

# Lawsuit yields student roommate

## Policy may cause conflict UNL housing director says

By Alan Phelps  
Senior Reporter

Kristy Coleman doesn't seem to mind that the university treats her as just another student.

Coleman, a junior human development and the family major, won a suit against the University of Nebraska-Lincoln requiring UNL officials to assign her a randomly selected residence hall roommate this semester.

Coleman has cerebral palsy. Because she uses a wheelchair and occasionally is helped by an attendant, UNL housing officials placed her in a single room last year.

At the time, it was UNL's policy to exclude from the random roommate pool disabled students who required attendant care.

It was a policy Coleman wasn't willing to accept.

"The old policy, I feel, was based on misconceptions about disabled people," she said. "that we're somehow different from an able-bodied person."

Christy Horn, coordinator of UNL's Services for Students with Disabilities, said the university's old policy was based largely on disabled students' desires.

"It really had never been a problem," she said. "We never had a student who wanted to have a roommate."

When Coleman requested a roommate, Horn said, the university tried without success to find one for her.

"Our policy has never been that she couldn't have a roommate," Horn said. "We had had students who had attendant care who had roommates, but those were roommates who knew the student and had requested to be roommates. We could not randomly assign somebody without mutual consent."

Horn said the new policy stated students who require attendant care, use extra medical equipment or use trained animals can request a single room. If Horn decides the request is reasonable, the student will be given a single room, but charged the lower double-room rate.

If disabled students request a roommate, they are put into the same random pool as any other student. That is the process Coleman went through this year, Horn said. If problems arise between the roommates, they would be handled as any roommate dispute.

"Our attitude from the beginning was, if we need to change our policy, we'll change our policy," Horn said.

But Coleman said she didn't think UNL officials would have changed the policy if she had not filed suit last year.

"They weren't very receptive to change," she said.

Before filing the suit, Coleman said, she tried in other ways to voice her opinion. Administrators told her they would try their best.

"I didn't feel like they were making a conscious effort to do so," Coleman said.

The new policy, she said, might help to dispel myths about disabled students. In keeping disabled students from the random selection pool, Coleman said, the old policy might have sent a message that disabled students were so different they couldn't have roommates.

— 66 —  
**The old policy, I feel, was based on misconceptions about disabled people, that we're somehow different from an able-bodied person.**

—Coleman  
UNL student

— 99 —  
"In randomly assigning a roommate," Coleman said, "people will see that disabled people are really no different, except in the way they get around."

Doug Zatechka, UNL housing director, said the university had a policy similar to today's about 12 years ago. It was changed, he said, at the request of disabled students and their roommates.

Some students at the time, Zatechka said, thought they should help their disabled roommates go to class, dress or do other daily tasks, even though they didn't necessarily want to do these things. Others found the interruptions of hired attendants during the day and night too disrupting, he said.

Disabled students reported feeling uncomfortable when receiving help from attendants while their roommates were in the room, he said.

Zatechka said he saw the potential for conflict now that the rules again provide for random roommates.

"All roommates may not be as accepting and as tolerant as maybe they should learn to be," he said.

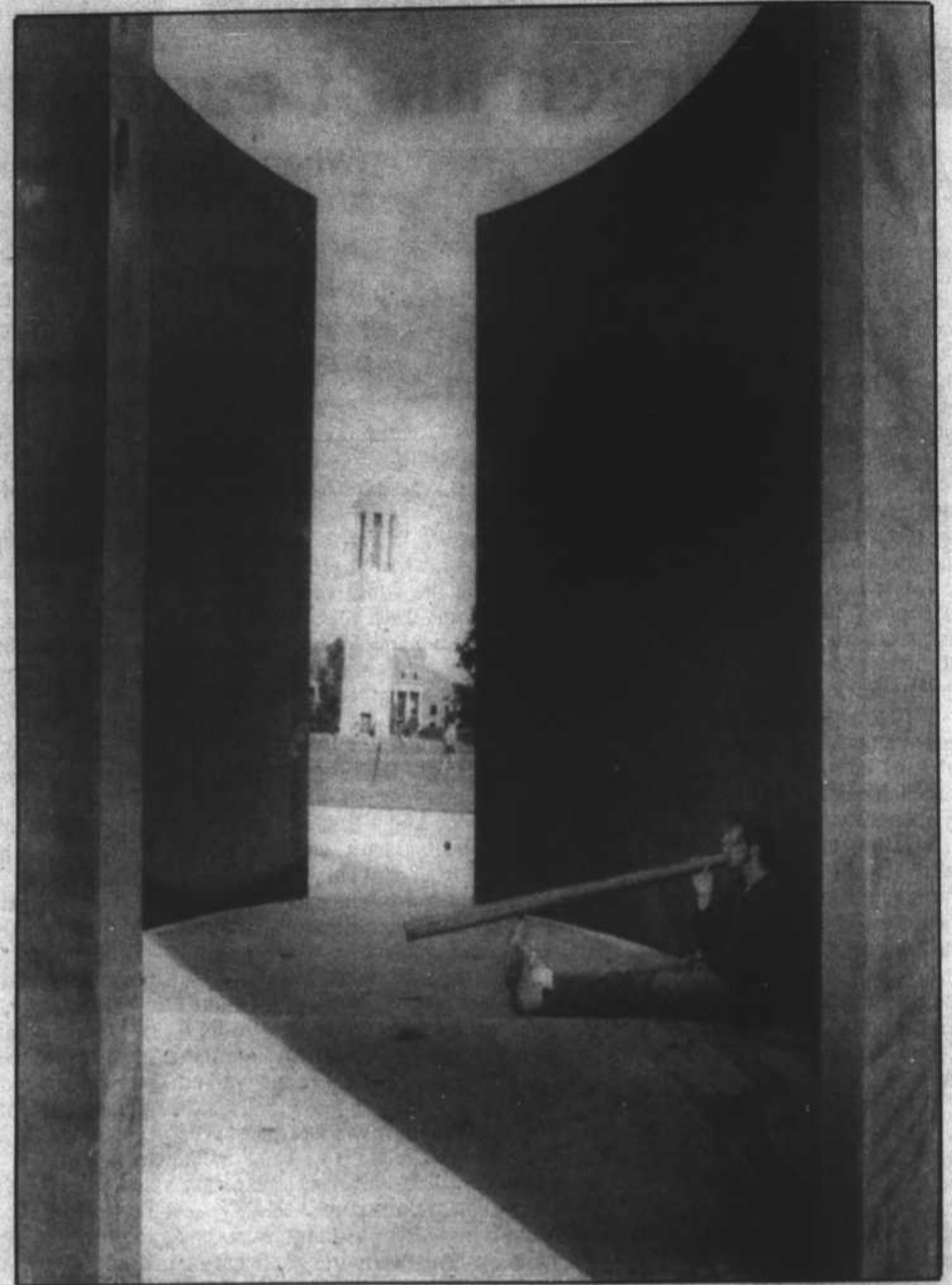
Despite possible problems, Zatechka said he was not displeased with the new policy.

