

Editorial

Job training emphasis masks true college value

The magic words these days when you talk to people about a college education are "job training." Society tends to establish the value of a college education in terms of the number of dollars that education can help graduates earn.

If job training and career preparation are all that a college education is intended to provide, students are wasting an awful lot of time and money. Some of the jobs for which they are preparing will be obsolete by the time they get to them. Other job classifications that don't yet exist will appear in coming years, but graduates will not be prepared for them because of narrow, career-oriented plans.

So students' hard-earned money, loan money, grant money, begged-from-parents money, is being poured into career preparation plans of questionable value. If job preparation is all that matters, students might be better off spending much less money and much less study time in a vocational-technical program at a junior college some-

where. At least, so goes a prevalent argument in the United States today.

The problem with this concept is that it values the human only as a producer and a consumer, as fuel for the Great American Dynamo. The ultimate lesson that a college education should teach, however, is how to be something more than that.

The value of college today is not so much in job training, but in the much-maligned, underfunded "liberal education." It speaks volumes about our attitude toward education that the term "liberal education" is sometimes mistaken as some sort of political indoctrination. At its best, a liberal education is not only not an indoctrination, it is the best defense against one, because it encourages independent thought and the asking of questions.

A liberal education also brings with it the realization that there is more to life than work and the compensation received for it. Many graduates, like it or not, are going to be stuck doing something eight hours a day that they

won't want to do, but they will stay in those positions simply to earn a living.

Some of these jobs may even be the ones graduates thought they wanted and for which they trained so diligently in college. An education — that is to say, something beyond a job training program — can help students realize that there is something worthwhile in not only the eight hours of work, but also the other 16 that make up a day.

Ultimately, a case could be made that no vocational program in a classroom can match the on-the-job training that one can get in the "real world." But mere job training, no matter where you pick it up, cannot prepare students for the certain changes that will take place in the world, including the job market, during their lifetimes. Society has devalued the ability to think and defied the ability to work in a world that will need people who can do both.



Protest march: moral marathon

Now that spring is here at last, we all had better brace ourselves for the return of that most predictable of all fair-weather political phenomena: the protest march.

"The right of the people peaceably to assemble" is guaranteed by the Constitution, and in the fullness of



William Rusher

time it has been expanded to include the right of the people to assemble here and proceed peaceably to there. The resultant "march" is one of the most common social activities of our time and deserves a little thought.

One of the biggest advantages of a protest march is that it eliminates, or at least reduces to an endurable minimum, the amount of time the assembled troops have to spend listening to Bella Abzug or Gore Vidal or some other alleged "celebrity." A rally is unthinkable without speeches, but a protest march solves the problem neatly:

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The audience is on the move — the precise reverse of "captive."

Another advantage is that a protest march maximizes the principal asset of the organizers — the crowds. It mobilizes them into spectacular photo opportunities while reducing to the vanishing point the need for serious thought. The average "anti-nuclear" protest marcher hasn't given a moment's consideration to the distinction between (say) a nuclear freeze and no-first-use; nor need he — nobody is going to cross-examine him on the subject.

From the standpoint of the participants, a protest march combines most of the healthful qualities of jogging with the social attributes of a marathon and contains a moral dimension unknown to either. What could be more delightful than strolling along the highway in the merry month of May with several thousand kindred spirits of all ages, sexes and ethnic backgrounds, carrying photogenic banners and singing inspirational songs, while television crews record it all for history?

There is, however, a still bigger high involved in protest marching: the moral dimension, referred to above. The average person certainly knows himself far too well to have a very high opinion of his own moral rectitude. But equip him with a high-sounding cause (No Nuclear War, Save the Whales or whatever) and send him marching down Main Street with 2,000 other people and he will develop fangs that would turn Mr. Hyde green with envy. By the time he passes the Greyhound depot, he will be shrieking that Ronald Reagan is a bomb-crazed millionaire who ought to be strung up from the nearest lamp post. If a television camera films the incident, so much the better.

Consider the 79-year-old that an Associated Press reporter caught up with during a Chicago "peace walk" April 10. The old geezer was ecstatic.

"I marched through the 1960s," he told the reporter, "and I'm still marching. But this, I think, is the biggest of all because life in the whole world is involved."

One glimpses here the psychology of the protest marcher in its purest form. During the 1960s he had discovered protest marching and had marched doggedly for the causes of that uproarious decade: civil rights, perhaps; against the Vietnam War, certainly. Then had come a period of doldrums: the 1970s. But now he was hitting the pavement again, and it was just like the old days, only better: "because life in the whole world is involved."

The rhetoric, in short, is more apocalyptic than ever: We march for All Mankind! Our enemies want to destroy the Human Race! Where else, for the cost of streetcar fare home, can you find a lift like that — and fresh air besides?

Writing a column on column writing

It seems like it's becoming harder and harder to write a column.

For my last effort of the semester, I had planned on exposing the plight of one of Lincoln's downtrodden job-



Reid Warren

less people. You know, go to the unemployment line, see how someone feels about not having a job, not having any money, not having any hope for the future.

But, not wanting to make anybody mad, especially not Ronald Reagan, I decided I had better not do that. I wouldn't want to create a false impression of doom for our country, something the president is always castigating journalists for doing.

After all, if the White House can get on Bill Moyers' case for a television program, I figure City Hall could look unfavorably on me if I did another one of those "unemployed person" stories.

I could have written something about college. You know, UNL's open admissions policy, the university's lack of recreation facilities, and so on. But then I figured that anybody who would read the column is already sick to death of school and would just pass over it anyway.

I mean, after being around campus for six months, who wants to be reminded of the place anymore than they have to be?

I could have written about the nuclear debate. It's a pretty good issue. But then I figured that if the Soviets really did attack our country, it would take me about 15 minutes to gather up all my material about nuclear survival and evacuate the city. I would probably spend an extra five minutes looking for this column, and in that span of time I could be radioactively dissolved, or something like that. So if I don't write about nuclear weapons, it could save my life. Can't go against something like that.

The Falklands crisis? I'm sick of that. Anybody and everybody's uncle has written about the Falklands incident. They've dug up quotes from the 16th century, and other things, and I sure can't be more thorough than that. The only good thing I could say about the Falklands would be that I thought Margaret Thatcher and General Galtieri would be the hands-down winners of a contest to see who can stick their chin out the farthest without having anybody hit it.

So what to write about . . . aha! Write a column about not being able to write a column. "People will love that," I assured myself, "because it seems that no one wants to hear anything of realistic value today anyway. All most people want to do is ogle Calvin Klein jeans and increase the nation's rate of alcohol and drug use. No one wants to listen to some cockeyed voice of reason crying out in the wilderness." (I found myself very convincing, but then I realized I was dealing with a weak mind.)

Believe it or not, there is definitely something to be said for writing a column about not being able to write a column. Something like, "Writing a column about not being able to write a column perfectly mirrors today's society. No one knows what the hell is going on in the world . . . everybody is getting ready for the simultaneous start of a new depression and World War III. Writing a column about not being able to write a column will show (ironically and satirically) that indecision, uncertainty and fear has hit America."

Since the world is so confused and mixed up about values, a column should reiterate those feelings, I told myself. Thus, a column about not being able to write a column.

The late great sportswriter Red Smith once said something like "Writing a column is like cutting your wrists and bleeding out all your feelings on paper." Lately, about all anyone cares to read about are a few measly drops.