

The Salem Leader
Educationally Speaking
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Was it something I said?

I've had a big week recently. IUPUI's spring semester has come to a close and I am officially 50% of the way to my degree. Also, in the same week Indiana's Chief Justice approved my hiring as a full-time employee of the Indiana Supreme Court. That's a big deal if you ask me – my first full time job with all the benefits and such. Plus, I finally get paid holidays!

Now that I'm settling back (only a little) for the summer, it's a good time to reflect on a few things that I've learned. The biggest challenge that I faced coming to IUPUI was that I had to learn how to learn. I believe that our public school system today teaches kids what to learn – not that they need or how to learn.

When I was in seventh grade something astonishing happened that I think is starting to change the way our children learn. Scott Vannoy, who for whatever reason I always called "Cheese" and who called me "Slice", brought this idea of "Socratic seminar" style learning to the classroom. The idea was simple: The teacher sits back and shuts up while the students tout off about a given topic. Many of us would call that debating. For once students were asked to speak our minds in a civilized manner. Most of us didn't know what was going on. I kept wondering when the guy was just going to give me a worksheet full of pointless questions to answer.

Then I came to IUPUI and one of the first classes I took was an introductory logic course. The class was like seventh grade all over again – a room of 20 people sat around debating and discussing important matters. We analyzed what makes a reasoned response, how to spot a red herring, slippery slopes and other ill-advised forms of logic. That class has had a profound impact on the way I look at things. I'll never forget when my Professor was introducing the class and she said, "I think about *real* logic every time George Bush opens his mouth."

Then, a few weeks ago I wrote a column challenging the existence of free will. The responses I received were numerous. Some thought I was a hero for quote "knocking people off their rockers" and others thought I was the devil in corduroy jeans. However, there was a consistent theme among people who wrote to me. They all formed their own thoughts about what I really thought like a hallucination. I'd like to take a moment to clarify my position on a few key items.

Foremost, my goal behind my free will column was to inspire debate – that is what I have learned learning is all about. Debate is how you learn. You discover a problem you may not have thought about and then you can listen to other people's opinions and solutions with the opportunity to form your own. For example, I recently invited a couple of

Mormon gentlemen into my home as they were going door-to-door speaking about their faith. They sat in my living room and we sipped lemonade. One of the gentlemen claimed that people of other faiths – specifically the Chinese – were going to Hell because they had not been educated properly. I asked, “Don’t you realize they feel the same way about us as Americans?” The other guy across the room had a puzzled look on his face and seemed stunned at this revelation. In the end, I actually had the two men tell me that I was right – that we should stop trying to recruit people to a faith like an army. I told them their reasoning was based on faith and faith alone. They agreed.

It’s this sort of debate that gets people to stop passively absorbing whatever guy around them is speaking the loudest. My intent is not to prove or disprove a god. I believe all the responses I received in regards to my column raise some good points; although, some used poor logic through ad hominem attacks or hasty generalizations. Regardless, my point is to inspire people to learn again and to stop being told what to believe. If no one is willing to talk about a controversial subject I sure will. So many people believe something as fact because their neighbor does too, whether it’s which sports team to support or faith to believe. That’s called bandwagon logic and it’s a poor way to form an opinion. Always seek your own opinion – one that makes you happy and fulfilled and know others may require something different.