

Editorial

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Liberal arts Important to education

Last January UNL Chancellor Martin Massengale set up the Commission on General Liberal Education, leaving it with this question: "In the context of our distinctive role and mission, what do we consider to be the desirable qualities of an educated person?"

Not surprisingly, the commission concluded that an educated person should be schooled in the traditional areas of the liberal arts. Their report emphasized that this consists of thought processes and basic knowledge.

The commission concurred with the Chancellor's notion that "the success of a general education program depends not so much on the curricular structure but on the commitment and enthusiasm of the faculty." The commission emphasized "faculty involvement" and held that "faculty are at the center of renewal in education."

While the emphasis on teachers' roles is justified, the analysis is too simplistic. True education occurs through contact between faculty and students. While teacher enthusiasm certainly is necessary for a good learning environment, students are re-

sponsible to bring forth this commitment from teachers.

The report indicated that an educated person should be active, rather than passive, in the education process. But the report missed the central importance of positive student posture within the educational context.

Faculty and students equally must care about developing the thought processes and basic knowledge fund identified by the commission.

The next stage of the commission's report seeks answers from the university community:

1. What existing programs at UNL already meet the goals of liberal arts and general education outlined above and might be a basis for further development?

2. What part of the current curriculum could be modified to allow greater emphasis on general education?

3. What new approaches and programs would strengthen general liberal education?

The commission invites people to submit questions, comments and more formal responses to commission chairman Gerry Meisels, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, 1223 Oldfather Hall.

Traffic court

No-shows are unnecessary expense

Nearly 40,000 Nebraskans fail to appear in traffic court each year. It's a problem that costs taxpayers thousands of dollars in paperwork and personnel.

To control the problem, state Sen. Vard Johnson of Omaha introduced a bill this session to suspend the driver's licenses of people who miss court dates for traffic-related violations.

Although the bill is based heavily on assumption, it could be the right solution to a large problem.

LB153 would suspend, after a 20-day grace period, the driver's licenses of people who fail to appear in traffic court. Transgressors would have to pay a \$25 fee to reinstate their licenses.

The bill also would require \$130,000 needed to hire 10 additional employees to handle the extra work of reinstating licenses.

That figure appears to be large, but the return from such an investment could eventually benefit the state.

Currently, when someone misses a court date, court employees often have to issue a warrant for arrest. Law enforcement officials must serve those warrants. Court employees then must spend more time rescheduling a new court date.

Paulette Miller, deputy clerk of the Lancaster County Court, said her office spends a significant amount of time reissuing warrants because of no-shows. She said personnel in her office could be reduced if the problem

was reduced.

Johnson's bill has the capability to eliminate no-show problems and financial losses. The \$130,000 would be made up through the cost of reinstating licenses of people who fail to appear for their court date, said Gerry Pankonin, staff attorney for the state Department of Motor Vehicles.

Problems with LB153 lie in the assumptions of the bill. Proponents say it will decrease the number of Nebraskans who fail to appear in court. They assume revenue will replace the initial \$130,000 investment.

For these reasons, senators should shelve the suspension idea this year, and reconsider it again at next year's session. In that time, the idea should be tried in a county or municipality. Senators should monitor the pilot program carefully and then revise a bill for statewide use.

The entire problem however, could be easily reduced if people with traffic tickets would make more of an effort to show up for their respective court dates. Courts generally will revise a date to best accommodate the person. It's up to Nebraskans to plan a date that will be convenient for them. Through responsible, voluntary compliance on Nebraskans' part, Johnson's bill wouldn't even be needed.

Maybe then senators could spend their time discussing some of the more important problems of the state.



Defending Philosophy

Noblest of all studies lacks esteem in academic world

Aristotle fled Athens so that Athens might not "sin twice against philosophy." (Socrates was politely asked to kill himself.) Yet, some of my best teachers at UNL sin against philosophy regularly.



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For instance my favorite chemistry professor states that Democritus and his fellow pre-Socratic atomic theorists were engaged in "almost idle thinking." If the first theories of atoms were produced by idle thinking, then perhaps we should do more idle thinking in hopes that our thoughts may have equivalent usefulness in the year 4500.

My favorite resource economist once suggested that the scientific method, and therefore, any real science worth discussing, originated with Francis Bacon (1561-1626) or his contemporaries. Many scientists, however, speak less of a formal method, and more of habits of curiosity and investigation that have ancient roots in the Middle East, China and Mesoamerica.

