

Tuition grant asked of Education Committee

By Jim Zalewski

College students in Nebraska may be eligible for grants up to \$1,000 for tuition and fees if a proposal submitted to the Legislature's Education Committee passes, said NU President D.B. Varner.

The proposal would establish a commission to determine qualifications for the grants, which would be based on need, Varner said. The commission, he said, would be independent from financial aid departments and would accept applications from students at both private and state schools.

Such a plan would particularly help private colleges in the state, some of which cannot offer adequate financial aid, he said.

The state funds for the program would come from the state general fund, which is composed of revenue

from sales and income taxes, he said.

Anne Campbell, commissioner of the state education commission, said the state would receive matching federal money.

The grants would have to comply with the federal rules and regulations, she said.

Varner said he recommended a first-year budget of \$250,000.

"I would like to see the budget kept at a reasonable level the first year in order to get the program established," he said.

Varner said the grants would be awarded to the students, not the schools.

"I want to emphasize that the money goes directly to the student to be used at the college of his or her choice in Nebraska," he said.

A similar measure introduced last year died in committee, possibly because it would have awarded the grants to the schools and not to the students, he said.

The Nebraska Supreme Court ruled that the use of public funds at private schools is unconstitutional, which led to the bill's defeat, Varner said.

"My understanding is that the direct grant to the student will be within the limits of the constitution," he said.

The grants would be available only to Nebraska residents.

The grants have been proposed by the Nebraska Postsecondary Education Council, Campbell said.

State Sen. Frank Lewis, chairman of the Education Committee, was unavailable for comment.

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Bill would change drunkenness from crime to treatable disease

Editor's note: This is the first of two stories examining LB237 which would establish detoxification centers for people arrested for public drunkenness. Today, the sponsors of the bill are interviewed. On Monday, the bill's opponents will be interviewed.

By Lynn Roberts

State senators soon will decide whether public drunkenness is a personal problem or crime—best treated by understanding rather than jail.

A bill introduced by Lincoln Sen. Wally Barnett would decriminalize public intoxication and treat alcoholism as a disease instead of a crime.

The bill covers public drunkenness and steers clear of the drunk driver, who, Barnett said, is a problem not only to himself, but to society as well.

Detoxification center

Under the bill, police officers still would pick up people for public drunkenness, but instead of taking them to jail, the officers would take them to a detoxification center.

There the person would be treated, fed and given a place to sleep. No one would be kept involuntarily for more than 72 hours.

After detoxification the person would be evaluated and provided with the opportunity to be placed in a more comprehensive program.

The centers would in no way be a place for an alcoholic to come for weekend food and lodging, Barnett said.

Comprehensive program

Repeaters would be placed in a comprehensive program if the courts determine it is necessary, he said.

The centers would be set up through the state's six mental health regions. The director of

the program would be the director of the division on alcoholism of the Department of Public Institutions.

The details of setting up the centers will be determined after the bill is passed, Barnett said.

"This is a small step—a first step," Barnett said. A more comprehensive bill was introduced in the last legislative session, but failed.

Barnett confident

Barnett said he is confident the new bill will fare better this session.

"I think we should try to help these alcohol-dependent people instead of throwing them in jail," he said.

Assistant Lincoln Police Chief Dale Adams said persons presently found drunk in public are taken to jail where they remain until they are sober or released to their attorney or on their own recognizance.

They must appear in court the day following their arrest. There is no type of rehabilitation at the jail but the court does offer alternatives to fines or jail sentences in some cases, Adams said.

First offenders fined

First offenders usually are given a small fine, but repeaters are often offered alternatives through a court approved program, said Walt Giles, alcohol program coordinator for the municipal court.

If the person chooses to participate in a court approved program, such as counseling or attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, sentencing will be delayed.

The person must then prove that he participated in the program and the case usually will be dismissed, Giles said.

Giles, who helped draft the Barnett bill, said it will provide a place to treat the alcoholics' problems medically, not criminally.



Milton Yuan of the Nebraska Dispatch testified Thursday night at the Lincoln City Council's well-attended public hearing on the Lincoln Police Department's activities in alcohol related offenses.

Alcohol hearing fills city council chambers

By Lori Demo

Lincoln citizens filled the City Council Chambers and outside lobby Thursday night for the public hearing on the Lincoln Police Department's (LPD) policies dealing with alcohol-related offenses.

Before the public testimony started, Chairwoman Helen Boosalis introduced Lincoln trial attorney M. James Bruckner who will lead the council's investigation into the matter.

Boosalis said the hearing would include police policies and procedures for:

- the arrest of persons for driving while intoxicated (DWI) and the state law which sets the legal limit for intoxication at .10 per cent blood alcohol content as shown through body tests.

- arresting and processing public intoxicants.
- patrolling taverns and other establishments holding liquor licenses for the purpose of enforcing liquor laws.

Bruckner said his investigation would be conducted like a trial and that his findings would be reported to the council by April 1. He said all testimony would be under oath, in a closed hearing before himself and a court reporter.

He said "people will be less inhibited and we'll get closer to the truth" in a closed hearing.

"The truth mellows when it's given under oath," he said. "The problem we anticipate is that reluctant people will feel that they will be hassled," he said. "Those who want to remain anonymous will. We want as many people as possible to participate."

He said anyone interested in testifying for the investigation can arrange for an appointment with him by calling 473-6269.

Bruckner said interviews probably will be scheduled at night so people can participate without having to miss work.

"These will continue through February and March until everyone interested has had a chance to testify," he said. "But we have to end them by mid-March to have time to get the report finished."

Bruckner said anyone who feels inhibited by testifying at the County-City Building can arrange to testify in his office.

He said the purpose of the investigation was "to get to the truth" of charges that LPD denies suspects of their constitutional rights, harasses people frequenting taverns and private parties, unnecessarily detains people in jail and denies suspects the right to make telephone calls.

The charges were made by Lincoln businessman Roger V. Dickeson who, during the last month, has sent letters to city, state and federal officials and to the news media.



Lincoln Sen. Wally Barnett introduced the bill (LB237) that would treat alcoholism as a disease instead of a crime.