

Blinded by the light

Raising admissions standards should be priority
In a time when it seems administrators are doing little to improve the quality of education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the prospect of raised admissions standards is a beacon in the night.

University of Nebraska President Martin Massengale recently appointed a committee to consider changing admissions standards. Although in his charge to the committee Massengale billed its task as a routine evaluation, far more is at stake.

The committee would not have been formed if it had not been for the report on higher education restructuring issued by Widmayer and Associates of Chicago to the Legislature. The report recommended raising admissions standards at UNL and was the impetus for discussion on the issue.

The committee, to be led by NU Executive Vice President and Provost Lee Jones, is the first step in acting on the discussion. Hopefully, the result will be more in line with the needs of the state and not a ploy to preserve the status quo.

UNL each year admits hundreds of students who have not taken prerequisite high school courses, such as algebra. These students have a low chance of succeeding at the university, causing a high freshman year dropout rate.

Expending professors' time and university resources on these students makes for a lower quality education for the rest of the student body.

Surely, the transfer system with the community and state colleges would need to be improved to raise admissions standards, but the change would be worthwhile. Such a move would give borderline students the attention they need, while still giving them the eventual opportunity to attend and graduate from the state's main research postsecondary institution.

In a period of budget cuts and calls for higher quality, raising admissions standards would be a step toward refocusing precious resources to their best use.

— Victoria Ayotte
for the Daily Nebraskan

Rhino display should go

The ongoing campaign to retain the rhinoceros statue in Morrill Hall (Daily Nebraskan, July 3) displays a profound misunderstanding of the purpose of a modern natural history museum. The principal function of museum exhibits is not wowing the yokels, but exciting public interest in the study of the natural world through the display of real artifacts and specimens of actual, natural objects. Whatever else one can say about an asbestos and steel simulation, it is unquestionably not a specimen. It is not "real" or "natural" in any useful sense of these words. And there is no reason for the state museum to have to indulge in such fakery. Nebraska is the source of one of the most diverse and remarkable collections of fossil mammals in existence. There are mounted specimens in Morrill Hall of animals that can be seen nowhere else in the world. Bert Schultz' vision of a Hall of Giants would degrade these magnificent exhibits to the status of a pathetic carnival sideshow, a tangible expression of Nebraska's erroneous collective fear that the state has nothing of true value to offer.

If this is the image that the admini-

stration wishes to foster, however, why stop at just one humongous sculpture? At a small risk of making ourselves the laughingstock of every university in the country, we could people the whole campus with monolithic simulations. There's a town along the interstate in North Dakota that bills itself as the home of the world's largest Holstein. And a few miles further on, there she is, on a bluff above the freeway, about 40 feet tall at the withers, staring off with a beatific expression in the general direction of Saskatchewan. Perhaps UNL should inquire whether the local city fathers would be willing to part with her. We also could acquire the world's largest prairie chicken from that place in Minnesota, or the overdeveloped Brontosaurus sculpture from Wall, S.D. We even could weatherize the rhino and mount it outside on the circle, guarding the east entrance to the stadium. Maybe paint it scarlet (who is to say they weren't scarlet, after all?) and call it Big Red.

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JIM HANNA

Death penalty reflects moral repugnance

I'm tired of grayness.
How much easier my life would be if more things were black and white. In the great morass of political and social issues that whip me into a polemical tizzy, I rarely feel absolutely right about anything.

Imagine the despair of a card-carrying liberal like me when he reads a George Will column and actually sees some good points.

There is little that compares to the warm feeling that comes over me when I know that I'm 100 percent right on an issue. Nothing like moral certainty to brighten my day.

Unfortunately, there just aren't enough issues that I know I'm right about. Most of them I think I'm right about, but I always can see some sense in the opposing point of view.

So as I swim in thick soup of political wishy-washiness, I love to find issues about which I am absolutely and undeniably right.

Thank God for the death penalty. I freely and willingly stand before the world and declare without a scrap of doubt anywhere in my soul that my position on the death penalty is stupefying in its correctness. Anybody who doesn't agree with me (and there are a lot of you) must face up to the unshakable fact that you are wrong.

Don Stenberg is wrong. Ben Nelson is wrong. 80 percent of the U.S. population is wrong.

As Nebraska gleefully rushes toward the state-sanctioned execution of one of its citizens, however, being right is of little solace to me. The wrong people are the ones with all of the power.

I can stand in front of the governor's mansion and hold up a sign that displays my correct position, but I have little faith that it will keep my government from plummeting to the depths of moral repugnance. People who are wrong drive by and look at me with pity or disgust or fury, and I know I can have little impact on them.

But let me try. Let's look at why



I freely and willingly stand before the world and declare without a scrap of doubt anywhere in my soul that my position on the death penalty is stupefying in its correctness.

I'm right by responding to arguments used by those who are wrong.

BAD ARGUMENT #1: "How would you like it if some sicko raped your mom 40 billion times and then strangled her and stabbed her and shot her and cut her up into little pieces and ate her?" (NOTE: When using this argument, it is apparently important to make the crime as gruesome as possible)

If this happened, I'd be out of my mind with grief and anger and probably would want to kill the "sicko" in question. I count on my government, however, to rise above such powerful feelings and administer justice in an unemotional way. As I see it, my government has failed me when it is unable to do so and insists on vengefully killing a killer.

BAD ARGUMENT #2: "Why should my tax dollars go toward supporting a sick killer in prison for the rest of his or her life?"

My question is: Why should my

tax dollars go toward killing a person whom I don't want killed? Our tax dollars go to support many policies that we personally might hate. Some don't want abortion advice financed federally, and I don't want to help pay for immoral wars in distant gulfs. It's the curse of being an American.

Beyond that, there is the well-documented fact that it costs far more to litigate a death penalty case than it does to support a prisoner for life in prison. But even so, to place a dollar value on a human life is repugnant. The money argument suggests that there is some magic price at which it would be okay to keep a killer alive in prison. Perhaps if it only cost \$100 a year to support an inmate, it would be OK, but if it cost more than that, kill him or her. Pretty shallow thinking.

BAD ARGUMENT #3: "That killer's victim didn't get any appeals." Absolutely, and for that, we are outraged. So why do we want to practice the very acts that repulse us? Let's give the criminal the justice his or her victim never received. To do otherwise is to sink to the killer's level. I honestly fail to see the difference between a criminal killing a victim and us in turn killing the criminal.

There are countless other reasons to punt the death penalty — it's a racist policy, innocent people are executed, no other "civilized" nation that we respect kills its citizens, deterrence is a statistically proven sham — and all of them are right.

The citizens of this state need to wipe the slobber off of their chins long enough to promote a healthy respect for the lives of even the most contemptible humans. In a world that is becoming increasingly violent, we must resist the urge to respond with more violence.

It is the only right thing to do — just ask me.

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