

Higher standards

UNL needs stricter admission policy

Several months before students enroll at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, they receive a handsome "certificate of admission" in the mail. What does it mean?

In effect, it is a second high school diploma. It signifies that a student has walked through high school for four years — or the equivalent — and managed to stay out of the principal's office long enough to get a bound piece of paper. Hardly an impressive achievement.

But it's good enough to get into Nebraska's land-grant, research institution, ostensibly the most academically rigorous public university in the state.

Instead of diverting "marginal" college students to a suitable environment, Nebraska admits them to UNL. After their freshman year, most of these students — more than a quarter of the class — end up at state and community colleges anyway. Or they drop out of education entirely, the victims of unnatural expectations and Willie Horton-style revolving-door higher education.

Finally, some university officials are addressing the problem. Unfortunately, they are doing so for the wrong reason.

Nebraska's self-inflicted budget crunch has forced some administrators and regents to speculate that UNL will have to become more selective not because they want to improve academics, but because the university can't afford more students.

More competitive admissions standards ironically could become the only positive side effect of the heavy dose of fiscal conservatism the government is trying to force down UNL's throat.

Opponents of higher standards argue that UNL, as a state school, should not become elitist. But higher admissions requirements would have no such effect.

If the university solved the budget problem by raising tuition rates, that would be elitist. It would keep financially strapped students away and let the elite attend.

Obviously, UNL should not become a competitive "Harvard of the Plains." But in Barron's ranking of college selectivity last fall, UNL came up "non-competitive," the least selective rank. Clearly, UNL could become somewhat stricter without threatening the Ivy League.

Admissions standards are not the same thing as academic quality. UNL does recruit and attract some of the state's best students. But UNL professors can only do so much. If they have to teach remedial courses more suited to state colleges, they waste costly, state-financed time.

Nebraska government has been committed over the last few years to improving the university by upgrading the faculty. Armed with double-digit salary increases, UNL has hired professors from a national market.

The faculty, however, makes up only half of a university's assets. The other portion is the students. Their admissions certificates should mean something.

—E.F.P.

Handbook focus misdirected

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln recently has published and distributed a handbook on rape prevention. I looked through it and became extremely angry to see a perfectly good idea applied in such a dumb way. The handbook contains the fundamentals like "don't walk alone at night," but it omits the buddy system of going to parties, where women travel in pairs, and never leave a drunk friend behind. It addresses women as victims, but it fails to address the victimizers.

The handbooks were distributed to all the sororities and women's dorms, but not to the fraternities or men's dorms. Why in the hell not? If every woman is a potential victim, then every man is a potential rapist. Just as everyone knows a rape victim, everyone also probably knows a rapist.

Rape is a man's issue. We must take responsibility for it if we honestly want to stop it. Admitting there is a problem is the first step to solving it.

I believe rape to be the predominant male sexual fantasy in America, the kind where "she secretly loves it." But good luck finding some guy to admit to it. It's the crime that men commit, but don't talk about. Actions, such as rape, are codified by

certain ideas and attitudes, such as demeaning jokes about women. So long as it's "just a joke," those attitudes are "harmless." But our ideas and attitudes are what give us our identities. If you talk garbage, chances are you think garbage. Think of somebody you know who laughs real loud at Andrew Dice Clay's jokes. Then ask yourself honestly, "Would he treat my girlfriend/sister/daughter/mother with respect, or would she be just another slut in his eyes?" Then ask yourself, "Do I have a little bit of that in me, too?"

Most women are self-made experts on rape prevention; they have to be just to survive here. Telling them how to avoid rape is like telling a cabbie how to drive.

I would strongly suggest that a second version of this handbook — targeted toward men — be published immediately. If only for one reason that I noticed in this handbook. In a recent survey, college males were asked, "If you knew you could rape a woman and get away with it, would you?" Sixty percent answered, "Yes."

