

Editorial

World-Herald error distorts Roskens' visit

Because of the volume of stories and the speed at which they are written, newspapers — both professional and student — make mistakes.

When a mistake is made, professional, ethical papers print corrections as quickly and fairly as possible.

The Daily Nebraskan policy on errors is simply to correct them. The size and prominence of the correction is left to the editor's discretion.

On Sept. 23, the Daily Nebraskan printed a page 1 correction on a Sept. 19 story that had wrongly quoted NU President Ronald Roskens on the consolidation of NU and the four state colleges.

We printed the correction on page 1 for our readers — not for Roskens, as was implied by an error in a Sept. 27 Omaha World-Herald article.

The World-Herald interviewed Gene Gentrup, Daily Nebraskan night news editor, who spoke to Roskens when he visited the Daily Nebraskan newsroom. The article stated that "the visit by Roskens resulted in some departures from newspaper policy. One included the placement of the correction in Monday's paper."

"We never put a correction on the

front page," Gentrup said."

The Roskens correction was not a departure from policy.

Gentrup said what he believed to be true, but he was not a valid source because he has nothing to do with Daily Nebraskan policy or corrections. That is up to the editor.

Gentrup said he told the World-Herald reporter nothing about departing from newspaper policy, but he told him he could remember no corrections on the front page.

The Daily Nebraskan has printed corrections on the front page before, as has The Omaha World-Herald.

The Roskens story merited a front page correction. The headline on the original article said, "Consolidation not acceptable; NU President Roskens says he'll quit if campuses merge."

The article said Roskens would quit if UNL, UNO and the NU Medical Center were consolidated. It said Roskens thought consolidation would eliminate duplication, but consolidation is undesirable because it implies that he is trying to build an empire.

The article should have said Roskens would resign immediately if the NU system — UNL, UNO and the NU Medical Center — and the four state col-

leges were merged under a single governing body.

Roskens, who spoke at a Lincoln Chamber of Commerce session, said he supports consolidation because it would improve efficiency and eliminate duplication.

But if a merger occurs, Roskens said he would quit "to avoid people saying 'Roskens is trying to build an empire.'"

A small correction on the NU system error was printed on page 2 of the Sept. 20 Daily Nebraskan before editors were informed of other errors in the story.

As soon as editors were told of the magnitude of the mistakes, a second correction was written.

The second correction was printed on the front page because newspapers owe it to their readers to correct errors. The correction was printed in the same spot as the original story with a similar headline to clear up any misunderstandings it may have caused readers.

The Herald article also stated that "Another variation from policy was that the editor, Vicki Ruhga, called Roskens and read the second correction to him before it was published."

Reading the correction to Roskens was not a departure from newspaper

policy or an attempt to censor the press.

I read the correction to Roskens because I wasn't at his speech, and I wanted to be sure we had corrected all the mistakes and accurately reported his speech.

The Daily Nebraskan is a learning tool for students, and its reporters have limited skills and experience. But that is no excuse for the sloppy, incorrect reporting in the consolidation article.

The Daily Nebraskan was under no pressure from Roskens to put the correction on the front page — we did it for the readers.

We have differed with Roskens in the past, and we may differ with him in the future. But on one thing we're agreed: A newspaper's job is to get the facts.

When Roskens visited the Daily Nebraskan, he simply pointed out the errors in the paper and said something should be done about it. He left the correction up to the editor.

The Daily Nebraskan is not in the business of correcting the World-Herald, and we don't plan to make a habit of it.

But we do set the record straight about our own paper.

Vicki Ruhga
Editor

No clear-cut decision

Royko paints a gray picture black and white

Here is another tale of injustice delivered to you, the reader, by the all-knowing, all-seeing, U.S. free press.

This, however, is not a story about a welfare mother who spends her food stamps on booze. It isn't a story about a poor Joe who can't collect his Social Security because they claim he's dead. Nor is it about a convicted killer coddled by mushy liberal courts.



