

Editorial

## Black Friday should be least of our worries

Black Friday is an annual part of post-Thanksgiving observances and Christmas season kickoff. In all likelihood, you participated in it to at least some degree. That participation may have consisted of anything from lining up after sleeping off Thursday's dinner and clamoring for the deals you wanted to take advantage of to going out Friday night to survey the damage and see whether the chaos remained.

We are in the middle of a cycle of economic recession and recovery, consumer confidence is low and unemployment is high. Yet we insist, just like we have for years, on going out and spending all kinds of money on all kinds of gadgets, clothes, toys and jewelry. Sales this year were up 6.6 percent from last year, at \$11.4 billion.

Maybe it's just a matter of who is spending money on credit to stimulate the economy. For whatever reason, it is acceptable and encouraged for individuals to go out, spend money and create demand for cheap imports, but when the government tries to stimulate the economy by putting people in the United States to work providing services, we're on the high road to socialism and betray the War for Independence.

That verdict comes even as Black Friday shoppers mar their fellow customers with pepper spray, robberies and shootings above and beyond the ordinary (and it may be a strong indicator of our social health that "ordinary" is an appropriate word here) pushing, shoving and swearing at shoppers who get in the way of greed. This is at a time when we all preach a spirit of giving, charity and kindness.

And then there's today, Cyber Monday, when even more deals appear that shoppers can take advantage of online. And with spending projected to be at \$1.2 billion this year, maybe it's for the best that so many of us, having lost the social skills that serve as a foundation to go out in public and interact with others, confine ourselves at home and shop online.

Shopping has become a way of life as we apparently discard fiscal temperance for self-gratification. Many news outlets offered tips for surviving Black Friday excursions and making a successful shopping experience. Families make their shopping plans while preparing Thanksgiving dinner or in its aftermath, and some of the legendary stories we tell this week will inevitably revolve around the weekend's shopping.

We should wake up. Until we snap out of our self-absorbed quest for material satisfaction, we won't solve any of the problems confronting us, from unemployment and banking to pollution, national security and looser morals.

**Editorial Board**

**Jake Lovett**, editor in chief  
**Michael Belding**, opinion editor  
**Rick Hanton**, assistant opinion editor  
**Jacob Witte**, daily columnist  
**Jessica Opoien**, daily staff writer  
**Ryan Peterson**, daily columnist  
**Claire Vriezen**, daily columnist

**Feedback policy:**

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.

Humanities

## Defining a subject's value

Vanity, arrogance, presumption and conceit are the marks of any scientist who assumes that his discipline provides more of the answers to human existence than the arts and humanities or social sciences. Disciplines that may not be of profitable use are the ones that validate our existence as humans.

Facts are very nice, and so is rational thinking. Science has undeniably given us important conveniences that free our time and improve our standard of living, but valuing science at art's expense makes men into machines who are unable to appreciate grace, elegance and beauty.

It is not through science that we suck the marrow out of life and let it drip from our tongues like honey. Science does not allow you to live deliberately. It makes decisions for you. Settled facts leave no room for debate or dissent or individual interpretation.

It is through poetry, art and human interaction that our lives are validated. Civil society exists because somewhere, once upon a time, some group of people decided that looking after people's safety and rights is important.

Despite the fact that, as a land-grant institution, Iowa State is charged, "without excluding other scientific or classical studies," the teaching of "such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts," there is a discrepancy between funding for and enrollment in hard and soft sciences.

In 2006, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences sent 40 percent of its budget to departments grouped as science and mathematics, which teaches 43 percent of student credit hours, employs 47.7 percent of faculty and has 22.5 percent of majors in the college.

The humanities and social sciences, meanwhile, receive 38.8 percent of the budget to teach 55.75 percent of student credit hours, employ 51.5 percent of faculty and teach 48 percent of the college's majors.

People lived full experiences before science came along and provided us with modern conveniences. We are food for worms, and someday we will all fertilize daffodils. Technological and scientific progress will not save us from ourselves or from that fate. All too often, rationalism and science have provided the means to terrible ends.

The first world war was a boon to science. Using barbed wire, machine guns, flamethrowers, poison gas, airplanes, tanks, submarines and mines, vast



Photo courtesy of Thinkstock

While sciences are necessary for technological advancement, arts and humanities are essential disciplines to the human experience.



By Michael Belding  
 @iowastatedaily.com

armies entrenched themselves across northern France from Switzerland to the English Channel and wasted themselves on each other in four years of stalemated war.

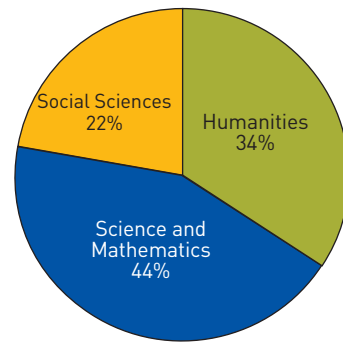
Technology also served the second world war. The Holocaust brought 11 million people to their deaths through a progression of methods toward maximum efficiency. The Nazis improved their methods during a decade in power, moving from shooting people into mass graves to piping carbon monoxide exhaust into the back of sealed trucks before they reached their desired mechanism: the showerheads at Auschwitz.

The French Revolution's solution to a world in which only reason was kosher, where religion and emotion had to be checked at the door, was a bloodbath. The 19th century's reaction to a world in which science and its cold, hard, empirical facts would provide answers to everything was the medical phenomenon hysteria — the manifestation, especially in women, of real physical ailments with no apparent physical cause.