My favorite math professor recently referred to Descartes, the father of

modern philosophy, as a "mathematician," period. Descartes enjoyed mathematics and was good at it. His famous appendix on "Cartesian" coordinate analytical geometry was meant as an example of the application of reason. But the idea was so powerful that we now live on a Cartesian plain in both senses.

These sins against philosophy are sins of omission. They arise from confusion of terms, the eternal struggle between curiosity and wisdom, and the tyranny of 50-minute classes.

Philosophy, as a teacher kindly pointed out to me in my last semester of formal philosophy, is not the love of knowledge, but rather the love of wisdom. Philo means love, and sophy is a form of sophia, which means skill or wisdom.

A doctorate means that its owner is skilled and/or wise in his/her field. Tenure is granted to professors in order to prevent sins against philosophy and philosophers and to provide for a free marketplace of ideas. A free market for ideas will, we hope, allow us to make wiser public decisions. When tenure is granted we should expect honest and learned opinions from its holder in return. Apparently this notion is an ideal. Milton Friedman has stated that only retired professors have the security to truly speak their minds. In fact, those with the courage of convictions

will speak their minds, and those of us with nothing to lose might as well.

Philosophy since Kant has earned a reputation for being technical to the point of narcissism. It is. But we all want to become skilled at something, and most of us will eventually become wise or die. The most profound statement on epistemology I ever heard was spoken by a key-punch operator who said, "... 'cause the computer, you know, doesn't have a mind." I think she was right, but I don't know why.

This prejudice against philosophy I have heard from a plethora of authorities, from Marshall McLuhan to instructors of Greek, who are unsurpassed even at dying. Therefore, the prayer of Socrates:

"Dear Pan and all ye other gods who dwell in this place, grant that I may become fair within, and that such outward stuff as I have may not war against the spirit within me.

May I count him rich who is wise, and as for gold, may I have so much of it as only a temperate man might bear and carry with him.

Is there anything else I can ask for? The prayer contents me.

Karstrom, a UNL civil engineering student, also has a B.A. in philosophy from the University of Colorado and a M.S. in agricultural economics from UNL.

Black value crisis now in open

The poster on the wall of the Urban League office in Detroit carries a direct message from one black generation to another: "Don't Make A Baby If You Can't Be A Father."

A black machinist interviewed by a Washington Post reporter says forthrightly and for publication: "We're not



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living up to our ideals." "We" are blacks.

A black community worker talks into the television camera and into millions of homes about the breakup of black families: "If the parent is 17 or 18, uneducated and unmotivated, fooling around, wanderin' around — what's the child going to learn? ... See, I'm not even talking about racism, maybe later on we'll get back to that. But I think we're destroying ourselves."

The old conspiracy of silence that kept blacks from criticizing their own in public has been broken. At first tentatively, and now openly, they have begun to air their troubles, especially family troubles. Even in front of white folk.

Two decades ago, an assistant secretary of labor named Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a report on the Negro family, warning that: "The evidence, not final, but powerfully persuasive, is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling." The report was attacked by civil-rights leaders who feared that such talk would allow whites to blame blacks for black problems. Even Martin Luther King Jr. said, "It wasn't the right time." The entire subject became taboo, and the family kept crumbling.

Today, the willingness of blacks to speak among themselves and with whites is both a measure of trust and despair, of much progress and of terrible slippage. There has been enough progress that blacks don't fear being lumped with the "underclass." There has been enough slippage to make the situation of the poorest one-third of American blacks desperate and threatening.

In 1965, when Moynihan wrote his first report, one-quarter of black births were out of wedlock. Now 58 percent are born to unmarried mothers. Nearly half of all black children under 18 live with one parent. When Moynihan, now a senator, returned to the same themes last spring, he said: "Social policy must flow from social values and not from

social science."

It is "values" that are being talked about by black leaders as well: The values lost to a subculture of 30-year-old grandmothers and young men who are disconnected "free-lancers." The values lost in a self-perpetuating and self-destructive life cycle of poverty.

First grass-roots blacks and then black clergy and academics broke the taboo. The leadership followed. In 1984, the National Urban League and the NAACP held the first "Black Family Summit Conference." Now this subject is a centerpiece for one study after another and for the mass media. A delicate centerpiece.

The troubles of the black "third world" of U.S. urban life are not exclusively those of values, or morals. There is a relationship between racism and the economy — the enemy without — and the erosion of self-esteem and family — the enemy within.

But it is a mark of security that blacks are willing to take a risk, to outline the hopelessness, violence and despair of the underclass, without retreating to defensive rhetoric. And it's also a measure of the catastrophe.

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Goodman is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for the Boston Globe.