opinion

UNO regent guilty of bad judgment

The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) Appeals Board is expected to announce today whether UNO's student government president and regent should remain on the disciplinary probation vice chancellor Beer imposed upon him last month.

The charge is that Steve Shovers seriously violated policies pertaining to the privacy of personal records. In the process, Beer claims, Shovers defied instructions of a UNO secretary.

There is no question that Shovers looked into at least one file in the Secondary Education Dept. office. Shovers admits to looking at his file

If, indeed, all he looked at was his file, Shovers is within his rights legally. The Buckley Amendment gave students the right to look at their own records.

Shovers' unwillingness to wait until someone authorized the file-opening was the first of several errors in his judgment.

Now we wouldn't go so far as some Omaha students and compare the incident to Watergate. However, the aftermath of the episode reminds us of another ill-handled scandal a few months ago.

Wayne Hays escaladed his problems by lying when accused.

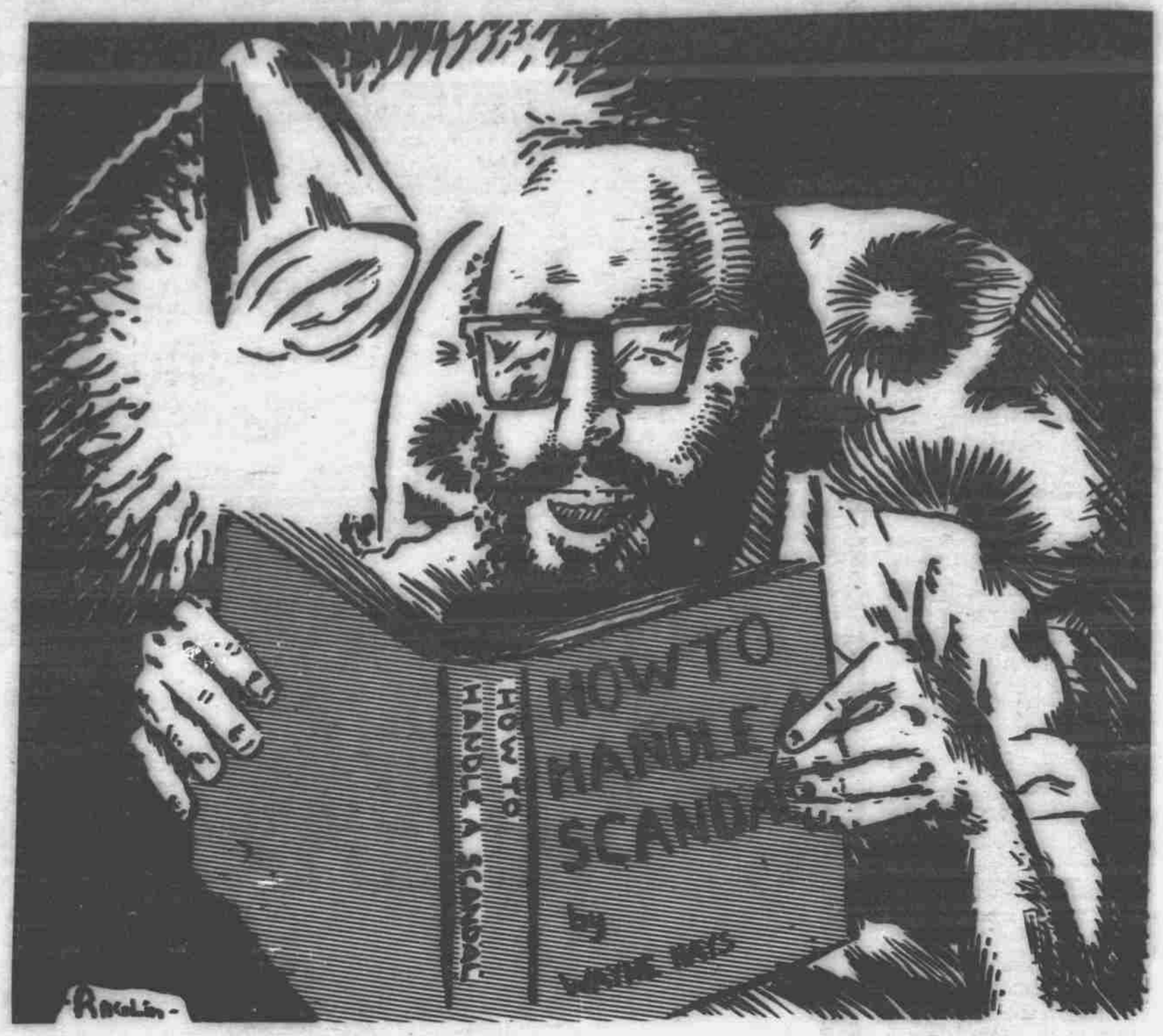
Shovers' credibility (and thus his arguments in the case) are weakened because he lied when first asked by the Daily Nebraskan on Sept. 8 about his probation.

