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News appeal starts with Calvin

Last semester, a Daily Nebraskan columnist tempted fate and tested my nerves by submitting a column about the dangers of reading the student newspaper.

"You probably are being duped," the column read.

"If you are reading the Daily Nebraskan uncritically, you are being duped."

I was upset because newspapers throughout the country are suffering for readership anyway. We didn't need any more bad publicity.

But the columnist had a point, which was that students who use the DN as their only source of campus information aren't getting the whole picture. Journalists, no matter what ideals they hold, cannot be completely objective, he wrote.

Ever since that column, I've been watching the newspaper-reading habits of students in my classes. For curiosity's sake, I wanted to find out what students were learning from the monopoly that is the DN.

I haven't learned much, and apparently neither have the students I've been watching. Generally, the best part of the newspaper in students' eyes is the back few pages: the personals, the crossword, the comics.

In an age when gathering information is difficult and time-consuming, the DN monopoly even suffers from lack of attention.

So, as a four-year veteran of the Daily Nebraskan, I no longer can be deceived about its influence on the university.

By now, I've interviewed too many potential columnists, read too many letters to the editor, fielded too many phone-call complaints to let the deception continue.

See, this really is not a newspaper. Actually, it's just the thing that carries Calvin.

I guess I'm just as guilty as the students who turn straight to Calvin and Hobbes. I read Calvin, too. Only I'm worse. I read tomorrow's comic today.

That means that, while I'm writing this column on Wednesday, I already know that Calvin makes his escape from Suzie by hopping on the school bus today. It's one of few perks this DN position gives me.

Other than that, I'm just like any other Calvin fan.

And there are many of us.

It's not tough to figure out what's so appealing about Calvin. He's a kid with an adult-sized mind. He gets the best of both kid and grown-up worlds.



Yep, Calvin is more than snips and snails and puppy-dog (tiger?) tails. He's a counter-conscience.

In the tone of a familiar beer commercial, Calvin fans think, "Wouldn't it be great if I, too, could make mud pies and snow goons and talk to a stuffed tiger without people thinking my brilliant social commentary was bananas?"

I've particularly enjoyed the most recent set of Calvins, in which the boy wonder is staking his fate on his horoscope.

This belief, he said, is based on the knowledge that, "The newspaper couldn't print it if it weren't true!"

If only that were so, kiddo.

We all laugh at these Calvins because we know that having a free press leaves room for having a phony press, like horoscopes and the National Enquirer.

But Calvin points out that even the smartest of us read our horoscopes once in a while, just in case.

Pretty sophisticated stuff for an elementary-school kid.

Yep, Calvin is more than snips and snails and puppy-dog (tiger?) tails. He's a counter-conscience.

He plays in mud puddles but won't take baths. He's the smartest kid in school but won't do homework. His imagination is so great it can make a stuffed tiger grow twice its size to be his playmate, but he just can't figure out little girls.

Naturally, all of this nonsense about Calvin is far more important to DN readers than what's on Page 1.

Sure, it makes sense. Human nature cries out for ongoing drama, or soap operas never could be so popular. And Calvin is filled with drama — even sex and violence.

Will Suzie succumb to the stars' desires and throw herself upon Calvin? Will Calvin's recent tussle with Hobbes permanently harm the duo's relationship?

Tune in tomorrow, same time, same page.

See, it is dramatic. And in some people's eyes it's far more dramatic than anything happening at UNL.

Perhaps that's a sad comment on student apathy. But I choose to disagree.

Maybe I'm just glad students read the DN for something. Or maybe I just like Calvin, too. But seeing the little grin a student gets when looking at the strip makes me realize there's much more to the news than what's on the front page.

It's pretty easy for journalists to adopt an air of self-importance. After all, we're the public's designates. When California executed a murderer this week, journalists were called in to be witnesses — for the public. During wartime, the press becomes the people's eyes and ears. In politics, journalists are supposed to be watchdogs for the public, hounding out corruption.

But when it comes right down to it, the press has very little public appeal. In a time-conscious society, newspapers are viewed by many as too time-consuming.

Today, it's better to turn on Headline News and get a 15-minute news fix then spend the hour or so it takes to read a good-sized daily newspaper.

Newspaper journalists nationwide are trying to figure out how to attract readers. One newspaper in Florida has completely revamped its format in an effort to draw Yuppie readership. USA Today was born to be reader-friendly.

Lucky for us, attracting student readers to the Daily Nebraskan is not a tough chore. All we need, I discovered, is Calvin.

And I've noticed that students typically don't put down the DN after reading Calvin and Hobbes. Instead, they check out the personals, the crossword puzzle, or even the sports page. Eventually, most get back to Page 1 and at least give the headlines a scan.

So maybe we are a monopoly, and maybe students are being duped.

But if Calvin gets students even to open the newspaper, more power to him.

Pedersen is a senior news-editorial and advertising major and editor of the Daily Nebraskan.

Affirmative Action unwarranted target

Well — here we go again! Another young white man opposed to affirmative action ("Affirmative action hypocritical," DN, April 21). I certainly will let my opinions be formed by the content of your column, Brian. You have said a great deal about yourself.

"To my knowledge, I have never been denied employment because of my gender or because of affirmative action." So what is the problem? Who are all of these white males suffering from "reverse discrimination?" Where are the jobs filled with Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans and women who got their jobs at the expense of white men, not because they were qualified for the job but because of affirmative action? Let's stop this false perception that jobs are going to unqualified people due to affirmative action. Brian, have you read an affirmative action plan? Have you studied affirmative action goals? Is it possible that some white men are really no more qualified for a job than others when performance-based selection criteria must be used?

I have been involved in numerous selection committees and have reviewed hiring procedures of many companies. My experience has been that if there is prejudice or bias in the process, it tends to be expressed by people looking for ways to restrict access to those who have been underrepresented in the past and to find ways to hire the people they want (read that "white male"). When white males no longer have the vast majority of high-paying, high-status and managerial jobs, you may have some reason to complain. In most places where affirmative action is being applied, there are still several times the job openings being filled by white males than are being filled by non-white males and females. I challenge you to find those jobs where non-white males and females are overrepresented.

Do you really believe that the problems of "less-than-perfectly qualified personnel" is a result of affirmative action? Look around you at professors, police, surgeons, construction workers and even students.

There have been less-than-qualified people filling jobs for a long time, and it has nothing to do with affirmative action. Affirmative action can be misused to hire unqualified people just as employment practices in the past have not focused on hiring the most qualified people. There is certainly enough evidence to suggest that qualifications have not been the reason that white males have historically been given and continue to receive most of the quality jobs. That evidence also shows that employment criteria developed by white males often ends up favoring white males. Surprised?

An old saying may be appropriate here. There are some people who are born on third base and think they have hit a triple. In the same way, it seems that some people who are unable to hit a home run are not considering their own batting capabilities but are blaming others for moving the fence.

Jim Burrow
associate professor
human resource development

LETTER POLICY

The Daily Nebraskan welcomes brief letters to the editor from all readers and interested others.

Letters will be selected for publication on the basis of clarity, originality, timeliness and space available. The Daily Nebraskan retains the right to edit or reject all material submitted.

Readers also are welcome to submit material as guest opinions. Whether material should run as a letter or guest opinion is left to the editor's discretion.

Letters and guest opinions sent to the newspaper become the property of the Daily Nebraskan and cannot be returned.

Anonymous submissions will not be considered for publication. Letters should include the author's name, year in school, major and group affiliation, if any. Requests to withhold names will not be granted.

Submit material to the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448.

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