

TUESDAY



30/25
Today, 60% chance of light snow, high of 30. Tomorrow windy and cold with an 80% chance of snow.

SPORTS

Nebraska vs. Oklahoma




Erik Unger/DN

Nelson Potter, an associate professor of philosophy, has taught inmates at the Nebraska State Penitentiary since 1974. He has worked closely with Harold LaMont "Willie" Otey, a prisoner who has been on death row for 14 years.

Inmate education

UNL professor donates free time, philosophy to penitentiary

By Matthew Grant
Staff Reporter

Nelson Potter, an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, spends much of his free time at the state penitentiary.

Potter has taught inmates at the Nebraska State Penitentiary about philosophy since 1974. In return, they have taught him about crime and punishment.

Potter is a member of the steering committee for Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty, which proposes legislation for the repeal of the death penalty in Nebraska. He has worked closely with Harold LaMont "Willie" Otey, a prisoner who has been on death row since 1978.

Otey was scheduled to be executed Aug. 6, but the day before the deadline, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a stay of execution. Last year, Otey came within six hours of execution.

Potter said three criminal psychologists who studied Otey last year concluded that he was a

"remarkably rehabilitated individual," and stressed the importance of rehabilitation programs in prison.

"One of the important points about the death penalty is that it throws away the chance of rehabilitation," Potter said.

Potter has taught the philosophy of logic to Otey since 1985, but, he said, Otey already had turned his life around before then. Potter said that while in prison, Otey consciously decided to seek out people to help him.

Many groups in Nebraska see the Otey case as a test for the state's infrequently applied death penalty. Since 1920, there have been only five public executions in Nebraska. The last time the death penalty was enforced was in 1959 for mass murderer Charles Starkweather.

Potter said he was opposed to capital punishment before he began teaching at the state penitentiary, but meeting people on death row humanized the issue for him.

A passage from George Orwell's essay "A Hanging," in

which Orwell describes a Burmese execution, is an example of this humanization, Potter said.

While being led to the gallows, the prisoner steps aside to avoid a puddle in his path. "It is curious," Orwell writes, "but till that moment, I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man."

Potter said he became a firm abolitionist of the death penalty after considering the international perspective. Almost all the countries that the United States regards as its friends no longer have the death penalty, he said, while those that retain it are considered barbaric.

"I fear we promote violence by having the death penalty," Potter said. "We encourage violent solutions to violence."

He also said that while he favored rehabilitation of criminals over simple punishment, more should be done to prevent crime.

"If you're talking about rehabilitation, you've maybe already lost half the battle," he

said.

Imprisonment is ineffective for minor offenses, he said.

"The United States imprisons at a higher rate than any other country in the world," he said, "but it doesn't reduce the crime rate."

He cited the war on drugs as one reason for the boom in the prison population. He said he would favor legalization of "soft" drugs, such as marijuana, to focus instead on limiting the use and sale of more harmful narcotics, such as crack cocaine and heroin.

Potter said he first visited the penitentiary to sit in on a self-improvement group at the suggestion of a friend. During the meeting, some of the inmates expressed an interest in learning about philosophy.

Since then, he has given both individual and group classes in logic, ethics and aesthetics. Right now, he teaches at the penitentiary for about one hour every two weeks.

See POTTER on 3

Student's trial date to be set

From Staff Reports

A University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate student who allegedly tried to fire a semiautomatic rifle in a classroom full of students has waived his right to a preliminary trial.

Arthur McElroy, 43, was scheduled for a preliminary trial Monday in Lancaster County Court.

He now is scheduled to appear 8:30 a.m. Wednesday in Lancaster County District Court, where a trial date will be set, said Lancaster County Attorney Gary Lacey.

McElroy was charged with attempted second-degree murder, making terroristic threats and two counts of use of a weapon to commit a felony.

See McELROY on 3

Committee urges UNL to mobilize against cuts

By Angie Brunkow
Staff Reporter

Student mobilization will be the key to keeping Gov. Nelson from targeting UNL for more budget cuts, a student government representative said.

Jennifer Lodes, chairwoman of ASUN's Government Liaison Committee, said the governor was responsive to the concerns of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students.

"We're all his constituents," said Lodes, a senior political science major.

Students have a voice in state government, she said, and they should use it.

Nelson will present his two-year budget proposal to the Legislature in January, Lodes said. At worst, she said, the university could face a 2 percent cut over each of the next two years. The university absorbed \$4 million in cuts last year.

Lodes said GLC and members of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska already had written letters to the governor ex-

See GLC on 3

Committee studies adding minuses to system

By Susie Arth
Senior Reporter

An Academic Senate committee is researching a proposal to add minuses to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln grading system, an official said.

Fred Wagner, chairman of the Academic Senate's Grading and Examination Committee, said the committee had conducted a survey of UNL faculty members to determine their feelings on the proposal.

Wagner refused to comment on the results of the survey, but said the committee would issue a report to the Academic Senate either before Christmas or at the beginning of next semester.

"We're looking at (the proposal), we'll evaluate it and forward a report to the Academic Senate," he said.

James Ford, an associate professor of English at UNL, initiated the idea to add minuses

Survey conducted to determine support

to the grading system because he believed they would more accurately reflect students' grades.

Wagner said he didn't know how the Academic Senate would act on the proposal, but he said he hoped a decision would be made by spring.

Wagner said he believed most students feared the proposal because they believed it would bring down their grade point average.

"Everybody is going to look at this as 'Oh my God, my B will now be a B-,'" he said. "Well, maybe your C+ will be changed to a B-."

"There are two sides to the issue; it's not designed to reduce the GPA of a student."

Wagner said he was uncertain how the sys-

tem would be implemented and whether it would affect students already enrolled at UNL.

"The faculty senate would have to take into consideration the grandfather clause," he said.

Wagner said he also was uncertain how a minus would affect a student's GPA.

One idea, he said, is adding .25 point to any grade accompanied by a plus and subtracting .25 point from any grade accompanied by a minus.

But Ford said he believed the system of awarding only pluses was not balanced.

"I'm interested in combatting grade inflation," he said. "I find this to be asymmetrical."

The transition to the new grading system

would be simple, Ford said.

"We're just talking about different gradations within the existing different divisions," he said.

Ford said he had surveyed several college deans, department heads and faculty members about his idea, and it received overwhelming support.

Of eight deans surveyed, he said, six favored adding minuses to the grading system, and two were neutral.

In addition, the results of a survey of 200 faculty members on East Campus indicated that 70 percent were in favor of adding minuses to the grading system, while 12 percent were opposed to both pluses and minuses.

Ford said he had heard little response from students.

"But I haven't talked to any students who have been violently opposed to this," he said.