

Blind to differences

Fluency bill only encourages prejudice

Apparently seeing, or rather hearing, is far from believing for one member of the NU Board of Regents.

After receiving complaints from constituents about the fluency levels of some University of Nebraska-Lincoln instructors, Regent Robert Allen of Hastings last week attended nine UNL classes taught by instructors for whom English is a second language.

Allen said he was able to understand all of the instructors. Yet he still supports a Nebraska Legislature bill that says university teachers should be fluent in English.

"Ideally our governing board should be able to handle this, but if the Legislature can help, I'm all for it," Allen said.

If a problem with teachers' English fluency existed at UNL, the Legislature might compel itself, wrongly, to become involved in an internal university matter.

Instead of improving teaching at UNL, the passage of such a bill would give UNL the perception of being hostile to teachers whose first language is not English. And UNL's reputation for diversity is poor enough as it is.

UNL already has a system to deal with teachers' English fluency. That system works. Involving the Legislature in that system only would cause trouble.

Concerns about the English skills of foreign graduate teaching assistants led UNL four years ago to begin requiring them to gain approval from a testing board before being allowed to teach.

As should be obvious to Allen, UNL's teachers no longer have a fluency problem.

The real problem lies with ethnocentric students who excuse their unwillingness to overcome cultural differences by saying that their instructors lack English skills.

In the world of higher education, students must expect to encounter individuals from different backgrounds. To endorse legislation to the contrary only perpetuates students' misconceptions about their own prejudices.

Not every UNL instructor can or should have a Midwest-American accent. When accents do not impede the learning process, as they do not at UNL, the efforts of foreign instructors should be applauded, not questioned.



ALAN PHELPS

Jury's finding lacks sanity

On Saturday, a jury found Jeffrey Dahmer was sane when he killed 15 people.

At first, it seemed almost like a joke. Dahmer murdered and dismembered 15 men and boys. He drilled holes into people's heads, he tried to make them into zombies, he practiced necrophilia.

It all sure sounds like the work of a sane man. After all, most every one of us supposedly sane people does those things on a regular basis.

Because Dahmer was sane, he must've had a good reason for doing what he did. Sane people who kill and slice up 15 people usually have a purpose in mind. Such a motive is difficult to think of offhand, but the jury members obviously know what they're talking about. They must have sat around listing really good logical rationales for pouring acid into people's brains and eating their body parts.

Or maybe these average Americans were simply like most other average Americans. Although they see that Dahmer isn't exactly sane, they don't want to deal with him. Blind with revenge, they would like to see Dahmer put away forever, out of sight or even killed.

They didn't want to see evil Jeffrey "get off" on an insanity plea.

"Please, please don't let this murderous killer fool you with this special defense," E. Michael McCann, prosecuting attorney, told the jury.

Dahmer probably thought he was being pretty clever when he carved up those bodies so he would look insane. Hum-drum, run-of-the-mill murders aren't enough to appear insane in Wisconsin — you have to really go for it. It's a lot of extra work, but if you're gunning for an insanity plea, it's worth it.

In most states, for criminals to win on an insanity defense, their lawyers must prove that at the time of the crime, the perpetrator did not know right from wrong. If the prosecuting attorney can prove that the criminal knew killing was wrong as he or she was doing it, then that person was not insane.

So, whenever a case like Dahmer's comes up, the jury must sit through a parade of psychiatrists, all disagreeing with one another as to the sanity of a murderer. The study of what makes the mind tick is not an absolute science. These experts all have differing opinions, and the jury is forced



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make him an example to others by taking revenge against him for all the people he killed. How very civilized it all is.

But that's the sympathy of the American pocketbook. The simple fact is that we don't care about criminals. We ostracize them, put them away, stuff them where we don't have to look at them. And we think that makes things better.

Psychology has come a long way in the century or so that serious study about human behavior has been conducted, and there are many hurdles to leap.

It would be difficult to find a group of experts to agree on why Dahmer did what he did. It probably would be much more difficult, with our present level of technology, to help him lead a normal life. If the jury had found him insane, he might have sat in some mental institution for the rest of his life, draining the taxpayers' money while doctors hypothesized and studied, but made little progress.

Yes, that might have happened. Of course, "might" is the operative word. We'll never know for sure. But even if we assume that would be the case, it doesn't paint a much prettier picture of America.

In a perfect society, we would be able to help all criminals. We would turn them back into "good" people and set them free. In a slightly less perfect society, we would be able to help many criminals.

In our society, we don't want to help them. We don't even want to try. And those who want to see our reform system actually reform people are denounced as being soft on crime.

We vainly are trying to rid society of symptoms instead of diseases. Jeffrey Dahmer is insane, and his insanity caused him to kill 15 people. Our reaction isn't to wonder what could've driven him to do this horrible act or to study him in the hope that we can prevent someone else like him from doing the same thing. Our reaction is revenge.

Of course, maybe such basic human instincts all are right here in the country the rest of the world sees as a nation of cowboys, where everyone has their own guns, where "justice" is sure and swift.

But maybe we could do better.

Phelps is a sophomore news-editorial major, the Daily Nebraskan opinion page editor and a columnist.

Green's view of 'Cops' wrong

Sean Green should try to research facts before he starts spewing forth incorrect data regarding the television series "Cops" ("Smile! You're under arrest!" DN, Feb. 10). In fact, Green's statements make me wonder if he actually even watched the show at all. If he had, then he would realize that no one is arbitrarily portrayed as a criminal, as he implies. If Green has the mental incapacity to watch a television program and automatically assume someone is guilty of a crime without knowing all (or even most) of the facts, that is his problem. I do not believe that Americans at large would share his ignorance.

Also, "Cops" does not just throw a picture of someone being arrested to a prime-time national TV audience without first acquiring that individual's expressed consent. Without such consent, the suspects' facial features are always digitally distorted. No

violation of rights there. Green, with little or no intelligent reasoning, states that he likes watching "Cops" because it provides valuable insight into the civil rights abuses of police officers on a national basis. He cites a traffic stop by police officers that ultimately reveals many bags of what he calls "the good stuff." Fortunately, he fails to tell us what the civil rights abuse was. I suppose he wouldn't know, since there wasn't one.

It's clear that Green has a problem with police. But then who can blame him? After all, he constantly has to be on the watch for all of those terroristic policemen looking to probe his bodily orifices. Yuk!

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Language brings understanding

I'd like to respond to the letter R. Bruce Kitchen II wrote about foreign language requirements. Now, being a foreign language major, one might expect me to be in favor of a foreign language requirement — this would be a correct assumption. Nevertheless, please hear me out.

I realize that having to study a foreign language can be difficult, even a pain, if it's just not your thing — I certainly have had some trauma in the classes I've had to take that involved math, which just isn't my cup of tea. But I'm not complaining that a certain amount of math is required. I realize that math is relevant and important, and it's good to have a taste of what you math people experience.

This brings me to what I want to

get at. My interpretation of your initial question is essentially that since the "general population of the earth" is learning English, then American students shouldn't have to learn languages beyond English. Perhaps this is true, if we are considering only what is convenient for the average American individual. However, if we wish to understand what many around the world have had to endure in order to understand our culture and the language we speak, then maybe a few semesters of foreign language would be good. Perhaps their requirement of learning English "is a travesty to grade point average" for them.

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