"In retrospect, as I look back, that's the way it ought to be," he said.

Coleman said she and her roommate, Jennifer Pistillo, have been getting along well so far. "I would say it's just like an everyday roommate situation," she said.

Coleman said she enjoyed having a roommate.

"You have to learn to share space, how to give and take in certain situations," she said. "Most of all, I like having a roommate because I'm treated like everyone else."



Kiley Timperley/DN

### What's he didgeridoo-ing?

Dan Kubicki, a junior engineering major, plays a didgeridoo in the middle of Greenpoint Thursday afternoon. A didgeridoo is an Australian aborigine instrument. Kubicki said the acoustics inside Greenpoint are great and enhance the sound of the instrument.

## Cultural Diversity Retreat applications due Monday

From Staff Reports

Applications for UNL's sixth annual Cultural Diversity Retreat, a retreat aimed at helping the University of Nebraska-Lincoln community reach cultural and racial understanding, are due Monday.

The retreat, sponsored by the Racial Pluralism Action Team and the vice chancellor of

student affairs' office, will be Oct. 9 and 10.

John Harris, special assistant to the vice chancellor for student affairs, said he saw the retreat as a chance for students to break down stereotypes and barriers.

Students who are interested in attending the free retreat must apply through the vice chancellor for student affairs' office, 124 Administration Building.

## Relationships

Continued from Page 1

said. If she found a faculty member was romantically involved with a student, she said, she would approach the professor, but not call for an end to the relationship.

Professors who have relationships with students do not make bad role models, Stara said.

"Why would that make them bad?" she said. "I don't see the fact that people are human as detrimental to them being role models."

Professors-student relationships can be risky, she said, but friendships between the two are important.

"Friendships tend to have a lower level of emotion. You don't tend to break off with friends," Stara said. "With dating, there's more emotional backlash."

But, Stara said, professors must be careful with all relationships they have with students—romantic or friendly.

The professor and the student must realize friendly intentions have no romantic implications, she said.

"The dilemma you have with friendships is, 'do both parties think you're friends?'" Stara said. "Does that mean you shouldn't have all of your students out to your house and have a barbecue? No."

A new UNL student mentoring service, the Resident Life Faculty Fellows Program, encourages student-faculty friendships.

The friendly bonds that are made between professors and students will provide students with a richer learning experience from the university, she said.

"You should not exercise caution to the point that you will not allow reasonable conversations and connections to exist," Stara said, "because then part of the growth that should happen at the university can't happen."

"If I'm so over-cautious that I won't talk to you then how can you grow?"

## UNL's policy on faculty-student relationships

Consistent with the intent of Section 4.1 of the By-Laws of the University of Nebraska:

It shall not be the policy of UNL to specifically prohibit sexual or romantic relationships between individuals where a professional power differential exists. One who enters into a sexual or romantic relationship with a student or subordinate must realize that when such a power differential exists within a relationship and a charge of sexual harassment is subsequently lodged, it may be difficult to prove immunity on grounds of mutual consent. Should a sexual, romantic or intimate relationship develop, despite the admonition set forth herein, the line officer, faculty member or supervisor bears a special burden of accountability including the responsibility to make suitable arrangements for the objective performance or academic evaluation of the other person in the relationship.

Relationships between a graduate student and an undergraduate over whom the graduate student has some supervisory responsibility are included under this policy. Other relationships covered by this policy are, but are not limited to, those between a student or employee and an administrator, coach, advisor, counselor or residential staff member who has supervisory responsibility for that student or employee.

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