

'Bankruptcy' could end failure

by Chris Harper

Michael closed the cover of the examination booklet. He had failed the final test. His failure was not caused by lack of intelligence, but because of family problems, he missed nearly four weeks of classes.

When he finished the exam Michael hadn't ended the year. That semester would continue to haunt him if he'd decide to attend graduate school or seek employment.

If a system called "academic bankruptcy" at the University of Indiana were adopted at UNL, it might help students such as Michael, according to two UNL administrators. Another administrator was not so optimistic.

Under Indiana's program a student can declare bankruptcy and throw out that period's poor work. The actual marks, however, are not expunged from the student's transcript.

Crumbling love affairs, pregnancy, family and psychiatric problems, and hitchhiking to California are some of the reasons why more than 100 students declared bankruptcy at Indiana after the program began in 1971.

"I think academic bankruptcy would be feasible at UNL," says Roy Arnold, acting director of residential instruction for the UNL college of agriculture.

"I don't think it's unreasonable to let people start over academically," Arnold said. "If you read the newspapers you'll find that we allow people to go financially bankrupt every day."

Arnold cited several instances where students might have been helped by academic bankruptcy.

"One student was disturbed over a friend's death in an auto accident and it ruined his whole semester," he said.

"Two students left UNL after a bad year and they went to a technical school," he added. "The opportunity to erase the semester would have been a great advantage to them."

Arnold said he believes that academic bankruptcy also would help the transient student.

"Academic bankruptcy is consistent with a trend that many educators call 'interrupted education,'" Arnold said. "Students don't go to school for four consecutive years. They interrupt their education because they need the money or to gain experience."s,

A bankrupt semester's inclusion on a student's transcript would not hurt the person, according to Arnold.

"It does not do great harm to have it on the transcript," he said. "An employer will see that a student has had difficulty and then overcame that difficulty which would be to the student's credit."

Mel George, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, said he favors the concept of academic bankruptcy, but said he views the proposal as an "addition rather than an alternative to the present system at UNL."

UNL's existing policy says that if a student scores less than a grade of 'C' in a course, he can replace the low mark by retaking the course. If the student scores a higher grade, then the subsequent grade will replace the former mark in the student's grade point average. The original and subsequent grades, however, both will appear on the student's transcript.

"UNL's system requires that a student declares bankruptcy by retaking the course," George said.

At times the courses are the reason for a student's poor performance, he added. Academic bankruptcy would aid these students, he said.

"The Indiana plan forces you to wipe out the whole semester," George said. "You may have an 'A' or 'B' and that also would be wiped out." The UNL program would be more flexible in this case, he added.

Both the Indiana and UNL system overlap in some areas but they both have some good options, George said.

Gerald Bowker, UNL Director of Academic Services, was a bit more skeptical.

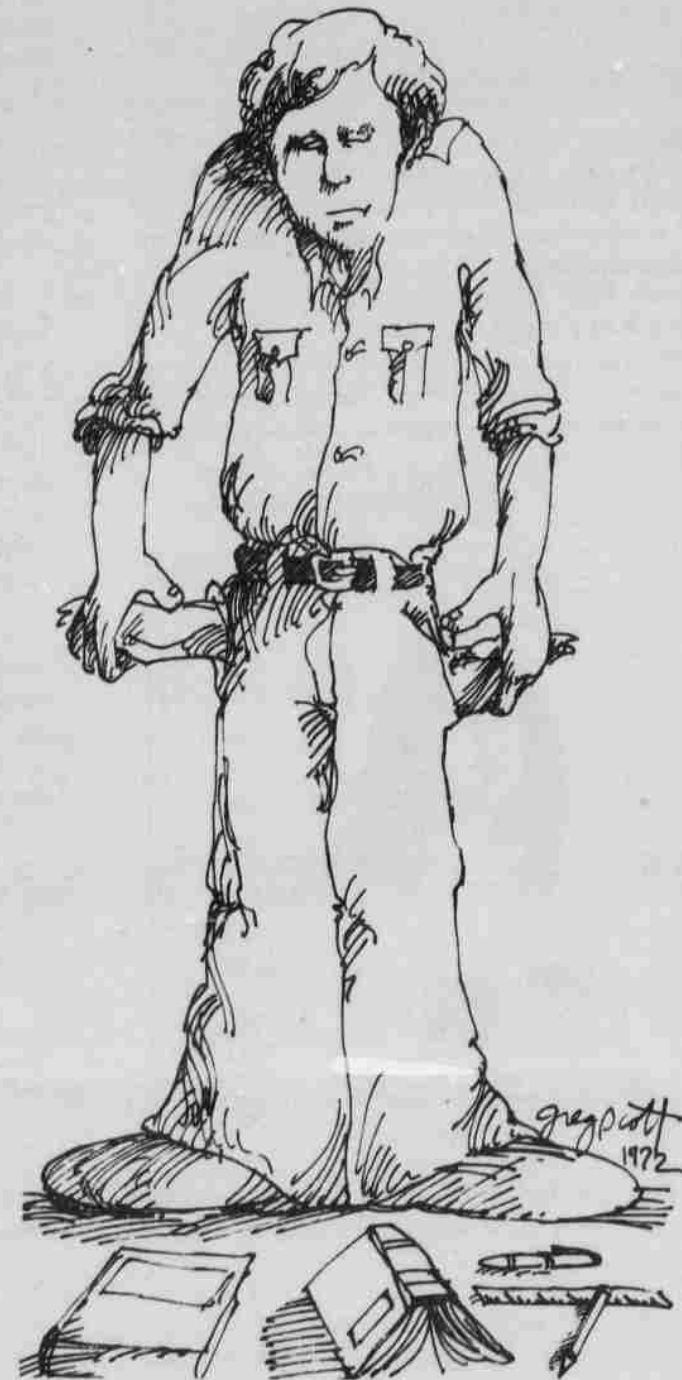
"This kind of program only benefits the student at that single institution," Bowker said. "If a student transfers to another school, that college computes their own grade point average. They may include the bankrupt semester in the GPA."

