

Editorial

Institute presents opportunity

Yesterday, the Board of Regents approved a request to create the Harkin Institute of Public Policy at Iowa State, named after longtime Democratic Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin.

The vote was 6-2, with “no” votes coming from Regents Craig Lang and Greta Johnson. Regent Ruth Harkin, the senator’s wife, abstained.

While the most vocal opposition came from Republican politicians, the Regents vote did not fall along party lines. While Lang and Johnson are Republicans, Regents Robert Downer and Jack Evans, also Republicans, voted “yes.”

Despite continued assurance of academic integrity from ISU President Gregory Geoffroy, along with bipartisan Regents support, the project still faces opposition.

Regardless of politics, a public policy institute at Iowa State is an excellent opportunity. And, as Geoffroy mentioned in the meeting, this would be one of almost 100 institutes at Iowa State, several of which bear the names of notable people and alumni.

We understand the initial concerns associated with naming a university entity for a sitting senator. It’s been done before, with Sen. Strom Thurmond at South Carolina’s Clemson University; Sen. Hubert Humphrey at the University of Minnesota; and, most recently, Sen. Mitch McConnell at the University of Louisville — and we imagine each situation raised similar concerns.

However, in this case, those concerns have been assuaged.

At the meeting, Geoffroy discussed guidelines for the Harkin Institute. He assured the Regents that political figures would not serve on the institute’s board, to ensure that the institute operates independently of political affiliation or influence. In addition, the institute would receive no anonymous funding. It would likely focus on policy areas that have been of particular interest to Harkin, including agriculture, education and international affairs, according to the proposal. However, Geoffroy explained that Harkin will have “no input into the [institute’s] activities.”

“I think this center will significantly enhance the university’s profile in the public policy arena,” Geoffroy said at the meeting. “It will help us attract better faculty. It will help us attract better students.”

Iowa State is not currently a prestigious place to study public policy and, in a state that has a large effect on public policy, that’s a shame. Much like Sen. Charles Grassley, Sen. Harkin is respected in the field, regardless of political affiliation. A public policy institute with his name attached should have positive associations of an alumnus who carried the ISU name all the way to Washington.

Iowa State isn’t known for public policy now, but there’s no reason why it shouldn’t be. Why pass up an opportunity to make it so?

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The Daily encourages discussion but does not guarantee its publication. We reserve the right to edit or reject any letter or online feedback.

Send your letters to letters@iowastatedaily.com. Letters must include the name(s), phone number(s), majors and/or group affiliation(s) and year in school of the author(s). Phone numbers and addresses will not be published.

Online feedback may be used if first name and last name, major and year in school are included in the post. Feedback posted online is eligible for print in the Iowa State Daily.

Speech



By Claire.Vriezen@iowastatedaily.com

Respect does not grant a free pass to viewpoints that do not follow logic, common sense

It’s a common phrase: “It’s my opinion.” In general, when someone uses this as a reply in a conversation or argument, we give them a decent level of respect.

Yes, people have differing views from ours, and we must understand that they may see things differently.

But how far does this respect extend? Does someone’s claim of their opinion leave no room for argument? It entirely depends upon what they base their opinion.

Ideally, most, if not all, opinions should have their roots in logic or some sort of factual basis. Quite obviously, this lends more credibility to the opinion.

If we didn’t rely on a factual basis for opinions, anyone could claim any ridiculous thing, maintaining that it is their opinion and expect us to accept it. We cannot simply agree to a difference of opinion when one person states that the earth is flat and the other asserts that it is round.

Likewise, if an opinion does not follow general rules of logic and common sense, it is usually seen as an invalid opinion.

It is clear that there are unspoken guidelines as to the nature of opinions, and that there are limits to what we will accept as a merely

differing viewpoints.

As someone who loves to use citations and references to back up and explain my opinions, I get quite frustrated when I see people maintaining opinions without delving into their factual basis.

Then, when questioned as to the validity of their opinions, they retreat into the fallacious claim that their opinions can’t be criticized.

Not all opinions are created equal.

This is not to say that I expect all opinions to be held solely on facts. It is unavoidable that emotion or personal experience enters into opinions.

In cases of medical opinion, two doctors may look at the same information regarding a patient and come to different conclusions about the proper course of treatment. Two different people may look at the same information and come to separate conclusions about its meaning based on additional factors in their life.

As long as the emotional reasoning of opinion doesn’t cloud the required logical parameters, there is nothing inherently wrong with this.

