**Jake Schmidt**

*Every so often, we post a story about a public figure who's been described as a polymath. This month, we spotlight someone closer to home.*

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As a first-year Physics major and Polymathic Scholar with a strong interest in entrepreneurship, Jake Schmidt probably didn't see himself writing for the *Daily Texan,*much less winning a national writing award by the end of his second year in college. Despite that failure of imagination, this spring Schmidt was named the winner of the 2016 Jeff Zaslow College Columnist Award.

Sponsored by the National Society of Newspaper Columnists, the Zaslow Award recognizes an outstanding undergraduate columnist who writes for a college newspaper. Pulitzer Prize winner and syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts, Jr. judged this year's entries. Schmidt's columns, Pitts wrote, were "smart, lively, and inviting, with a welcome pinch of snark."

The award includes a $1,000 stipend and an expense-paid trip to the Society's annual conference this summer in Los Angeles.

Schmidt calls his columns on science, business and campus culture "informed opinion articles." He says that he began writing "to bring creative and persuasive communication into my daily life and my future career in science. The STEM fields in particular suffer from the use of inaccessible, technical language that hinders public engagement. I hope to change that."

Like Pitts, Suzanne Martinez Standring, a screening judge who helped reduce the entries to five finalists, emphasized the vitality and intelligence of Schmidt's columns. "Jake Schmidt had my attention, whether he was writing about [Modafinil](http://www.dailytexanonline.com/2015/10/06/modafinil-provides-safe-effective-cognitive-enhancement-for-users" \t "_blank), [situational awareness](http://www.dailytexanonline.com/2016/02/08/students-should-unplug-when-walking-to-class) or [carrying guns](http://www.dailytexanonline.com/2015/10/19/bathroom-carry-dont-forget-to-wash-your-hands-grab-your-guns). Always engaging, witty and fresh.”

Has the idea of writing professionally after UT crossed his mind?

"I don't think writing will ever become a full-time gig," he answers. "But the command of written language will be crucial to whatever gig does. So in a way, I will certainly be a professional writer — and maybe I'll publish a book, too."