Joe Bowman
senior
anthropology



LISA DONOVAN

Violence for a greater good?

A few years ago, one of my English professors decided to show the film of Shakespeare's "King Lear." I had to get up and leave during the scene in which one of the characters was shown getting his eyes plucked out.

It was a gruesome and horrible depiction that could have been portrayed with much more subtlety.

But, hey, that's art.

The other night, I watched a video of a colleague who was competing in a kickboxing tournament — he was knocked silly during the second round and went down. I watched him — through the cracks of my fingers — take a bloody nose, swagger and fall.

But, hey, that's the spirit of competition.

Monday morning I picked up the Daily Nebraskan to read about seven "altercations" at a University of Nebraska-Lincoln fraternity's fundraiser. There were fights inside the ring and outside, as well. The Lancaster County Sheriff's Department reported that one student was hit in the head with a chair and another kicked in the face.

But, hey, that's the spirit of philanthropy.

Violence is a strange phenomenon that seems to lurk in the netherworld, but is still a part of our lives.

Society is handed so many signals that we hardly know what is socially acceptable. You know, like the hypocrisy behind a police force's war on crime. Or hiring a police guard for a so-called civilized boxing tournament — just to ensure that no fighting breaks out in the crowd.

The line between what is staged and what is real becomes fine and difficult to define.

Folks just aren't satisfied with the more uncontrived natural violent phenomena like, say, Saddam's crimes against the Kurds or even seeing for the 220 billionth time the granddaddy of them all: Rodney King being beaten senseless by members of the Los Angeles Police Department.

There is a difference between real-life blood and gore and Shakespeare, my friend Bob getting the crap kicked



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out of him in a kickboxing tournament and a fraternity holding an ass-kicking event to raise money for emotionally disturbed children.

But many find there is a connection between the real life, and the stage.

Newsweek conducted a poll showing that 40 percent of those interviewed thought movie violence was a "very great" cause of real-life violence, and 28 percent thought it was a "considerable" cause of violence.

Filmmaker Martin Scorsese told Newsweek, "Maybe we need blood-letting like the ancient Romans — as ritual — but not real circus."

Maybe this is good therapy for potential rapists, cannibals or any of those nocturnal folks who slick their hair back, have fangs and sleep upside down all day.

In the same article one mental giant said he comes out of movies like the "Texas Chainsaw Massacre" and

"Alien" feeling "refreshed." It would equal, say, a nice little jog on the beach or a walk through fresh flowers on a cool spring morning.

The rationale here is that if a man goes out and murders 33 people it is a societal outrage, but if Arnold Schwarzenegger is re-enacting it, then it's like 15 minutes in a whirlpool.

But as sure as we turn off the 5 p.m. news horrified at the news of a rape at the Kennedy compound, many of us will pop into our VCRs the portrayal of similar violence — all, of course, in the name of entertainment.

According to Newsweek, civilized folks like you and me spend \$1.5 million annually on renting "action" videos. These of course include great landmark and mind-expanding films like "Robocop" and "National Velvet."

I've never been a big fan of action-packed films like "The Terminator" and "Rambo." I've heard people talk about how funny and cool these shows can be. Conversations usually run along the line of: "Remember that one part when he took that nuclear-scud raygun and blew off that dude's left arm after he started eating that chick's ears off. Yeah, that was cool."

So I am to understand there are some real reasons behind prostituting violence: entertainment, fun, philanthropy.

Well, students will be students, but it is interesting to contemplate the whole idea of two people voluntarily jumping around and punching each other into oblivion.

It's probably no worse than football, but at least violence happens to be only a bad side effect of that game. Sanctioned violent fighting like boxing makes little sense as sport.

Even stranger is that people pay to sit around and watch it. At Friday night's Fight Night, a few of them even became entranced by the moment and began a brawl of their own.

That's not the kind of ritual we need.

Donovan is a senior news-editorial major, a Daily Nebraskan columnist and senior reporter.

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