It is when emotion overtakes common sense that one is able to say your opinion is

invalid, or at the very least, questionable.

While we all have a variety of opinions on every issue and topic imaginable, some of these ideas fail to be factually accurate at their core or may not be logical conclusions. But it is unfair to assume that people having these opinions are ignoring facts or logic.

It seems, too frequently, that people will listen to talk shows, popular media, peers or family members and take their information from these sources, some of which may be biased or fallible.

I know I have been guilty of this, as I’m sure most have.

But I find that if I do a bit of research on some of my opinions, I discover they may be wrong. Perhaps I only focused on one side of an issue or was utilizing incorrect facts.

Once this is discovered, I then do the best I can to adjust my opinions to first be in line with the information presented and secondly with my own experience or emotions.

It is my hope people will pause a moment the next time they hear, “Well, it’s my opinion.” Opinions do not receive a free pass if they do not hold up to certain standards. They are vulnerable to critique, as is anything.

Granted, this is all just my opinion.

Finals

Dead Week is not a time to lounge

By Rick.Hanton@iowastatedaily.com

We’ve hit the end of the fateful prelude to finals: Dead Week. I’m sure some students are given only a few normal assignments to accomplish during Dead Week and are able to spend the majority of their time studying their notes and textbooks. If I just described your week, I envy you.

My schedule for Dead Week involves finishing one major class project, giving two presentations, completing one major homework assignment, a quiz, a paper and two multi-hour labs; and I only have a light load of four classes. That’s not to mention keeping up with the nonprofit group I help run and helping an engineering team preparing a robot for a competition in a month. If this sounds more like your week, I feel your pain.

Dead Week is definitely not a time of rest and study for me and it has seldom been so during my five years at Iowa State.

Instead, it tends to be the week when most professors realize the semester is ending and they need to cram in the rest of the information and activities they haven’t yet covered during the semester. In some respects I even feel lucky this semester, because I don’t have any tests during Dead Week; I’ve

talked to friends with more than one test in a single day.

Will Dead Week ever give us a break before finals?

Notably, all my professors are completely in compliance with the university’s Dead Week policy. None of them are giving me a final examination, I haven’t been assigned any major course assignments during Dead Week, and the few projects I am finishing were supposed to be finished last week but were pushed back by student request. Still, I feel like I need a detailed schedule to get everything done, allocating every hour and minute of this week’s five 18-hour-plus days.

The gurus at Wikipedia warn us that Dead Week tends to bring sleep deprivation, irritability and stress. So maybe it is simply the stress of the week pushing me to write this column, but perhaps a professor or two will read the Daily and remember to keep students in mind as they plan future Dead Weeks.

It was exciting to see that Wikipedia has an amazing run-down of Dead Week traditions at many American universities, with Iowa State proudly at the top of the list. Perhaps we could learn something from other schools and initiate a “primal scream” during

Rowdy Hour or mass streaking for stress-release one of these years.

I must commend the university administration and the Government of the Student Body for making Dead Week “official” over a number of years, but there seems to always be a few major violations or other ways professors can still inundate us with work.

To the professors out there, please keep doing your best to give your students a breather and, if you can, help us by reviewing your course prior to Dead Week to help those with time to study. Soon, soon, it

will all work out and we will reach summer.

Until then, I urge my fellow students to keep up the good fight and not be held back by the craziness of Dead Week.

Study hard, and good luck on finals.



Graphic: Rebekka Brown/Iowa State Daily

Comments of the Day

The following comment was left in response to Ahna Kruzic’s column, “Victoria’s Secret should take advantage of the opportunity to empower women”:

“Ahna Kruzic, If you want a women’s wear store like the one you described, why don’t you open one and call it

Ahna’s Lingerie instead of whining how the world doesn’t conform to your beliefs and badgering them to do so? Put your money where your mouth is.

The reason why Victoria’s Secret is so popular is that customers buy what they sell. The market is voting for Victoria’s Secret brand and everything it represents.

The annoying thing about liberals is their control freak nature. They’re always demanding

somebody else conform to their view. They always want to place the burden on somebody else, not themselves. Take the burden upon yourself, Ahna. You’ve got a university full of young women to test your marketing concept. If you can’t sell it to them, the general market won’t buy it either. If you want to change the world, start with the girl in the mirror.”

The following comment was left in response to the letter, “Make informed decisions”:

“The hangover from drinking Obama’s Kool Aid is quite a kick in the head come interview time, eh?”

— Steve Gregg

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