

SUN could lose momentum

When you've got a good thing going, it makes sense to keep it that way. And the State University of Nebraska (SUN) program is a good thing.

Nebraska captured national attention last fall when SUN's first two courses, Accounting I and Introductory Psychology, made their debut not in classrooms but in the homes of the students. Here, from a state known more for its devotion to football than to education, was a unique program worth national consideration.

The SUN program is revolutionary. The "university without walls" offers courses to adults in their homes through a statewide program using television and newspapers as well as mail service. Where once an adult might bypass a college education because he couldn't afford to leave work for school, now he can learn and earn at the same time.

That SUN has been successful so far is hardly debatable. SUN officials expecting about 200 persons to enroll in each of the first two courses found themselves with 681 students, 408 in the accounting course and 273 in the psychology course.

According to NU President D.B. Varner, most of those in the first two SUN courses have indicated that they learned a great deal despite some criticism of the television lessons for the accounting course.

Two more courses, "The Consumer Experience" and "Making It Count" (a computer science course), will be offered beginning March

2. The first two courses will be repeated.

The success of SUN has, in a sense, worked against it. The University of Mid America (UMA), a four-state open education program developed along the lines of SUN, is an outgrowth of the SUN program. Along with SUN's ideas, UMA has taken a lot of the federal funding SUN had hoped to receive.

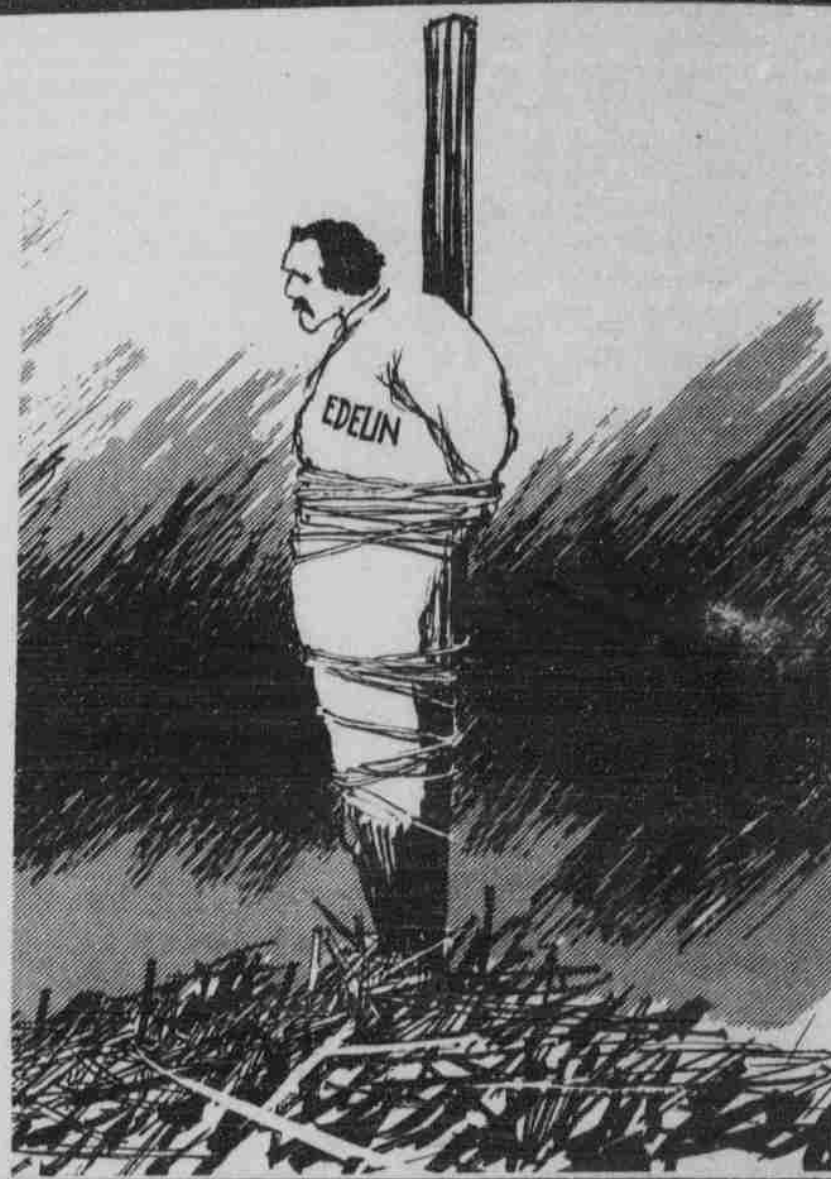
At its Saturday meeting, the NU Board of Regents, at the recommendation of Varner, authorized SUN to ask the Legislature for \$157,790 to expand the program. SUN's proposed budget for the next fiscal year would be \$348,415, including funds sought for the state and \$190,625 in tuition.

