Letter to the Editor:
Response to 'WBC Forum' article

To the Editors of Tech News:

We read with interest your article about the rumors concerning the Westboro Church (WBC) debate event [Editor's Note: Issue 2, published on September 10.] The article implies that faculty were silent while students debated the pros and cons of such an event.

This could not be further from the truth. Many faculty members voiced very strong objections to this event and were actively working to cancel it. These efforts may have seemed "silent" because we did so in faculty forums, not online student ones. As faculty members in the Humanities at IIT we see part of our mission as fostering a toler-

ant and inclusive environment and we stand behind those ideals—often at significant personal and professional expense. We did not initially speak to the press because our hope was to ensure IIT's name did not unnecessarily become tarnished by association with the WBC in press accounts or in online postings, which—as you know—tend to persist indefinitely.

We are writing to publicly affirm our strong support and sympathy for the many students on campus who have been affected by hate speech and intolerance. To those students we would like to say: We are glad you are here at IIT and we value and respect your contributions to

our shared community. We take a hard line against hate speech and its harmful effects on civil discourse and education. And, we have faith that IIT students and graduates will continue to play a role in shaping a more progressive society, based on the humanistic—as well as technical—training that they receive at our University.

Sincerely,
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Professor of History
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Marie Hicks
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Humanities Department offers numerous, diverse courses

Greg Pulliam
ASSOCIATE CHAIR, HUMANITIES DEPARTMENT

I was both unsurprised and surprised by the article in the September 24 edition of TechNews, by Austin Gonzalez and Kyle Stanevich. Headlined "Cross-enrollment at Shimer College proves pleasant experience," the article makes the case that Shimer College's humanities classes are a fun experience, that the faculty and staff at Shimer "make the atmosphere relaxed, yet professional," and "IIT has much to learn from the way Shimer handles its students."

I have no doubt that any of these claims are true. Shimer is an excellent school for students interested in an education in the classics. Their small enrollment (about 100 full-time students) and faculty and staff make personal relationships easier in a way that a larger institution like IIT does not—we really do have to work harder here to forge meaningful friendships among our students, faculty and staff.

I also have personally witnessed IIT faculty and staff being terse with students, as the writers documented in their article. Such behavior is unfortunate; it should not happen, but it does happen. It has even been directed toward me on occasion, and I found it off-putting, too. But I told myself, "They must be having a really bad day," treated them cordially, and found that I was treated much better by the same people the next time I had to interact

with them.

But for me, as associate chair of the Humanities department at IIT (and—full disclosure—the faculty advisor to TechNews), I was rather taken aback by Gonzalez and Stanevich's reference to "a whopping three [first -year] humanities [courses]," as if this were somehow out of the ordinary. While we actually have four such courses—HUM 102 Industrial Culture, HUM 104 Age of Darwin, HUM 106 Life Stories, and HUM 208 Digital Culture—many if not most universities require their first-year students to take a single course: English 101 Composition. No choices, and no ifs, ands or buts.

At IIT, we integrate our primary college-level composition instruction for most students into these four HUM courses, so that rather than taking a course whose subject matter is purely about how to write (talk about boring!), our courses are about actual topics, and students learn to write for college by reading, thinking, talking and writing about those topics.

The writers claim that they accept that a tech school's humanities offerings will be "scant," and point to Shimer's classes as "rang[ing] from Ethical studies to basic Latin. There is even a Kubrick film studies course!" I agree that Shimer presents interesting alternatives to IIT's humanities courses, but the courses the writers name are not the equivalent of HUM 102, 104, 106 or 208; they are more the equivalent of our upper-level humanities classes, which are actually much more numer-

ous and diverse than Gonzalez and Stanevich may realize, which is understandable, since they both seem to be first-semester freshmen.

This semester alone we have courses in Latin American Film, Ethnicity, Chicago History and Prohibition, The Holocaust, Disasters, American Music, Gender, World Religions, Islamic Thought, Spanish Language and Culture, Video Gaming History, Graphic Novels, Sherlock Holmes, Real Men in Fiction, Ancient Philosophy, Nietzsche, 19th Century American Art, Linguistics, Journalism and Bioethics—yes, we do ethics at IIT. That's not anywhere near being an exhaustive list.

In the Spring, we will offer upper-level courses on 13 topics that have never been offered before at IIT, including Language and Technology, Consumer Culture, Anglo-Saxon Britain, Game Design, African Literature, Scientists in Film, Suffragettes to Drag Kings, Race, Gender and Sexuality in Music, and others. Another two dozen or so regularly-offered courses will also be on the bill.

Having taken Shimer's versions of our lower-level humanities classes, the ones that count as equivalents to HUM 102, 104, 106 or 208, Gonzalez and Stanevich will be eligible to take any of this array of topics at IIT, or they can take more of Shimer's alternatives, or both. By the way, if you're wondering about those Shimer College courses that are equivalent to Industrial Culture, Age of Darwin, Life Stories and Digital Culture, it turns out that there are only two: Humanities 1, and Humanities 2. I like our options at least as much as theirs.

Bomb blasts target Christians in Pakistan

Shireen Gul
COPY EDITOR

Life is really unpredictable and at times it gets really harsh as well, especially when your loved ones are in a situation of life and death. You feel really guilty to be safe, and helpless because you really want to help them, but still you can't. My heart goes out for my country, as everyday my soil is being painted red with the blood of innocent people. All I could think of is "Pakistan ka matlab kya?" (What is the meaning of Pakistan?) Does it mean brutal killing of innocent people or genocide on minorities? Does it mean disaster after disaster or a long road of hopelessness? Because, as far as I remember, Pakistan was created to stop violence against it people and to end fear of being among the minors. But now the situation is worse than the situation that we had during War of Independence.