Chris Welsch

This story starts with a particularly brutal murder. Robert Hunt Jr. picked a young woman's wedding announcement picture from the newspaper, went to her home and broke in carrying a gun. While she pleaded, he tied her up and shoved some underwear in her mouth, then strangled her, had oral sex with her and masturbated onto her stomach. Then, to make sure she was dead, he pushed her head under water in a bathtub.

Hunt confessed, was found guilty

and was sentenced to death. However, there are several technical points of contention in the case.

The Nebraska Supreme Court overturned the ruling because our state law says execution can only be imposed when the murder is "especially heinous, atrocious, cruel, or manifested exceptional moral depravity by ordinary standards of morality and intelligence." In a close vote, the court ruled that this case was not especially heinous.

Mike Royko, a syndicated columnist known for championing the average Joe against the Powers That Be, took exception to the ruling.

Royko decided he knew the law better than the Chief Justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court and wrote a sarcastic column, which most of his readers probably enjoyed. He described the murder graphically, then said that Chief Justice Norman Krivosha screwed up by supporting the decision to overturn the ruling. Royko thinks the crime was indeed "especially heinous," and that Hunt should be executed.

When Krivosha defended his stance in a speech to a UNL journalism class, his remarks were reported in the Lincoln Star. He said Royko probably had not read the decision. He was right. Royko read the article and responded

with another, more sarcastic column after reading the decision.

He made it seem as if Krivosha was pretentious enough, or dumb enough, to think he clearly knew the difference between "heinous" and "especially heinous."

Assistant journalism professor Richard Streckfuss was in the class that Krivosha spoke to. He wrote a Sept. 26 Point of View guest opinion for the Star. In it, he noted that Krivosha told the class he had received letters that said, "You idiot, don't you know the difference between night and day?"

Krivosha told the class, "Yes, I can tell the difference. But can anyone tell us at which moment twilight began?"

Krivosha and Nebraska's other justices have sentenced 12 of 130 people convicted of first- or second-degree murder to the death penalty since it was reinstated. The "especially heinous" clause has been weighted in all those cases, Streckfuss wrote.

This murder may or may not have been "especially heinous." The court's job is to interpret the law — not to make it. Many Nebraskans, including myself, think the death penalty is immoral to begin with and perhaps "especially heinous" itself.

Royko painted a picture of Krivosha

as a backwoods bureaucrat who cannot even interpret the law.

That simply is not true. I have heard Krivosha speak many times, and I've been consistently impressed with his intelligence and thoughtfulness. Even in Nebraska one does not become Chief Justice by being a dope.

As Streckfuss wrote, if there is a point to be debated, it's the law, not Krivosha's qualifications or powers of interpretation.

It's pretty easy for Royko to sit in his office in the Chicago Sun-Times and paint pictures with black ink on white paper. Journalists and writers know that the simpler the story the better: it makes good copy.

If you can write a column that shows President Reagan or a chief justice making the wrong decisions, people will read it. Nobody likes to see injustice prevail.

Even if we have all the facts, journalists often eliminate complications that would "bog down the reader" or interrupt the flow of a story.

Royko is still my favorite columnist. He's a sharp wit, a precise writer and often an insightful one. I read him every chance I get. This time, though, he didn't present the story as completely as he could have.

Stories are never as simple as they seem on paper. There are a thousand exceptions and complications in every one. Journalists must be sure not to sacrifice crucial facts to make a story better.

Folk musician Pete Seeger's father once told him: "Strive for simplicity, but never trust it." That's good advice for writers and readers.

Hey, what about those fun-loving guys at Alpha Tau Omega? A panty raid of all things! Nothing like harassing women for a good time.

Who says frats perpetuate sexism? As fraternity spokesman John Rood says, the panty raid was just an "age-old fraternal custom that got enjoyably out of hand." Enjoyable for the ATO's at least, nudge nudge, wink wink! And I'm glad those naughty boys were "appropriately reprimanded." That's a relief.

I propose a new tradition. The sororities should mount a commando raid on the ATO house and put Ben Gay in the boys' jock straps and undies. What fun! I'll tell you something: Those crazy Greeks get me every time!

Welsch is a UNL senior majoring in English and Journalism and is a Daily Nebraskan copy desk chief.

The Daily Nebraskan

34 Nebraska Union
1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448

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