

Modern science only complicates abortion debate

WITH ALL OF THE ADVANCES IN SCIENCE AND technology these days, anything is possible. We have vaccines for diseases, we have intricate machinery that can sustain human life, and we even have the benefit of foretelling what sorts of problems babies will have before they're even born.

A lot of complications in childbirth can be assessed ahead of time via genetics knowledge, or even by undergoing a simple ultrasound. The prenatal tests are done for a reason: to make the mother aware of the possible defects their children might face. And following from that, prenatal test results—should they come back bearing bad news—might ultimately call for an abortion.

Felicia Simms, a 21-year-old woman from Vernon, BC, recently gave birth to craniopagus twins—twins conjoined at the head, an occurrence that happens only once in every 200 000 births. Normally, twins are the result of an egg splitting in two, but if the division happens in the womb beyond the 12th day, the cells don't fully separate. This is what happened to the Simms' babies, Tatiana and Krista.

From the beginning, Ms Simms had a decision to make: she could continue carrying the twins, knowing the complications and risks that the girls would face at birth—especially since three quarters die within the first 24 hours—or she could have an abortion. Furthermore, being on government assistance and with two other children to care for already, she knew she would have to rely on Canada's health-care system to pay for an operation that may or may not work on little Tatiana and Krista.

Having the technology at hand to assess complications ahead of time has the potential to rehash the abortion debate, but it also sheds some light on situations like the one in which Simms was placed. The fact of the matter is that Simms was given a choice; she had the freedom to make the ethical and personal decision of whether to have an abortion—and in my opinion, she made the wrong one.

She was well aware that the lives of Tatiana and Krista might be at stake if she were to attempt to give birth, and that the well-being of her other children might be affected financially and emotionally.

Tatiana and Krista are currently undergoing tests that will determine whether or not they can be successfully separated, for the girls aren't only joined by the skull—they share similar brain tissue that controls speech and vision. The two were lucky to be born at all; whether they can live happy, fulfilling lives after being separated—or after not being separated—is definitely questionable and will, undoubtedly, be the cause of a lot of strife. It's true that having an abortion could've created a lot of ill-feelings and guilt on Simms' part as well, but chances are that the emotional effects of an abortion would—and will be—a lot less than what Simms and her children are going to go through.

When severe deformities such as craniopagus twins are the case, technology's ability to foretell complications should be put to use to reduce further difficulties along the road. Despite Simms' belief that she can care for Tatiana and Krista as though they're normal children, there will always be emotional, financial and health problems surrounding them. Of course, the line between deciding to abort and deciding to keep the babies in the name of their well-being is blurry, but when the future problems are as abundant as the ones faced by the girls, sometimes a rational decision based on their self-interest needs to be made.

AMANDA ASH
Arts & Entertainment Editor

Premature hibernation

Bears choke in the snow
Quarterbacks play really bad
Throwing many picks.

PAUL OWEN
Poet

LETTERS

There's more to WTF than meets the eye

We would like to provide some comments on the article in the 12 October *Gateway* (re: "University-level English doesn't make the grade") and to clarify a few points about writing at university that were not apparent in the article.

First, we would point out that Ingrid Johnston is a professor of English Education in the Faculty of Education (not in Faculty of Arts). She and Betsy Sargent, a professor in the department of English and Film Studies, have co-chaired the University Writing Task Force since its creation in September 2005. Seventeen other members serve on the Writing Task Force from across campus, including faculty, administration, sessional and student representatives. Our mandate is far beyond the focus on grammar and correctness that the article seemed to suggest. Task Force members are dedicated to considering a variety of possibilities for improving supports for writing at all levels at the U of A.

