

Guest Opinion

Libraries working toward better safety

Recently, the University of Nebraska libraries have come under some rather harsh criticisms by the media. The center of the problem stems from one major incident in October of 1982 (not March of 1983, as earlier articles indicate) in which a woman was disrobed and robbed in the basement of Love Library.

Since the incident, the libraries have greatly increased security measures; doors to non-public use areas have been keyed and are kept locked, the maintenance department has made certain to keep burned-out bulbs to a minimum and the libraries and campus police have improved and increased their communications. Campus police can be seen in the building more often during library hours, and library staff, at every level, have had numerous meetings and discussions on library safety — not only for sexual offenses but for other possible crimes.

Recent fliers put out by the Women's Resource Center ad hoc committee on violence against women were scattered throughout Love Library (without library authorization). Letters were put out warning that "men are attacking women in this facility." To stereotype all men in this respect is as absurd as saying "all women ask for what they get" or using the old line "she must have provoked him."

And why the libraries? While it is true sexual assaults have occurred on campus, the assaults have been relatively few in the libraries as compared to other campus locations. Recent installation of emergency telephones throughout the campus were not the result of an incident in Love Library, nor are there any of these emergency phones in the library — a possible solution? It might at least be a consideration for a proposal should the committee on violence against women decide to take a constructive approach to the problem.

In the April 14 Lincoln Journal, UNL psychology department assistant professor Natalie Porter is quoted as saying, "The

library staff even recommended that women do not enter or work in certain areas alone . . ." That is not totally true. Staff members, naturally after an act of violence, would become concerned. Because of the fear that some staff members had, the "buddy system" was approved. But it was approved for *all* staff members, women *and* men. Regardless, such a measure is hardly different than the measures one might take following a burglary in their neighborhood or the burglary of their own home. Safety measures, unfortunately, come after a major incident.

Porter also suggests that the problems of sexual exposure and harassment in bathrooms has become so common that the library staff fails to report the incidents. This is simply not true. The few incidents that occur are reported not only to the library administration but to the campus police as well. *None* of the incidents are taken lightly. Any act of violence is not regarded lightly — no matter where it occurs — or to whom it occurs.

While it is true a library guard recently died and the full-time position has not yet been filled, a student was hired as soon as possible to fill the vacancy until normal university procedures allowed for the hiring of another full-time guard. Also, it should be noted that Love Library did not stay open as late as usual on the day of the library guard's death because no other guard was available at the time.

Financial problems face the libraries as well as the entire university. Awareness of the security problems, concerns for the problems and action to correct and eliminate the problems are necessary. If a proposal were presented to the university, rather than attacks on the libraries being made, a solution may be nearer at hand. One alternative — though inconvenient to staff and students — would be closed stacks. The student would need to know *exactly* what he was looking for. Then a staff member would go and get

the materials. Again, even this solution would call for financial consideration.

Rather than attacking the university, or specifically the libraries, let's try to find answers within the scope of the resources available.

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