Two weeks back, there was a twin-suicide bombing outside a church in Peshawar in Pakistan that killed at least 80 people. This is one of the worst attacks on Christians in the country. I don't understand where the humanity has gone in my country. Before everyone was complaining that it's all because of President Asif Ali Zardari's government, but now I ask all those people who voted for the new government of Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif, where is the peace for which you voted? Where is the security that you were promised to give after your victory?

The relatives of the victims gathered at the scene to protest the government's failure to protect them. Protesters shouted abusive slogans against the cricketer turned politician, including chants of "Imran is a dog". This is exactly what they use to say for President Zaradari. I wonder who can actually make a better Pakistan, because anyone who is in power is acting the same. We lack good leaders like Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Martin Luther King who brought a difference for their people. They didn't fear anything in fact they had blind trust over their dream that's why they were able to make a difference.

Christians make up about four percent of Pakistan's population. They generally maintain a low profile, but are sometimes targeted by Islamist extremists who view them as heretics. In the Quran, Christians are often referred to as the "People of the Book," i.e. people who have received and believed in previous revelation from God's prophets. There are verses that highlight the commonalities between Christians and Muslims, so why are they seen as heretics by the extremists.
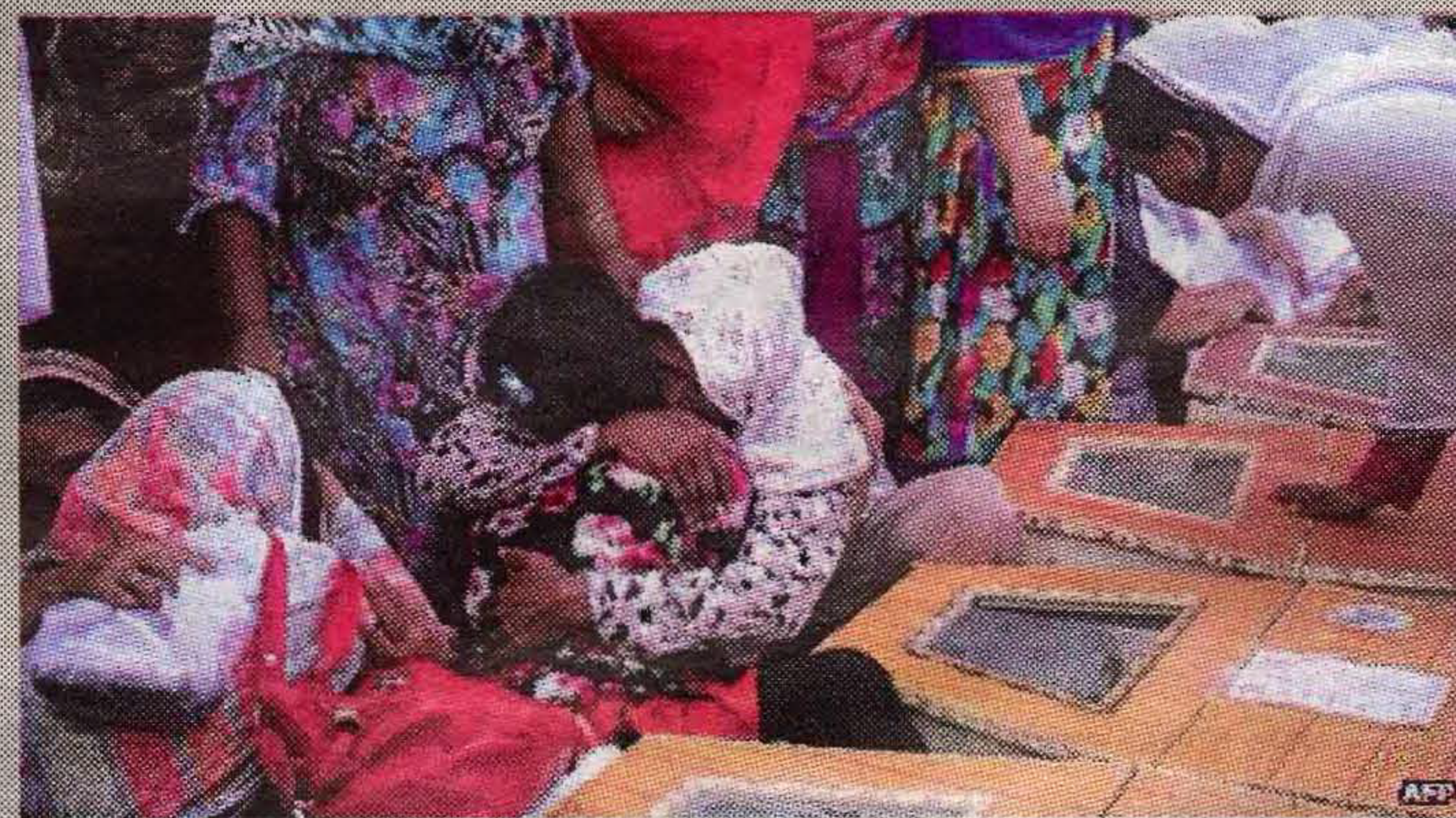

Photo courtesy of the Associated Press

"Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord. And there will be no fear for them, nor shall they grieve" (2:62, 5:69, and many other verses).

I pity the followers of Islam; just because of few fanatics, we all have to suffer, especially when you live outside Pakistan. People look at us as a sign of disgrace, which really hurts. My religion never taught me to kill anyone, for any reason. We were always taught to be equal, equal in every sense. We are not allowed to discriminate on any basis. But I don't know where the Islam of Muhammad (PBUH) and Ali (RA) went, where people were taught to live peacefully and treat everyone equally.