OPINION

STAFF COLUMNIST

HUGH GRIGGS

We should phase out private schools

After the midterms, particularly with Democratic victories in state houses, public education reform is more within reach. The 2024 Democratic Party Platform says that students have a right to a quality education "regardless of zip code." Most states fund schools based on local property taxes — which perpetuates poverty and income inequality, since the least privileged students get the least support. Wealth inequality persists into the next generation, as children of the rich grow up with better opportunities. Equal public school funding, though, will not end education inequality. Many wealthy parents may move their children from their formerly overfunded public schools to private ones once elite communities stop funding their own schools. After public education reform, the Democrats should phase out private education as well.

In 2015, Kansas was four years into its "Kansas Experiment," where conservative Gov. Sam Brownback introduced sweeping tax cuts. The promised "shot of adrenaline" to the economy did not come; instead, the foster system collapsed, infrastructure maintenance ground to a halt and school funding dried up. Every so often, the Kansas Supreme Court declared schools constitutionally underfunded; the legislature ignored it, and conditions worsened. In 2013, some schools ended before the scheduled date in late May when they ran out of money. Unlike most students, I avoided this. My parents moved me from the public elementary school that my mom and great-uncle attended to a Montessori school. Kansas Republicans had had the same idea as my parents. The daughter of Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt was in the same Montessori school, a few grades above. While Schmidt defended the "Kansas Experiment" in court, he was careful to shield his daughters from its consequences.

Leaving my public school made me uneasy. I left my neighborhood's community for a privilege most in my town could not afford. I did not return to public school until my senior year of high school. I am grateful for my education. I had some excellent teachers in high school, and a college counselor with the time to focus on me. But the uneasiness I felt leaving public schools has evolved into something else entirely at Yale. Here, after witnessing the extent of private school privilege firsthand, I realize that private schools aren't just something to feel uneasy about; they should be phased out altogether.

Private schools privilege the wealthy. They let the rich live in a world separated from the drawbacks of an unequal country. In Kansas, they can reject disabled children if it is inconvenient for them. Derek Schmidt and many other wealthy supporters of the Kansas experiment did not have to live with the consequences of their actions on education. Kansas would be a better state if they did. The flaw with private schools is not just that they give the rich an unfair advantage; it is that they let the rich ignore society. Rich parents have more time to pressure school boards and administrators. If America forced the rich to opt in, it would not only level the playing field but also pressure public schools to improve. If the elites' children attended public school as well, they would think twice about a "Kansas Experiment" type of funding cut.

The gulf between public and private education in Kansas is less extreme than in states such as New Hampshire. Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, with a senior class of around 300, sends around 10 or more students per year to Yale, while Kansas, with a population of almost three million, usually sends five. Exeter is prohibitively expensive for everyone but the super rich, costing more than $60,000 per year. To be fair, Exeter has scholarships. They are need-blind, and around half of their student body is on financial aid. This does not change, though, Exeter's primary role as a school, which is to give rich kids an unfair advantage in the college admissions process. Letting in some poor kids does not make Exeter a force for justice; it just lets a few normal people into the next generation of elites.

America is unequal and lags behind its peers in education. Any serious solution to this should include phasing out private schools and elite public ones. There would certainly be a legal challenge to a private school ban. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down an Oregon private school ban 100 years ago in Pierce v. Society of Sisters, and a ban may need a constitutional amendment. At the very least, states should prohibit private schools from charging tuition and should fund themselves elsewhere. Finland banned schools from charging fees in the 1970s and has some of the highest-rated education in the world. I welcome perspectives from any and all readers.

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STAFF COLUMNISTS

ALISTAIR BROWNING AND GONI WONG

AI isn't slop, and that's the problem

Several of our professors have made similar remarks. "I can't see AI writing anything better than a C essay... and that would be a generous C." Comments to the tune of, "AI just isn't capable of this." Comments made, it seems, in an attempt to dissuade the use of AI on assignments. It's the right idea, and it's the wrong argument.

Let's be frank. AI use is rampant. Maybe you're fine with that, if you believe students are using it in a regulated, appropriate way. But if you're a hardliner — if you believe that the use of AI is corrosive, even when "only" used for researching, editing, or revising — then the number of totally pure, 100 percent human-made essays is probably a minority.

If the last five years of University policy has reflected a consistent push to limit the burdening effects of AI on the learning process, the developments with large language models within the exact same timeframe have told a completely different story.

We draw lines in the sand, proclaim certain things as human territory, only for the next model to wash those boundaries away. Photorealism was impossible, and then it wasn't; video generation was impossible, and now it isn't; engaging, thoughtful writing is impossible — for now. Maybe. It took the human brain millions of years to evolve, and AI takes six months to double its computing power. Who's gonna win that race?

It's understandable — a very human impulse, you might say — to plant our flag in the ground, and defend its borders against any skeptics; to believe that we possess irreplicable abilities. The alternative is humbling, and a little frightening. It's the knowledge that in ten years time, this article could be better made by a chatbot.

So we call it "slop." Yet a recent study at Cambridge University found that humans can't distinguish between human and AI-written text, and that when compared, they prefer the AI. This study even used a model of ChatGPT that's now three years out of date — in computing terms, a lifetime ago.

> RATHER, IF HUMAN WRITING REALLY IS WORTHWHILE, IT'S BECAUSE THERE'S SOMETHING INTRINSICALLY VALUABLE IN ITS CREATION.

So the argument against AI can't be that we're better than it. That argument has a halflife, and every passing day reveals a little more of its falsity. Rather, if human writing really is worthwhile, it's because there's something intrinsically valuable in its creation. Fortunately, there is.