Finding a great key to everything in reason, even if it can be done, is impractical. The search drives men mad. Trying to reconcile problems using only reason also drives them mad.

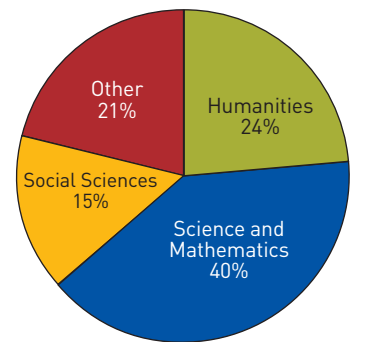
This problem does not belong

### LAS Credit Hours vs. Budget



Graphic: Kelsey Kremer/  
 Iowa State Daily

Share of student credit hours taught by the divisions of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.



Graphic: Kelsey Kremer/  
 Iowa State Daily

Shares of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences budget given to the college's divisions.

only to the great mysteries of our time: Even chess players are afflicted with an obsession for finding the most perfect set of moves. Masters at the game, such as Paul Morphy, Aron Nimzowitsch and Bobby Fischer, exhibit patterns of descent into severe mental illnesses.

Experience formed by interaction with other humans is what makes life worth living. It is the soft sciences that give us civil society, morals and comfort in the face of injustice.

Biological existence and the human experience are not the same thing. God's only afterthought when he created the Garden of Eden was to create a second human, woman, because "for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him." The power to name each living creature was insufficient.

Life alone, even with complete

dominion over nature, is no life at all: God created woman out of one of Adam's ribs; by himself, he was incomplete.

Consider Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's character Sherlock Holmes. Intellectually brilliant, able to make use of the best logic and forensic analysis, he was sometimes a cocaine addict, regularly played the violin at 3 a.m. and was without friends or lovers. He cherry-picked through knowledge, learning only what was useful to him.

No one discipline is more important than another. Each is valuable in its own right. Science does nothing to alleviate the natural condition of man as one in which life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

**Michael Belding** is a senior in history and political science from Story City, Iowa.

Beliefs

## Politicians cannot ignore science

The shopping holiday of the year, otherwise known as Black Friday, was not only an exciting time for shoppers this year, but for scientists as well.

On Black Friday, the Mars Science Laboratory blasted off for the red planet, which it will reach in September 2012. The one-ton Mini Cooper-sized rover will spend the next few years (at least) photographing and investigating Mars rocks, looking for signs of life.

This mission is what science and engineering is all about. Science is about finding precise answers to the multitude of unsolved problems in the universe and engineering is about building the tools that help get them to the answers. Why do we continue to search for questions and their answers?

Perhaps it is just an evolutionary impulse that has helped humanity develop as a species. But it is no question that the new scientific data we discover could be revolutionary and at the very least will add to the human pool of knowledge.

I spent some time during the first Sunday of break listening to one of the department chairpersons from the University of Minnesota talk about the long history of conflict between faith and science. What struck me most about the event at my church was one of the questions at the end of the lecture from the man behind me.

He pointed out that after watching a debate between two people recently where one argued that our planetary system is geocentric (Earth-centered) and the other supported the scientific heliocentric (sun-centered) view, he found it more compelling to believe the pre-Copernican (Earth-centered) viewpoint.

That was a bit stunning to me.

I couldn't believe there are still people who think the sun revolves around the Earth,



By Rick Hanton  
 @iowastatedaily.com

as impossible as that may be in a universe of Newtonian physics. They have consciously made the decision that the Bible holds more truth than the scientific process in this matter. To an engineering student like me, this is simply amazing.

While I don't want to go too far down the science-religion rabbit hole here, I agree with the professor that while many literal teachings of the Bible that may have been true to the knowledge of their day, but are now proved false are just that — teachings.

The central tenets of faith can't be explained away by science. You have to have faith that your god forgives you of sin and that you will have the chance to pass judgment and find life after death — science will likely never prove those beliefs to be true or false.

On the other hand, the belief that the man in my church held that we shouldn't believe science unless we can verify scientists' work with our own two eyes is ridiculous. If this were the case, it would be impossible, because not all of it have electron microscopes or space telescopes sitting in our basements.

If proof is what we seek, we need only look at the peer reviews in the science community and the work that is done to repeat experiments to prove a good hypothesis and build on prior work.

If I take my criticism of non-factual beliefs a few steps further, I also can apply it to the 2012 presidential race.

It worries me that a number of the Republican front-runners have made more statements that websites like PolitiFact.com have found to be blatantly false than statements found to be true. The worst offenders are Herman Cain, Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry.

However, I should add that many of the other candidates have very good records of truth-telling and many Democrats also have records that are littered with half-truths and nowhere near spotless.

But it isn't hard for anyone with a moderate understanding of logic to see that super-conservatives seem to live down a deep rabbit hole these days where the media is out to get them, science is not to be believed, compromise is seen as defeat and corporations are king. With so many of these far-right Republicans sitting in Congress, the voice of the mostly moderate group of Democrats is largely drowned out.

This is not how our Founding Fathers ever wanted the country to be run. Without the reasoned consideration of all opposing views and use of compromise to make law, we are little better than the monarchy that we fought for years to break free of.

So do us all a favor in 2012: Research all the candidates you can vote for, pick the very best person for each job (hopefully someone willing to believe science and use facts) and then go vote, either here in Ames or in your hometown. Scientists will continue to reach into the universe and into the atom to discover and explore, but it will mean little if our representatives never pay attention to what they find.

**Rick Hanton** is a senior in computer engineering from Arden Hills, Minn.

