Tappen's essay were a song, I would label it "cheese," but since it's not, let me say — what a bunch of baloney. But the bashing stops here.

Rather, I hope to salvage the golden idea she was espousing by plucking it from the wreckage of her delusional epiphany. Ms. Tappen seized upon a very timely issue; she was just lured off the track by the siren of college-entrance essay imperatives: Describe the most meaningful experience of your life. So, what is the treasure, glinting from the bottom of all this silt?

It's Ms. Tappen's encouragement of students to open up an international dialogue at home and abroad. I would like to amp up the volume on that rally cry, and run it through an equalizer. Because now is the time for us all to seek international dialogue, preferably before the word "war" finally cuts our tongues and the taste of iron whets our palate.

If you think diplomacy is not the work of students, think again. But don't worry, I'm not going to implore you to protest, begin a letter-writing campaign or intern in Washington, D.C.

All I'm asking is that you make better use of the resources for international cooperation already in place at this university.

The Office of International Programs (OIP) goes to great lengths to diversify this campus with foreign students and scholars. From 1991 to 2001, the number of international students at University Park nearly doubled. But that figure is effectively meaningless, because the last time I checked, minorities at this university (understandably) stick together like motor oil in milk. For every U.K. student who floats as freely as a talcum moth around campus, spreading her "radical" ideas and effecting a change for the better in people, there is a Pakistani student with equal, if not greater, potential to promote understanding but whose lips are sealed by the dark wax of segregation. And frankly, discussing current world affairs with a student from the U.K. is about as useful as conferring with a best friend; debating with the choir does not bring about international understanding.

The Office of International Programs also tries very hard to offer a diverse selection of study-abroad opportunities to as many students as possible. Consider, for example, that the number of Penn State students that [illegible]

[illegible]

So step [illegible] home [illegible] more [illegible] Begin by [illegible] the hospital[illegible] getting [illegible] to say and [illegible] them to [illegible]

Finally [illegible] ing a study [illegible] the metaphorical airmail envelope. Instead of dreaming about [illegible] Dublin [illegible] and [illegible] London [illegible] students [illegible]

[illegible] Egypt [illegible] studying [illegible]

[illegible]

Daniel Moore [illegible]

LETTERS

Stopping Saddam akin to destroying bin Laden

Going to war with Iraq is imminent and must be undertaken for the citizens of the United States to remain safe in an unstable world. Eliot Walker's Oct. 4 column and Andy McKinnon's Oct. 8 letter are extremely naive, and if their policy was to be undertaken, Americans would probably perish in subsequent attacks upon the United States.

I would like to remind these "blame America first" advocates that nearly 3,000 Americans died on Sept. 11. The president stated after the attacks that, "If you harbor a terrorist, you are a terrorist," the president told the American people that these nation states would be dealt with accordingly, if they continue their policy of harboring terrorists.

I would like McKinnon, Walker and any other pacifist to consider this scenario, and any reader to think about what these same people would be saying if the circumstance I'm about to present had actually played out.

It is July 11, 2001, and the president comes on television for an evening address to the nation from the Oval Office. He says that at this moment, the United States military has launched a pre-emptive strike in Afghanistan to capture Osama bin Laden and destroy al-Qaida.

The United States is going to remove the Taliban government, which is extremely oppressive to its citizenry, free enslaved women, and help bring democracy to the people of Afghanistan. The president says the threat posed to the nation is too great to ignore, and that pre-emptive action is necessary.

What would have these two gentlemen said in response to this policy if it were to have happened? I'm a betting man, and I'm willing to bet that they would be pushing the same "Can't we all get along" rhetoric that they are now.

Mathias R. Shaner
senior-history

Write a letter

We want to hear your comments on our coverage, our editorial decisions and the Penn State community in general.

■ **E-mail:** letters@psu.edu

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Science ideas change; evolution isn't doctrine

Shonna Days's recent column ("Faith, science may help to heal depression," Oct. 8) shows that she doesn't understand how science works. For scientists to advance their understanding, they must discard mysticism and replace it with skepticism. In other words, mysticism is the antithesis of science.