AI may very well write novels that win the Booker prize, create original research worthy of a Nobel, compose sonatas that rival Mozart's best. But AI won't create the kind of work that's not slop nor anti-slop, neither inane garbage or robotic perfection: the kind of messy, emotive self-expression that captures our feelings, beliefs and values. Could AI have written the Bible, or the Federalist Papers? Could it write a love letter? It may soon write with better prose than us, more articulate language, perhaps even sharper ideas. But it won't be our ideas.

Maybe that distinction doesn't matter, and if it doesn't to you, it probably never will.

As an unintended consequence of preserving humanity's writing, there seems to be an urge to recreate our writing styles in opposition to the tendencies of AI "slop." Any use of an em dash, the rule of threes, or "not just x but y" elicits a pang of cringe on the side of the reader and fear of accusations of AI influence on the side of the writer. When we allow these anxieties to define our approach to writing — by being reactive rather than proactive — we redefine our writing as anti-AI rather than pro-human. Embracing human writing means accepting it on its own terms. It means giving yourself license to use an em dash here and there, and, most importantly, the freedom to define your own writing.

Finally, recognizing the revolutionary capacity of AI in the arts and sciences should not be seen as appeasing our AI overlords. As just one example, John Lewis Gaddis, one of Yale's most renowned historians, posits that the ability of LLMs to aggregate massive amounts of information may well revolutionize the field of history by identifying reliable patterns more akin to sciences like evolutionary biology than history.

It's understandable to find this all a little overwhelming. AI presents a novel and unnerving possibility: that we may no longer be the world's intellectual apex. Fear of that future is, in bittersweet fashion, the last refuge for our unique selves. If there's one thing you can write that AI never will, it's the acknowledgement of our fate and the simple declaration: I'm scared.

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STAFF COLUMNIST

IAN MCCORMICK

Faith and MAGA

The midterms are over, and it was a blue tsunami. Thank your chosen deity. And so began the predictable excuses. Laura Loomer implied that the Christian God was absent on election night, and that Allah and the ghost of Karl Marx had conspired to deny MAGA its due. A rationalist might question the plausibility of a communist jihadist.

Unsurprisingly, religion was a focal point this midterm cycle. Although Loomer and other acolytes love to spout the importance of Judeo-Christian values, their dedication to their faith goes no deeper than their words. Linking Donald Trump to Christian values tests the limits of irony. The name Trump appears more than 5,300 times in the Epstein files. Trump's "faith" would collapse under 30 pieces of silver.

Christianity is so deeply entrenched in the government that it is becoming difficult to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. Just last year the White House posted a mandate for "Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias." In his second inaugural address, Trump said that he "was saved by God to make America great again."

Church and state are not separate, but they never were. I'm not here to cite letters penned by Jefferson or protest against Christmas. The American government and Christianity always have and likely always will be intertwined, from the cradle to the grave. But it is important to clarify how faith should fit into our government.

What I take issue with is how we got here. How can these politicians latch on to Christianity and use it as a shield to deflect all accountability and justify such unrighteousness? Professions of faith often provide a person with an aura of virtue. This aura is never challenged. In the political sphere, a profession of faith is not an avenue to be explored; rather, it is a rhetorical dead end. And who are our modern-day apostles? When he wasn't quoting "Pulp Fiction," Pete Hegseth was the architect behind Operation Epic Fury and its lamentable consequences. JD Vance LAW '13 supported a despicable midterms advertisement about Ohio Democrat Amy Acton, claiming that it "calls it out like it is, and calls Amy Acton a liar." Donald Trump is clearly a sexual predator, amongst other transgressions.

The question of the hour must then be "what would Jesus really do?" Try to imagine Jesus of the New Testament wearing the red MAGA hat. He would be among the first to be deported. Many MAGA politicians claim to be informed by their faith in Jesus. Given the greed, hypocrisy and cruelty that informs MAGA, I can think of no greater insult to American Christianity. Still, it seems that over half the country could not escape the siren-like lure of bigotry two years ago. Today, they denigrate the cross with their complacency.

So why, then, do we not push back against these heretics? They mock our intelligence and experience, telling us black is white and circles are squares. They take what is ours and enrich themselves and then point and tell us to look over there at the next shiny distraction. They proclaim that we are us and that they are them, all under the guise of faith. They are careless people. We are the ones who clean up their debris.

While there have been some futile attempts at accountability, questioning a politician's faith is certainly not the mainstream narrative, unless you are Abdul El-Sayed or Vivek Ramaswamy, notably two non-Christians. To the young man at the Turning Point USA event who asked Ramaswamy, "How can you represent the constituents of Ohio who are 64 percent Christian if you are not a part of that faith?," I ask him how he can not direct the same concerns to the rest of MAGA. As the Bible puts it, "They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality." Read the word of God rather than corrupting His words and masquerading as His mouthpiece.

If one dares to step into the limelight and speak of Christian values, then they should be prepared to answer questions regarding their faith. Unfortunately, that is not the path America has chosen. Inquiry and culpability are seen as taboo when it comes to faith. Grifters have become monarchs. We allow our government to be run like a circus and feign surprise when the king rules in folly.

What better place to enact a cultural shift than the university? Be open to pushing back and being pushed back on. Freedom of religion and freedom of the press are conjoined for a reason. The biggest threat to our nation is not religion; it is those who abuse it. So don't be afraid to ask, "what would Jesus do?" And if the powerful and the rich try to tell you otherwise, remember who Jesus drove out of the temple.

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