Shovers denied knowing anything about it. He went so far as to say "This is the first I've heard about it," and went on to imply that Beer had lied when he told the Daily Nebraskan Shovers was on probation.

Shovers' reason for lying? He told the Daily Nebraskan two days later he wanted time to form a complete public statement about the incident."

If he was not prepared to comment, why not say so in the first place? As it is, a student regent lied to students through the student newspaper. Or maybe he is not concerned with what students on this campus think of UNO's representative?

We are in no position to say whether Shovers violated any UNO rules by looking at whatever files he did. But we could be more sympathetic about any mistake he may have made if he had told the truth instead of acting as if there is something to hide.



Community-controlled education virtually a myth

By Nicholas Von Hoffman

Back-to-school time again. In some places the merchants are offering appropriate specials in steel helmets and earplugs. Kansas Sen. Robert Dole is contributing to the clatter by calling his vice presidential opponent Mr. Busing, and everyone aspiring to elective office is calling for a return to local control of the schools. Better to call for it than to discuss it and run the danger of explaining to the voters that their local school boards lost effective control over educational policy long before the judges got it in their heads that a kid learns to read faster on a moving bus than in a stationary classroom. Their unpopularity aside, the reason the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) guidelines on sexual and racial discrimination have come to symbolize outside interference is that they are visible while the ordinary mechanics of outside, centralized control aren't.

Curriculum; what is taught is more central to the policy control of the school than the means by which the pupils are carried to their places of instruction. School boards have the power to include or exclude sex education from the curriculum but they have no say-so over the core subjects. From Maine to California the same subjects are taught the same way

National infirmity

Standardization of curriculum follows automatically from the introduction of standardized testing. As colleges and other users of high school graduates have insisted on basing their judgments of people on test scores, school systems have had to adjust their course content to help their pupils score high on the tests. Thus tests, which were once thought of as a way to verify whether a student had mastered what his school hoped to teach him, now have the function of assuring national uniformity.

Any school board that elects to try a different way would find its pupils would be barred from colleges, from the unionized crafts and from a multitude of certificated technical occupations.

When the right mix of outside forces come together our independent school systems change with such speed and identical precision they might as well be run by a Minister of Education. That's what happened in the late '50s with the introduction of the New Math. Within five years the entire program of instruction was developed, tested and slammed into school systems across the country.

Whatever the pedagogical result, it was an achievement in centralization to write and publish the text books and guides as well as train the teachers in such a short length of time. The money for this endeavor came from the federal government but percolated through institutions such as the National Science Foundation so that it didn't seem as though Washington were dictating.

Washington seldom dictates. It prefers moneyed persuasion. Thus a generation of math teachers were taught to give up what they knew and to try an entirely different kind of syllabus by paying them to attend summer seminars in pleasant places to learn how to teach the new math.

The do-it-or-else methods used to get compliance on racial matters isn't the usual style employed by the pointy-headed bureau-class in HEW's Office of Education. The new math wasn't forced, it was sold as a way of catching up with the Russians who were supposed to have gone ahead of us in space with the launching of Sputnik. That whole period saw school systems everywhere in America volunteer to fight the Cold War by producing teachers, scientists, engineers and other personnel who were to be the indispensable front-line troops in the struggle.

Unintended victims

Scholarship money and other incentives were made available to youths who signed up for national defense vocations, and for those who didn't there was the Selective Service and two wasted years on guard duty. The catch was that the calculus was wrong; the Russians weren't ahead of us and, worse, the need for people pushed into a number of these occupations was grossly overstated. It is these excess teachers and engineers who have had to take pay cuts and demotions in this recessionary period. You might say they are

might say they are the unintended victims of centralized school planning that went a cropper.

Even if they hadn't been pushed and lured into superfluous occupations they might be out of work anyway. But if they hadn't been conscripted into the Cold War battalions, they could at least tell themselves it was they who picked the wrong careers, not the manpower planners

sidewise

and the distinguished but invisible members of the high-level commissions and committees that made the policy recommendations on such matters.

Since 1972 and our economic problems, national educational policy has been moving in very different directions. No more hysterical cries for more engineers and physicists. Now the money and the persuasion is going into vocational education, into guiding young people into service, craft and low-level technical occupations for which, we're now told, there will be an abiding need. people are running around giving talks saying college isn't what it's cracked up to be, and that, contrary to everything Americans have been told for generations, a B.S. doesn't guarantee its possessor a better job and a higher income.

Again, within a relatively short space of time, we have a new national educational policy. Since we're no more able to predict the labor market in 1976 than we were in 1956 when we were producing unnecessary engineers, the policy is a highly questionable one. Its quick and wide acceptance, however, serves to show how little policy control local school boards continue to have. Their job is to front for decisions made elsewhere to try to squeeze out more revenue, and also to convience the taxpayers that those debates about the colors of the high school band uniforms are what is meant by community-controlled education.

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