

Editorial policies set standards, test new ideas

Most professions have ethics that people within that profession look to as guidelines for their conduct. Journalists also have a standard of conduct which they look to. Generally the standard includes fair and unbiased reporting, no libelous stories or pictures, not disclosing sources who wish to remain anonymous and not printing off-the-record comments.

To say the standards are never broken would be a bold-faced lie and to hope that someday newspapers will be errorless is a pipe dream. As long as journalists are merely human, no matter how hard they strive for accuracy, there will be mistakes.

For the Daily Nebraskan, this means new rules and a new editorial policy each semester.

Editors from semester to semester basically follow the policy of the editors before them and change in the Daily Nebraskan is fairly gradual.

Driving age likely will remain at 16

By Mary Jo Pitzl

A bill to raise the minimum age for obtaining a driver's license to 17 appears to be driving toward a dead end, according to a member of the Legislature's Public Works Committee.

Sen. Don Wesely of Lincoln said he is "pretty certain" the bill won't win committee approval. He said a committee decision will be announced early this week.

LB804, proposed by Omaha Sen. Patrick Venditte, would raise the minimum age for getting a driver's license from 16 to 17.

Presenting his bill to the committee Friday, Venditte said the measure's advantages would include saving gas, reducing the number of teen-age traffic accidents and allowing youth "one more year of maturity" before taking the wheel.

Venditte said restricted licenses could be assigned to those youths who must drive to help with farm chores and to those students living in rural areas who must drive to school.

Studying lacking

A former high school instructor, Venditte said he is concerned about the lack of studying he sees among high school youths. Much of their study time is spent working, he said, and often the jobs are dependent on the student's access to a car.

"I guess I really question the need of 16-year-olds to drive," Venditte said, citing the mass transportation systems available in urban centers as alternatives.

Dr. Ben Meckel of Burwell spoke in favor of LB804: "It's my impression that most males at the age of 16 are not ready for driving privileges." Meckel said he has a 16-year-old son who would probably "beat me up" for supporting the bill, but added that he believes his son is not mature enough to handle the responsibilities of driving.

Meckel, a former member of the State Highway Commission, said states with a higher minimum driver's license age report fewer traffic fatalities. In order to reduce traffic fatalities, he said, the number of drivers on the road must first be reduced.

Students testify

Five of the six people testifying against the bill were high school students.

Debbie Kaminski, representing the student council at Millard High School Level II, presented a list of students' complaints. Among them were lack of effective mass transit in the Millard area, lack of busing for Level II students living within a four-mile radius of the school, and the hindrance the bill would be to student employment.

Many 16-year-olds at Millard work, Kaminski said, and making parents chauffeur a student to and from a job results in two wasted trips.

"The reason why a lot of kids work now is to continue their education into college," Kaminski said.

"Experience doesn't come with age, it comes with practice," she said. Kaminski said she and three other students carpooled to get to Lincoln for the hearing.

Two other Omaha students who testified Friday also said they carpooled for the 50-mile drive.

Lincoln High School sophomore Mary Samson, 15, told the committee she recently finished a driver's education course and believes she is qualified to drive.

Although rising gas prices have curtailed joyriding and drag racing, Samson said "there's always going to be a percentage of people doing this at any age group."

Samson added many 16-year-olds need jobs because their parents are unwilling to continually support them.

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The standard of conduct is broken in all professions, but when it happens in a newspaper it is more noticeable to the public.

On the other hand, journalists know that the newspaper is subject to daily reader criticism, so they should have a higher standard of accuracy than most professions.

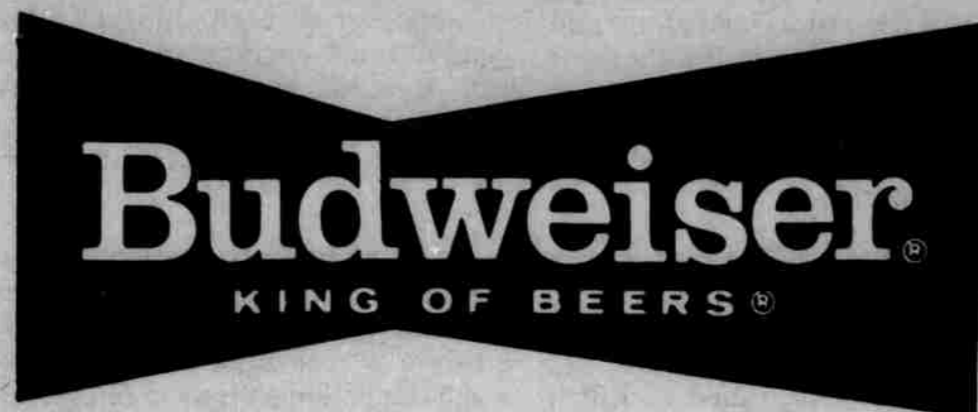
The press guidelines are really so general that most editors set standards within individual newspapers for their staff.

But there is nothing that says that the change can't be radical, that a new editorial stand can't be taken, that innovations to make the paper look different can't be made and so on.

Sometimes people get so ingrained in tradition they can't see there might be something better. It also stands to reason that unless the new idea is tested, it will never be known if it would be good for the paper.

But then, there are many ways new ideas can be tested without just taking the plunge. Readers are sometimes polled, staff meetings called and ideas discussed before the major change is made.

However it is done, the step has been taken, and the decision then must be made about the success or failure.



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