

Other Viewpoints

State universities need to improve national rankings

A year ago, Gov. Mark Parkinson gave a bold speech in which he urged the Kansas Board of Regents to improve the state's higher education programs and national profiles over the next 10 years.

He set a dramatic goal that at least one state university should place in the top 50 in U.S. News and World Report's annual ranking.

Well, the latest college ranking is out, and the universities actually lost ground this past year. The University of Kansas, which has the state's highest ranking, dropped from 98th place last year to 104th.

The slip doesn't mean that the regents and the universities aren't working at improving quality and stature. Even before Parkinson's speech, the regents had begun developing a new strategic agenda for higher education, including state universities and technical and community colleges.

A draft of that plan will soon be presented to the regents. It contains six goals with measurable objectives, such as increasing retention and graduation rates by 10 percent by 2020.

Improving graduation rates is particularly important to improving the universities' rankings, as that's a key measurement used by U.S. News. And one way to improve graduation rates is to make sure incoming students are ready for the rigor of college life....

But the regents don't want to overreach in raising admission standards, said Chairman Gary Sherrer, because that could disenfranchise a lot of Kansas students.

"Accessibility is really a big issue to us," he said.

Sherrer is also wisely cautious about allowing one magazine's ranking system to set policies that may not be in the state's best interests. Still, he acknowledged that the national rankings matter, like it or not.

Improving the universities will be challenging, particularly when they have experienced double-digit cuts in state funding. But the success of our state depends upon it.

- The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 274-W, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org

web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansan.com

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Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkansan.com

NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor
kbottrell@nwkansan.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkansan.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansan.com

Vera Sloan and Rachel Bomba - Society Editors
colby.society@nwkansan.com

ADVERTISING

Heather Woofter - Advertising Representative
hwoofter@nwkansan.com

Andrea Bowers - Advertising Representative
abowers@nwkansan.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansan.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansan.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Robin Tubbs - Office Manager
rtubbs@nwkansan.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansan.com

NORWEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowker, Judy McKnight, Barbara Ornelas, Kris McCool

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We have a share in Somalia's struggles

When you think about Somalia, several words come to mind: Failed state. Anarchy. Famine. Civil war. Terrorism. Warlords. Blackhawk Down.

But Somalia's internal struggles shouldn't overshadow the destructive role other countries, including the United States, have played in this African country.

Most Americans' knowledge of Somalia hearkens back to our military action in the country in 1993. The failed intervention that started out as a well-meaning U.N.-sanctioned, U.S.-led relief effort to feed starving people in the poor, ungoverned country. It ended with 18 dead U.S. Army Rangers and thousands of dead Somalis.

The American-led expedition was a noble, altruistic effort, and my heart goes out to the families of the brave men who gave their lives. The principal agent responsible for this tragedy was Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid. His followers killed 25 Pakistani peacemakers, and this served as the match that ignited the conflict.

But American involvement in Somalia didn't begin in 1993. It actually started in the late 1970s when America started backing Somali dictator Siad Barre with millions of dollars for arms to counter the Soviet-backed Marxist dictatorship in Ethiopia and possibly in order to ensure U.S. use of military facilities originally built for the Soviet Union.

Stephen Zunes, Middle East analyst for the liberal think tank Foreign Policy in Focus, and associate professor in the department of politics at the University of San Francisco, claims the U.S. ignored warnings throughout the 1980s by African specialists, human rights organizations and humanitarian organizations



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

that continued American aid to the dictatorial government would plunge the country into chaos.

These warnings turned out to be true when Barre was overthrown in 1991, ending a dictatorship that killed thousands of civilians with weapons supplied by the Italian and American governments. Zunes wrote that the M16 rifles sent to Barre's regime courtesy of the American taxpayer eventually fell into the hands of rival militiamen, who used them to kill their own countrymen and also against American troops in 1993.

Somalia remained chaotic until Islamists emerged in the 1990s, trying to bring order to the country. According to the PBS show *NewsHour*, the Islamists could be brutal, at times using Sharia law to execute criminals and cutting off the limbs of thieves, but the Islamist gained the support of many people because of the stability they were able to bring. In 2000, these groups formed the Islamic Courts Union to consolidate power and to hand down decisions across clan lines. This group reportedly remained popular among the people for providing daily services for the country.

President George W. Bush's State Department was wary of the Union. It accused Shiekh Hassan Dahir Aweys and Adan Hashi Ayro, two militants associated with the courts,

of heading militias linked to al-Qaida and of killing Somali citizens and foreign nationals, including Kate Peyton, a British Broadcasting Corp. producer.

In order to counter the perceived threat of the Islamists, the Central Intelligence Agency began sending cash to anti-Islamist Somali warlords. Many critics felt the move stoked anti-U.S. sentiment in the country and made the courts even more popular.

After this strategy failed, the Ethiopian government invaded the country with U.S. backing in 2006. The pretext was a perceived threat to the sovereignty of Ethiopia by the Islamist government. After a two-year occupation and 16,000 civilian deaths, Ethiopia left the country after helping to install a transitional government ironically led by Sheik Sharif Ahmed, one of the leaders of Union.

The Ethiopian invasion plus the support for the warlords led to the rise of a terrorist group known as al-Shabaab, once merely a fringe movement in the Union. The group comprises religious extremists allied with al-Qaida. It has conducted terrorist operations in and outside Somalia, including twin bomb attacks in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, which killed 76 people. Uganda has become a target because it has peacekeeping troops in Somalia under the African Union.

It would be unfair to blame all of Somalia's troubles on American foreign policy, but the United States does bear some responsibility for the tragic history of this country.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

She thinks Labor Day may be misplaced

I am a person who likes to work in blocks of time (she says as her co-workers howl with laughter).

Really. It's not necessarily readily apparent if you watch me working at my computer, where I may have 15 documents and several Internet connections active at the same time. That's a whole different kind of multitasking.

Summer school always seemed easier, though, because concentrating on one or two classes full time for a few weeks was a lot less complicated than carrying five or more classes for a full semester.

So Labor Day seems not to come at quite the right time. It interrupts the flow of things.

Three weeks ago, we were sitting around bored - at least a little bit. Fair was over. The weather was hot. Lots of people seemed to be on vacation, and nothing much was going on in town. It was the doldrums of August, between fair time and school time.

(I hear that all of Europe goes on vacation simultaneously during August, but that can't be right. After all, who's going to cook for all



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

those vacationers, and clean their hotel rooms and do their laundry?)

Then the college started up again, with the rest of the schools following in short order. Colby is back in gear again, with a full complement of sports practices and concert schedules and projects swinging into action, affecting everyone from toddlers to senior citizens.

Just when I get out of that lazy August mood, just when I'm about ready to shift into second gear and head into fall....

Summer comes rolling back in with one more three-day weekend - one more barbecue/fishing trip/camp out/veg out.

Not that I mind taking time off, of course. The only problem is that it interrupts the mo-

mentum. That may not be a problem for some people, but I tend to be a slow starter. I have to get up extra early in order to be fully conscious by the time the work day starts. Even then, it takes half the morning to get me out of turtle gear.

On the other hand, once I get some momentum, I also have trouble stopping. In other words, I'm a living example of Newton's first law of motion: when in motion, I tend to keep going, and when at rest, I tend to keep resting.

So, Labor Day presents a problem. If I ignore it, I become a martyr to work. If I revel in it, I have to start all over again Tuesday morning getting the engine into first gear.

Oh, well, the Tuesday after Labor Day is usually a lost cause anyway.

Editor's Note: We have offered to let Marian come to work on Monday.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Write us

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

