

Daily Nebraskan
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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Too few students ask questions Action should be taken to end fear of professors' retaliation

Have you ever heard a student challenge a professor in class? When a professor makes a statement with which you disagree, do you take issue with the point or simply let it slide by?

Last week, one of my professors made some bold statements about life and society in class. One of his contentions was that we are all living out the script of a movie with which we identify. He gave a number of examples and showed how we could see many people living out movies.

One bold student in our class did something our professor said had never been done to him: He put the professor on the spot and asked him to explain what movie he lived in and why. After our professor got over his initial shock, he gave us a very interesting and insightful answer. What struck me was not his answer, but the fact that no student had put him on the spot before.

This particular professor has been teaching here for quite some time and yet no one had ever asked him to personally verify his contention. Another student in our class said that he figured someone would have asked the professor that question. Perhaps we all figure someone else is asking the tough questions. But if we aren't, who is?

Far too often students are passive observers rather than active participants. Every day professors and graduate students tell us their truths of the universe and we write them down, rarely questioning or asking them to prove what they say.

The big question is why? Why don't we challenge our professors? The answers are probably wide and varied, but I think there are a few general ones which might be true.

Perhaps we just really don't care, perhaps we're afraid of the consequences of raising a stink, or perhaps we just don't think it's our place to question these "authorities."

In some instances, we probably don't care. Every one of us is required to take classes we just don't want to take. Obviously we're not going to spend all our time dealing with these, but we should take a stand on those issues, and classes, we care about.

Few of us stand up to our professors, perhaps because we're afraid of the consequences. After all, it's our professors who give us grades and grades affect our futures.

Many of us are afraid to do anything which is going to get us on our professor's "bad side." It's much

safer for us to just sit there and take what they say, regurgitate it on a test, get our good grade, and be on our merry way. I can remember many times when I disagreed with a professor but didn't say anything because I feared questioning him or her would endanger my grade.

We live with a grade guillotine above our heads and it is preventing us from making professors prove their contentions to ensure us that they know what they're talking about. We sit passively and accept, rather than question and decide. Perhaps this is a misguided perception. Maybe our professors wouldn't hurt us for challenging them. But there is a perception that they would, or at least a fear that they might. And regardless of what is real, we live in a world dominated by perceptions and fears.



It all comes down to who works for whom. Typically we see professors as being "in charge" of us. But is this right? We pay, through tuition, and our parents pay, through taxes, the salaries of our teachers. They are employees of the state of Nebraska and we are the people of this state. In other words, they work for us.

But it rarely seems that way, does it? We don't seem to act like employers and our professors don't treat us as such. I'm reminded of a specific incident of professorial arrogance which infuriated me last year. I was shown a course syllabus that a student had received from a professor. On the bottom of the syllabus this condescending, self-inflating professor had typed, "This is a bitch of a course. Drop now and avoid the rush." Can you believe that? Is this the attitude which should be held by a state employee who is hired to serve us?

Or for a couple of other examples: A student recently told me that she had a teacher's assistant who showed up to teach a review session drunk. Another student told me his professor came to class drunk. In the "real world," if any of us had an employee show up to work drunk, we'd fire them.

In less extreme, but more fre-

quent, cases, we've all had professors show up less than prepared for a class. And we've all had professors make contentions which may not be true or they probably couldn't prove if questioned. Professors certainly penalize us when we are unprepared or when we can't verify our conclusions. Why should it be any different for them?

It's time we re-evaluate roles, and realize that incidences such as these show cases of instructors willfully neglecting their duties to serve the students and facilitate learning in this state.

Obviously we can't fire our professors and the relationship is a slightly different employer/employee situation. Certainly professors must control classroom situations and they must evaluate the work of students. Perhaps it's actually more of an employer/employee relationship. They are employed to teach and we are employed to learn, and we evaluate each other. But it's up to us to make sure they are doing their jobs.

Even if this makes sense and it's something we want to do, we still have the fear of retaliation from faculty. Perhaps some action could be taken to remove this fear. I am quite confident that people like Jim McShane, faculty senate president; James Griesen, vice chancellor for student affairs; and Robert Furgason, vice chancellor for academic affairs, want students to feel like they are getting the most out of their classes. I'm sure they also would want to ensure that UNL faculty are doing a good job.

Maybe they can come up with some action or at least some statement to assure students that reporting drunken professors or challenging questionable ones won't be allowed to hurt our grades. Maybe such a policy already exists, but if it does we need to know about it and be encouraged to follow it.

When instructors neglect their duties, we should be sure the people who can fire them know about the problem. And they better be willing to listen. We need to do less questioning in our minds and more questioning in our classrooms. After all, the quality of education we receive is directly dependent on the quality of teaching done by our professors. When they don't do their job well, we're the ones who lose. So let's make sure we don't lose.

Peterson is a senior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Ted and Wally's mourned

What a shame that we can no longer enjoy Ted & Wally's ice cream in Lincoln. This August the local ice cream parlor was forced to close for several reasons, not the least of which was financial.

You see, when Ted and Dean (Wally) first opened their store on 12th street, business was incredible. They had a marketable product and the location was very accommodating.

However, this soon changed as the university, in its infamous wisdom, required the business to move from its building a few years back. The reasoning was that they decided to reevaluate the use of the space on UNL property.

Of course, the building still stands today, same as two years ago, except without two profitable businesses operating in it. When they moved to their most recent location, on 14th street, the business mysteriously suf-

fered about a two-thirds profit loss.

Many factors can be attributed to this, including: saturation by several other ice cream/yogurt stores, a poorer location, and lack of available parking. While not all the blame is the university's, it is still apparent that they contributed to the demise of an original and very successful operation.

By the way, you can still enjoy Ted & Wally's ice cream at their Omaha store in the Old Market. Anyway, thanks Ted and Dean for serving the public in more ways than one. First, by creating a version of ice cream that is rated in the top 250 in the country, and secondly, by showing the questionable business operations that go on around here at our UNL.

Keelan Kaiser
junior
former Ted & Wally's employee