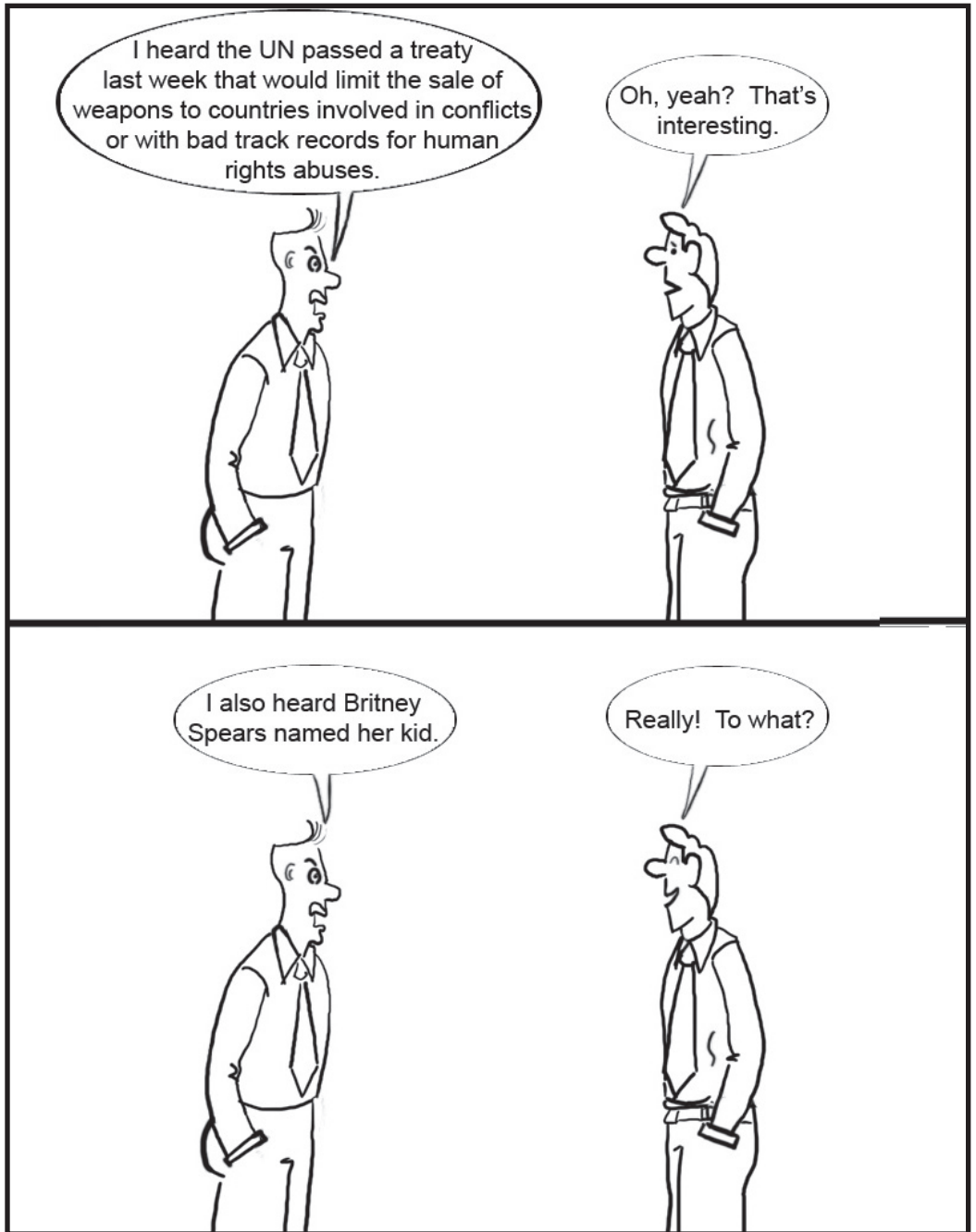
Over the past year, Task Force members have investigated writing initiatives and programs at other major universities in North America, have drawn upon current research in the teaching of writing, and have surveyed instructors' perceptions of undergraduate writing across campus here—all in order to develop recommendations for ways to improve writing and support for writing at the U of A. The Writing Task Force report (along with its extensive appendices and subcommittee research reports) can be accessed at <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/wtf>.