Graduate schools also compute their own grade point average, he added.

Bowker said he "needed more evidence concerning how the program helps the student." He noted that the adoption of the bankruptcy program only could be instituted by the UNL Faculty Senate.

Bowker lauded the UNL program: "Whereas our system is certainly not perfect, it gives a chance for a student to recover."

More than 1,000 students use the "retake" system



each semester, he said. The pass-fail option has helped lower the number of freshmen on academic probation by 10 per cent over the last five years, he added.

"It's apparent that the students feel good about the system at Indiana," Bowker said, "but the jury really isn't in yet. The thing that you have to watch is that what the student thinks may benefit him, indeed may not. Students are not always totally aware of the implications of these programs."

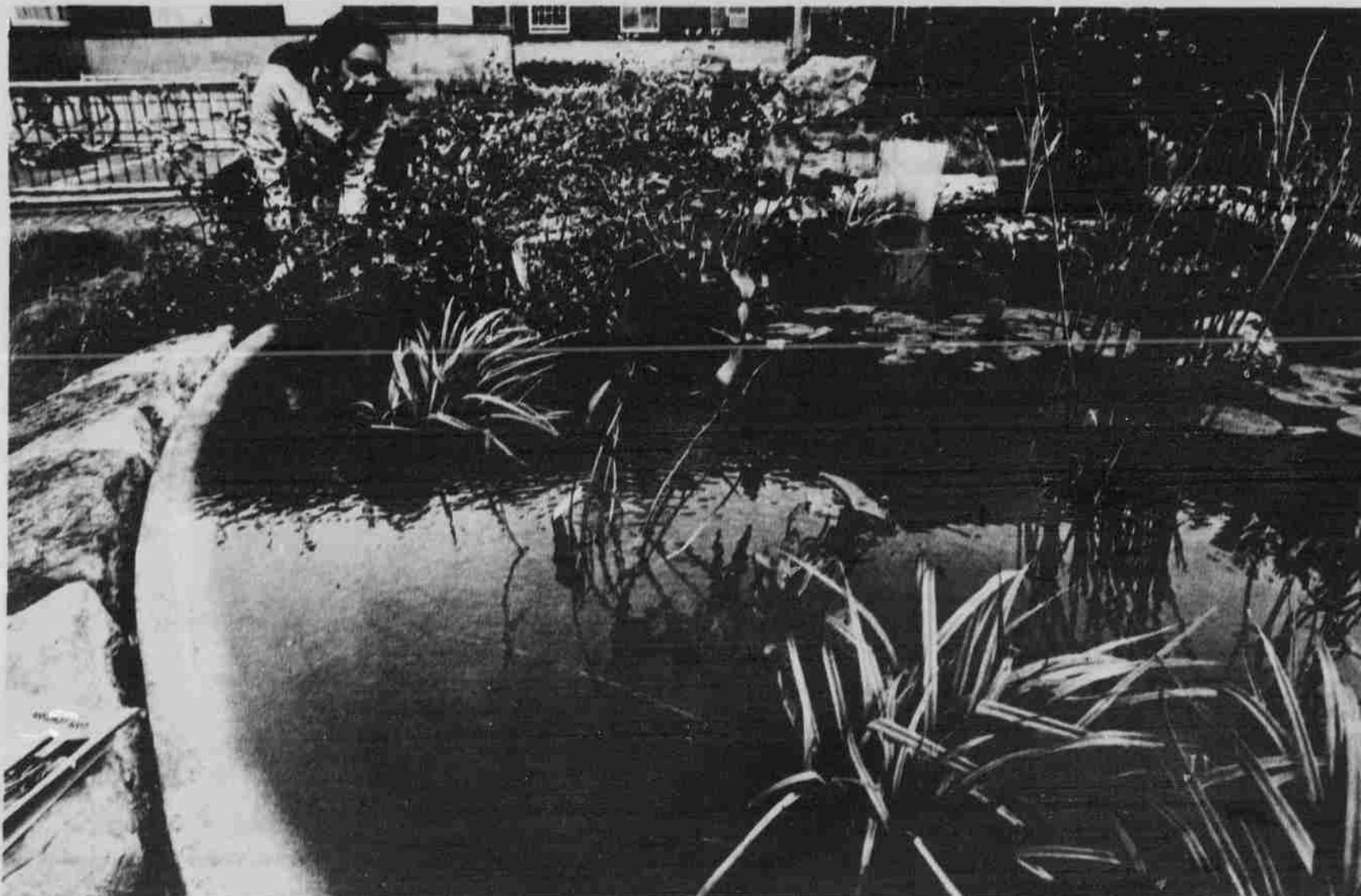


photo by Gail Folds

Garden will help native plant study

A native plant garden, located between Oldfather Hall and the botany greenhouse, has been completed over the summer. It is dedicated to Dr. Harry Lloyd Weaver.

Besides beautifying an area that once was an eyesore, the garden will be used for botany classes, greenhouse manager Glenn Drohman said.

All plants in the garden are native to Nebraska especially the Lincoln area, according to Drohman.

"A garden of this nature will always be changing," he said. Besides prairie-type plants, a small pond is located in the garden for aquatic plants.

Drohman noted the garden will make it easier for students to study Nebraska flora.

Weaver, for whom the garden was dedicated, was a UNL botany professor. He also was an associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.