If we relied on religious dogma rather than healthy investigation of phenomena without preconceived notions, then we would still believe that we live in a Earth-centered solar system. Human society would be without modern medicine and the microelectronic devices that we use every day, because according to mystical dogma, all of these discoveries should have been impossible.

Ms. Days also attacks evolution as "doctrine," a common argument among creationists. Personal opinions about creationism aside, it's improper to characterize a scientific theory as doctrine. The theory of macroevolution is the best nonmystical explanation that currently exists to explain the evidence available.

If evidence emerges to disprove the theory, biologists will discard it and develop a new one that considers the new information available. There exists no devotion to evolution as a doctrine.

That's how we scientists work — we only accept propositions that are directly supported by evidence available for observation. Ms. Days, as a nonscientist, doesn't understand this and therefore is unable to comment intelligently about how science works.

Stephen Segal
vice president, Society of Physics Students

Religion doesn't negate evolution understanding

In response to Shonna Days' column: She states a conversation that took place between her and another student regarding faith and evolution. I was the student she was speaking with and I'm extremely offended by the way she portrayed my opinions. After two minutes with me, Ms. Days concluded that she knew enough about my thoughts on religion to categorize me as an atheist. I'm offended that she referred to my textbook as my "bible." That's certainly not accurate. Actually, I happen to believe very strongly in my religion.

I think Ms. Days is missing the point of biology and science. It's not saying there's no place for religion in a world where there is scientific evidence about human evolution. I may not believe that God created heaven and earth in seven days, but I pray and believe in religion as a valuable asset to everyday life. Maybe religion could have helped Timothy Kulp turn away from suicide, but how could knowledge about evolution have hurt him? I'm proud to say that I take religious and scientific classes at Penn State, and I can defend my opinions with solid facts and pride, if someone were to give me the chance.

Mallory Podolsky
freshman-division of undergraduate studies

Groups should think before using mascot

I recently saw that the National Coming Out Day (NCOD) participants were wearing T-shirts depicting the Nittany Lion coming out of the closet. I abhor the use of our mascot in this way.

When someone uses the Nittany Lion, he or she implies that they speak for the entire university. I have no argument with NCOD; in fact, I believe it is beneficial to many people. But they have no right to speak for Penn State and no right to use our mascot.

I recently was discussing making a T-shirt with some of my friends, with whom I play in a Christian band. They wanted to make a T-shirt with the Nittany Lion praying at the foot of the cross, but I objected to this because I understand that we as a Christian community cannot misappropriate symbols like the Nittany Lion for our own use. I have the respect for my fellow students not to misuse the reputation of our school, and I'm both disappointed and angry that other groups on campus don't have the same respect.

I have a great deal of respect for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community and its allies (LGBTA), and I wish only to object to their speaking for Penn State as a whole. I expect that all groups, including the [illegible] the [illegible] they don't [illegible]

[illegible] Montagne

Rallies aim to educate, combat discrimination

[illegible] in the [illegible] McNeill Smith [illegible] resistance to [illegible] Coming Out Day [illegible] a day for everyone [illegible] diversity and common [illegible] The so-called [illegible] someone to [illegible] a joke at all. [illegible] someone would call [illegible] the point that [illegible] LGBTA community are [illegible] against and are not [illegible] State community.

These [illegible] education, by putting [illegible] symbol, to the [illegible] *Will & Grace*. I [illegible] isn't believe [illegible] rainbow [illegible] hold hands with [illegible] same sex and walk [illegible] Then see firsthand [illegible] and derogatory [illegible] members of the [illegible] face everyday [illegible] campus.

The LGBTA [illegible] rallies don't [illegible] impressionable [illegible] educate students [illegible] as adults. Should [illegible] wait to educate middle [illegible] when it's too late? [illegible] rather than [illegible] students of [illegible] the efforts of the LGBTA [illegible] are legitimate and not [illegible] joke scribbled on a bathroom stall.

Andy Shingle