In their report, Writing Task Force members acknowledge that writing issues are complex and require multi-pronged approaches to address the needs of all students, including our international students and students for whom English is not a first language. They stress the importance and value of integrating writing-to-learn into a wide range of courses that students take at University (in all disciplines) and stress how this kind of writing has a different intent than writing for correctness, for evaluation, or for communicating something clearly to a public audience. The report recommends possibilities for Writing-across-the-Curriculum (WAC) at all levels and for Explicit Writing Instruction (EWI) in junior courses, emphasizing that all students should have frequent opportunities to practice their writing with the help of constructive feedback. We want readers of the *Gateway* to know that the Writing Task Force values all the different kinds of writing, from messy exploratory jottings or first drafts (written primarily for oneself, to get ideas down and to figure something out) to carefully edited final copy.

INGRID JOHNSTON
Professor of Secondary Education
BETSY SARGENT
Professor of English & Film Studies

U-Pass not so universal

Canadians often take pride in the importance we place upon protecting minorities from majority oppression. The Students' Union, however,



MATTHEW BARRETT

seems to have forgotten this principle in their push to bring the U-Pass to fruition. Indeed, the program would appear a major coup for those students who utilize public transit as their primary mode of transportation. These students would see their costs reduced significantly, and so it would seemingly be economically foolish for them not to support it.

But what about the forgotten minority? Yes, I speak of the thousands of students whose circumstances lead them to either walk or drive to campus each day. Such students will see their costs rise, as they are forced to use money which could otherwise be spent on books or food to purchase a mandatory transit pass they don't even need.

It has been said that the democratic system "can only exist until a majority of voters discover that they can vote themselves largess out of the public treasury." The U-Pass initiative appears to be an example of this concept in action. We are seemingly headed to a scenario where the majority of students (transit users) use the U-Pass referendum to transfer wealth to themselves ... straight from the pockets of the non-transit minority.

Don't our Students' Union representatives have an implicit duty to protect minority interests?

CHRIS YOUNG
Law I

Soccer Panda gets grievance off her chest

As a member of the Pandas Soccer team I do not appreciate being referred to as "breast-endowed"

(re: Thursday, 26 October). I find it disrespectful and immature. I agree with free speech, but seriously, we are in university. I would have thought the toilet jokes would have lost their appeal by now. As a journalist, I am sure you could come up with a more appropriate way to describe your clients. In the future, a more professional approach would be welcomed.

ASHLEIGH EVANIEW
Education IV

Heise has yet to see the (Blu) light

The writer is mistaken when he states "most studios have committed to supporting both except for Universal" (re: "HD DVD stung by the Blu-ray," 26 October). The truth, in fact, is that all studios are supporting blu-ray except for Universal. This includes Fox, Disney, Warner, Paramount, Sony and Lionsgate. HD only has support from Warner, Paramount and Universal. Therefore, the consumer proposition to go with Blu-ray becomes a much easier decision.

STEVEN FELDSTEIN
SVP, Corporate and Marketing
Twentieth Century Fox

University's vision blurred by lofty goals

I understand Ms Henry's concern as to the President's goal of vaulting the university into the world's top 20, given her role as SU VP is to protect the interests of undergraduates at the university (re: "U of A's 2020 vision," 26 October).

However, instead of focusing on the downsides of current university aspirations, she should join the President in lobbying the provincial government in order to enable the U of A to accomplish this feat. The university market is now global, evidenced by the recent plethora of world university rankings.

Talented individuals transcend national borders in order to study in the most favourable university environment. These individuals help transform and power the human capital input in achieving economic growth and innovation. Witness the drive of foreign students helping to power the technological hotbed of Northern California, home to two of the world's top 20 universities in Stanford and Berkeley (of note Berkeley is mainly publicly funded and therefore lacks the massive endowments found at comparable private universities).

Given that Alberta is currently in an enviable position as Canada's wealthiest province, it is not justifiable that the province's flagship university is not measuring up to Canada's three other large provinces' flagship universities—UBC, U of T, and McGill—which all consistently rank in the top 50 globally.

If Alberta is to wean itself off of a fossil-based economy and create a 21st-century high-tech economy, I'd recommend that Ms Henry join the President in advocating the provincial government to provide the resources so that the province's flagship university can compete to attract the world's brightest minds.

ROCKEY YOO
Via e-mail