

opinion/editorial

Universe pioneer's birthday a worthwhile holiday

Today is Albert Einstein's birthday. Until recently it was a date that passed relatively unnoticed, but recent scientific advances have reaffirmed the strength of Einstein's theories, leading one British science writer to recently remark, "Einstein's theories are the bedrock... It is Einstein's universe."

Those are pretty heady words to accord a mere mortal, but the truth

is that the importance of Einstein's work has never been equalled. His early theories on the equivalence of energy and matter, on the unity of space and time are the foundation blocks upon which modern physics have been built.

Americans, because of their heritage, have always admired the pioneer spirit and Einstein may have been one of the greatest pioneers in

history. His pioneering wasn't limited to a country, it encompassed a whole universe.

Scientific inquiry, although increasingly limited by ever-shrinking budgets, still is making rapid strides. It is the consensus of many scientists that as new facts are gleaned and more secrets are uncovered, Einstein's stature as one of history's greatest minds will only be enhanced.

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So it may be fitting that this day be set aside. Perhaps some day it will even become a holiday of sorts. If that suggestion seems frivolous, reflect a moment on Einstein's incalculable accomplishments. It is frivolity to honor a man whose works began the bridge which someday may prove to span the vast chasm between humankind and God?

French schools' lack of screening draws 'freeloaders'

At first the figures on shocking: 30 percent of those entering the French university system finish. What kind of grueling experience awaits students once they enter the hallowed halls of higher education?

A closer look at the facts puts that figure in a better light.

First of all, there are no entrance requirements for French universities.

Because of this lack of screening, many students find themselves up against a system they cannot handle.

Others, after several years of working for a certain diploma, are either discouraged or eliminated by competitive selection processes.

And still others, although in the minority, enter the university simply to freeload off the system. Students are entitled to cheaper meals and public transportation, help in finding part-time jobs and library privileges.

Class attendance

The administration defines a student as anyone paying the 150-franc (\$37) enrollment fee and has no way of knowing if all "students" attend class regularly.

mary jo pitzl

Although anyone passing the high school "exit exam" is entitled to enroll in the university, restrictions on a student's mobility to do what he wants to are soon imposed.

Students are allowed to repeat a year only once. After that, they must advance to the next level or, if they still haven't passed, change majors.

This sounds logical and reasonable enough, until one considers that students often "fail" a year not because they are ill-prepared, but because a competitive exam had to draw the cutoff line somewhere. This kind of make-it or break-it competition can best be paralleled to entering medical school in the States.

Passing grade

If a student's field of study is not so crowded as to require a competitive exam, advancing to the next year is simply a matter of scoring a passing grade on the end-of-the-term exam. However, a failing mark in one class out of a year's load of seven is all that is necessary to fail the entire year. Students are then obligated to re-take basically the same courses they just finished, with the hope of doing better the second time around.

Increasing the difficulty to succeed in the French university system is the fact that usually there is only one exam that matters all year—at the end of the term.

Therefore, starting a class in November, it is often difficult to maintain a steady work pace when the exam is seven months away in June.

Often there are "partials"—exams at midterm in February. These are about the only guideposts a student gets to determine if he is working in the right direction.

Limited diplomas

If an academic field is overcrowded with qualified candidates or if the government decides it needs to cut positions to save money, diplomas in certain areas of

study will be limited or suppressed entirely.

The government can do this not only because it runs the other schools and universities that will eventually hire university graduates.

Although many feel that such a limitations policy is effective in curtailing diplomaed "chomeurs" (unemployed), others argue that this cuts down on the student's freedom to study whatever interests him.

Knowledge for knowledge's sake bumps into the cold reality of the real world and

the limits of a university's capacity.

Finding a job worthy of the diploma one has just slaved to earn is becoming increasingly difficult. No longer are a "license" (earned after three years) and a four-year "maitrise" automatically sufficient for landing a good job.

Diploma inflation (the same amount of work for a decreasing value) has created the ironic situation of those with the most simple diploma—or better, those with non-able to find jobs more easily than the guy who's been in the university for half a decade.



letters to the editor

In her various articles in the *Daily Nebraskan*, Mary Jo Pitzl prides herself in not experiencing "culture shock" during her stay in Bordeaux, France. However, I am beginning to wonder if she can find anything positive about Bordeaux, the teachers, the social life, the exams or the postal system (which seem to work well enough to get her articles to us).