With the additional money, SUN would be able to expand its course offerings, perhaps by as many as seven or eight, during the fiscal year starting in July.

While times are admittedly tough and education seems likely to absorb much of the blow again this year, it would be a mistake for the Legislature to overlook the good it can do for education and the state by granting SUN's request.

An object in motion tends to remain in motion unless stopped by an outside force. Before the Legislature becomes that outside force, it should remember that stopping SUN now may mean losing valuable momentum—something that is hard to regain.

Wes Albers



Education not to blame for low SAT scores

Public education is so beset with problems of integration, teachers strikes, textbook controversies and stingy legislatures that even a cynic is almost moved with pity at its sorry state.

But even more pitiful is to see public education blamed for that for which it's not responsible—the declining intelligence of students.

Now don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying intelligence quotients are falling or that students don't have brains. They're just using them less and less.

SAT decline

For example, the national average Scholastic Aptitude Test scores have declined for the last 10 years. The following chart tells the story:

	Verbal	Math
1962	478	502
1963	475	498
1964	473	496
1965	471	495
1966	467	495
1967	466	494
1968	462	491
1969	461	489
1970	460	488
1971	454	487
1972	450	482
1973	443	481

Verbal scores dropped 35 points; math scores, 21 points. The evidence also shows that the number of those scoring in the top percentiles has declined.

Some have argued that the lower average is a result of more students with lesser abilities taking the test, thereby lowering the average.

But in the past five years the number of students taking the test has leveled off, making this criticism invalid.

Tests 'irrelevant'

Others criticize that test scores aren't significant because the tests themselves are simple irrelevant.

The fallacy with this explanation is that it says no more than that students are becoming unable to handle "irrelevant" material. And since our day-to-day lives are filled with "irrelevant" events, this could be a rather disturbing revelation.

Probably more accurate explanations of the decline in scores come from educators such as Blakely B. Babcock, Director of Studies at The New Hampton School. He speculates that there is a correlation between an increase in watching television and the more dramatic drop in verbal scores than in mathematical scores. Students, Blakely says, are simply reading less and watching television more.

New math

Other educators are questioning the teaching of

in history courses it is popular to find professors who stress ideas, theories and themes rather than facts. Unfortunately, students either fail to realize or refuse to see that it is only through factual material that themes and theories are created.

Fourth president?

It seems students rarely learn either facts or theories, for they can neither tell you who our fourth president was nor discuss any "theme" running through his administration.

Another sign of increasing apathy in the pursuit of knowledge is that one rarely hears the cry for relevant courses anymore.

Instead, students express what they consider to be relevant by signing up in increasing numbers for courses in detective or science fiction.

I would imagine that if students really desired relevant courses, enrollment would increase in classes such as Modern China. Instead people clamor to take History of Sport.

Cafeterias

Another example comes from residence hall cafeterias. You might think that at least some of the conversation during meals would include issues or ideas the students had been exposed to that day in their classes. It rarely does.

Most of the cafeteria conversation revolves around sports, sex or how much homework students have to do. At first I thought there was a correlation between the poor quality of the food and the poor quality of the student's minds, but I have since stopped blaming the food.

For Diogenes, one of the founders of cynicism, "the foundation of every state is the education of its youth." Legend tells us that he spent his daylight hours walking the streets of Athens, carrying a lighted lamp and looking for a virtuous man.

If he were alive today and looking for a learned and virtuous student on this campus, he would need two lamps.

bruce nelson
cynic's corner

"new math" which emphasizes "abstract reasoning at the expense of rote learning of fundamental concepts."

But we do not have to look at national scores to see the declining interest of students in education. We only have to look around us.

For example, it is common knowledge among students that the major use of course description booklets is to find easy courses and/or easy professors. "Only three tests and no papers!!" is a familiar but sorrowful refrain.

