

Daily  
Nebraskan  
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EDITORIAL

## Open court

Coverage won't curtail Bjorklund's rights

Despite attempts to close the courtroom, the trial of Roger Bjorklund, the man charged with murdering a UNL student last fall, will be open to the press.

Lancaster County District Judge Donald Endacott ruled the case open despite Bjorklund's attorney's statement that the trial could not be fair if it were covered by the media.

Press coverage of trials serves a purpose. Having reporters in the courtroom means the trial is a public one, and that means it is probably a fair one. What is said during the proceedings will be recorded in print and on film and likely will be read and seen by thousands. This protects against perjury, and the publicity of it all prevents possible abuse of power by judges, lawyers and juries.

And before ruling, Judge Endacott said the overriding principle must be "that the defendant is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty by the state beyond a reasonable doubt." Obviously Endacott was keeping Bjorklund's right to a free trial in mind and knows it should overrule the rights of the press.

Bjorklund's rights are most important in this situation, and the press's presence should not interfere with them. But Nebraska Press Association Attorney Alan Peterson was right when he said a closed hearing actually would draw more attention to the case than an open hearing.

And this case has drawn plenty of attention since Candice Harms disappeared Sept. 22. The emotion involved may affect the public's view of Bjorklund. But if the press presents the facts in the case as it should, fairly and objectively, its presence during his trial should not affect how anyone views Bjorklund's innocence or guilt.

## Mock election

ASUN vote poor way to decide issue

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Chancellor Graham Spanier showed foresight and tolerance when he decided last December to replace prayer at UNL's graduation ceremonies with a moment of silence.

The decision was the perfect solution to the problem faced by a public institution funded by public funds. Students who wished to pray could do so to themselves. Students who did not were not offended by the silence.

It did not remove prayer from graduation. It simply made it private.

Unfortunately, Spanier reversed his decision this summer and has now decided to put the decision of prayer at commencement in the hands of ASUN elections. Prayer was included in last Saturday's ceremonies based on March's election results in favor of prayer.

But of the 22,628 students eligible to vote in that ASUN election, only 3,169 voted. That means 14 percent of UNL students decided the issue of prayer at graduation for the rest of the 86 percent.

Whether one approves of prayer at graduation or not, clearly ASUN elections are no way to determine the issue.

And even if only one student did not wish to pray at graduation, the issue would be the same. Is prayer at graduation right simply because a majority of students decide it is?

UNL is a public institution with students of many creeds and beliefs. There is no possible public prayer that could cover them all.

A vocal minority of students have demanded prayer, and Spanier has conceded and given it to them. It is unfortunate he was not able to stand by a moment of silence, which gave everyone the opportunity to be thankful for graduation in whatever way he or she wished.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Staff editorials represent the official policy of the Fall 1993 Daily Nebraskan. Policy is set by the Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board. Editorials do not necessarily reflect the views of the university, its employees, the students or the NU Board of Regents. Editorial columns represent the opinion of the author. The regents publish the Daily Nebraskan. They establish the UNL Publications Board to supervise the daily production of the paper. According to policy set by the regents, responsibility for the editorial content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its students.

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. The editor decides whether material should run as a guest opinion. Letters and guest opinions sent to the newspaper become the property of the Daily Nebraskan and cannot be returned. Anonymous submissions will not be published. 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.



JEREMY FITZPATRICK

## Editor finds news niche in DN

I've been a DN regular since I was a freshman.

My first article printed in the paper was on the Gulf War.

I got the assignment the night the war started. I was in my dorm room with the TV and radio off, trying to catch up on the schoolwork I hadn't done that week.

I had written my first story for the paper that day, and I was tired.

Waiting all day for people to call me back on the story had been no picnic. The grueling editing process I went through seemed like hell.

So when the managing editor called and wanted me to do another story, I was surprised. I asked her if she remembered I had just finished one, then sighed and asked her what the story was about.

When she said the war — which had been passing me by while I poured over calculus — I was at the DN in five minutes.

My original story was scrapped, but still, I was making calls and working on a deadline.

I forgot about my calculus assignment. At the DN that night I was involved with the real world, if only in a small way.

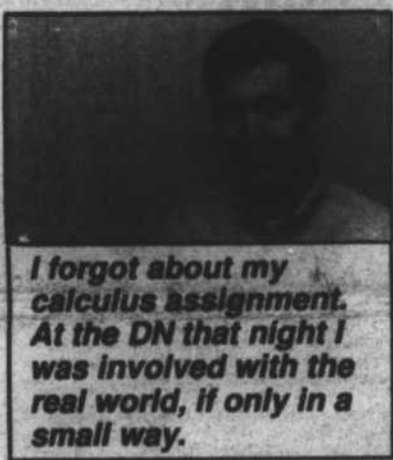
I was hooked.

I haven't been disappointed since my first opportunity to be involved in covering meaningful, if sometimes controversial, stories.

The DN has covered presidential announcements and budget cut hearings. The paper has shown a day in student life and the reality of being homeless.

The activities of a campus group identified as a cult were brought to light. When a chemical engineering professor was arrested for sexually assaulting a student, the Daily Nebraskan broke the story.

Since I've worked here, the most controversial story involved former Cornhusker running back Andrew Scott Baldwin and the series of events that eventually left him paralyzed when he was shot by an Omaha police officer.



When Baldwin was arrested for attacking Lincoln resident Gina Simanek, the Daily Nebraskan ran a front-page picture showing him — naked and bound — being put into a patrol car by police.

The DN drew heavy criticism for running the photo, which many believed was racially insensitive and offensive. But I supported the decision to run the photo then, and I still think it was right.

Although the picture was disturbing, the Daily Nebraskan did not invent the Baldwin arrest, and it did not slant the story. The paper simply showed the reality of what happened by printing the picture.

The events following Baldwin's initial arrest — including the Sept. 5, 1992, shooting that left him paralyzed — showed the seriousness of his condition just as the photo originally did. As those sad events demonstrated, looking away from something you don't want to see doesn't make it less real.

There have been other controversies and other complaints since I started. I'm sure there will be more this year.

That's news. It won't always be pleasant, but it is reality.

The Daily Nebraskan will deal with criticism openly and honestly. The DN is UNL's newspaper, and it does its best to serve its readers.

The people who work at the DN may make mistakes in judgment. If we do, we will correct them.

Our responsibility is to present an accurate picture of life at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. If that picture is sometimes unpleasant, the university should deal with that reality. We are not cheerleaders.

But we do have the opportunity to make all aspects of life at UNL accessible to students.

Students who may never meet Chancellor Graham Spanier can have daily contact with him in the news section.

Others who have never been in the Legislature can keep in touch with the state's budget crisis and how it will affect the amount of tuition they will have to pay.

Those who are concerned about Calvin Jones' Heisman Trophy chances can find complete coverage of UNL's athletic programs in the sports section. Profiles and features on student-athletes bring to life the people behind the performances.

The opinion section offers students the opportunity to express their views on issues from the toilet papering of sorority houses to gun control.

Students who want to know what is going on this weekend or about the latest music can find out in Arts & Entertainment.

Even the classifieds serve readers. They can lead to a date with someone you made eye contact with in an elevator in Oldfather Hall.

There will also be breaking stories like my first one in the Daily Nebraskan. With the world's leaders considering using force in the former Yugoslavia, such news seems all too likely now.

Whatever happens, we will try to present the news fairly and objectively.

And if you don't think we are meeting that goal, write and let us know. We need your letters to fill up this section.

Fitzpatrick is a senior political science major and the editor of the Daily Nebraskan.