Finding things to criticize about another culture is one of the more obvious results of experiencing cultural shock. I might suggest that when something is different, it does not necessarily mean it is "bleak," just different. Perhaps I am misreading the tone of her articles and she is merely trying to be cute. That may be. But as one who is interested in the effects of cultural shock on students going abroad, I would like to thank Ms. Pitzl for providing me with such fine examples.

Suzu Prenger
Coordinator
Overseas Opportunities Center

Death penalty

I would like to respond to Mr. David Eric Moeller's rather shallow attack on Sen. Sen. Ernie Chambers and Professor Martin Gordon, opponents of capital punishment.

You say that "in contrast to the method of death the victim has suffered... the punishment is merciful and quick." How sad that you completely missed that point and confuse revenge with justice. If, for one moment, capital punishment could bring the victim back to life, I would be its biggest proponent. But what purpose does it serve? Capital punishment only points to that regrettable aspect of human nature that demands an eye for an eye, something somebody we should all listen to warned us against. Yes, something should be done, but instead of taking the role of God and deciding who should live or die, we should give even the worst killers the real, honest help they need to overcome their obvious problems.

Perhaps you really do believe the death penalty to be a deterrent, but before forming such an opinion, the facts should be closely scrutinized. The vast majority of murders are not those committed by the evil-hearted deranged maniac who careful-

ly plans and waits for his victim. They are committed by husbands, wives and boy-friends who, in a moment of passion, are pushed over an emotional brink, losing control for that fatal instant. Do you really believe they deliberate on the possibility that they may be executed for what they are about to do? Often, they don't even realize it themselves until the act is over. How can we tell if anyone is ever deterred? Statistics don't show it. Would you ask the man on the street if he stopped himself from stabbing his wife in last night's argument because he considered he might be electricuted instead of sent to jail for life? And how do you justify the arbitrary and discriminate way the death penalty is applied overwhelmingly to the poor and minority groups?

Hopelessly idealistic? Very possible, but incomparably preferable to your alternative, which is in effect, to give up and stop caring. If we all do that, is there any reason to be alive at all? Of course the feelings of the victim's family are to be considered, but retribution won't change the fact that their loved one is dead. Getting the murderer out of society's mainstream is one thing, but killing him solely to appease a demented sense of justice is never the answer. Would you be willing, assuming a certain defendant's guilt was ever proved beyond a reasonable doubt, to make the irreversible decision to have that person die?

This may seem like a lot of questions, and we may never have the right answer, but one thing is certain; sweeping the troubled people of society under the rug through capital punishment, justifying it with tags of deterrence, will always be the easy, but never the viable alternative.

James Elworth
UNL School of Law

Heckling questioned

In the *Daily Nebraskan* for March 8, Hadi Rghei and Terri Rittenberg seem to imply that since Yitzhak Rabin, in their opinion, is a criminal and a liar, it's all right for people to heckle and shout him down. Would they apply this principle to others whom some among us regard as liars and potential criminals?

Shall we shout down advocates of capital punishment, abortion, nuclear arms,

nerve gas, etc.? Shall we heckle opponents of busing, national health insurance, capitalism, and other controversial issues if we see them as criminal and wrong? Or shall we merely keep such people away?

Shall we fire all teachers with criminal and wrong views? Shall teachers throw students with such views out of their classes or merely silence them? And who is to establish the class of opinions that are non-criminal and not to be shouted down? Will Rghei and Rittenberg please explain so that corrective measures can immediately be taken all around?

Mordecai Marcus
Professor of English

Debate illustrates obscenity

In response to the "Creationism and Evolution" debate of March 2 as described in the *Daily Nebraskan* (Monday, March 5), I have this paraphrase of the prophecies of Amos (Amos 5:21-24) to offer in comment:

I hate, I despise your debates, and I take no delight in your frenzied discussions.

Even though you offer me blind faith in a scientific method, or total dependence on an idolized bible (both agreeing that the only real truth is literal truth).

I will not accept it; and your foolish attempts to "defend God".

I will not look upon. Take away from me the cheers for your favorite theory; to the "obvious logic" of your preconceived notions

I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and acts of justice like an everflowing stream.

In an age of desperate human need and endless possibilities for human service, my commitments as an educator and as a Christian move me to suggest that such "debates," and the energy invested in them, are rich illustrations of the true meaning of obscenity.

Larry Doerr
Campus Minister-
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