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EDITORIAL

## Singapore sting

*Torture is extreme for spray-painting car*

Everyone in America — and many in the world — has become familiar with 18-year-old Michael Fay. Fay is the American in Singapore who made the mistake of spray-painting some cars.

His 15 minutes of fame may have to come at the expense of a bamboo rod, administered six times. If Fay passes out during his punishment, he will be revived so he won't miss any of the pain.

Fay's punishment is unquestionably too harsh. The United States should protest the flogging, and President Clinton should do everything he can to have it stopped. The Middle Ages are over, and torture should be as well.

Some people in the United States have applauded Fay's punishment. They believe that if the United States also beat up its criminals, this would be a safer country.

That is unlikely, but in a time when we are debating crime and punishment all over the United States, Fay's case raises important questions.

Singapore is a safer country than the United States. And all Americans would like to see crime reduced.

But what price are we willing to pay to have safer streets? Are we prepared to attempt to reduce crime by beating up teen-agers in public? And would it work if we did?

Punishment in Singapore is one extreme. Punishment in the United States might be another. We are too lenient on criminals and not concerned enough about victims.

Perhaps a middle ground between our two systems would be best. We can undoubtedly get tougher on America's worst offenders. But we should not make the mistake of tightening our crime laws to the point that they are ridiculous.

## Grab a partner

*Safety walk not reflective of female fears*

Representatives from University of Nebraska-Lincoln offices took a walk around campus at 4 a.m. Saturday to test how safe the campus was at night.

Although the group, which included representatives from the Parking Advisory Committee, UNL police, Landscape Services and the Nebraska Union, noticed areas that could be improved, overall they perceived the campus as safe.

Surprise, surprise. There were 13 of them, and 11 were men. Why wouldn't they be safe?

The perceptions of a female student alone at night would be radically different. Missing lights and a few dark areas that seem like a minor problem to a group of officials can be overwhelming to a lone traveller.

Tom Johnson, a parking advisory representative, expressed his disappointment that no students showed up for the walk. Although a student's viewpoint would be helpful, it is unrealistic to expect students to show up at 4 a.m. for a little-publicized administrative event.

Students spend enough time on campus at night to know whether or not they feel safe.

The biannual Safety Tour is a good idea, but participants must realize that the tour is not an exact replica of the student experience.

Students, especially female students, must realize that no matter what is done to improve UNL, the best way to stay safe on campus is to never be alone at night.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Staff editorials represent the official policy of the Spring 1994 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.



FIRST FAN

JOEL STRAUCH

## Attacks on UNL English unfair

The English department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has recently come under fire for its supposed no-brainer writing courses that involve little more than the freewriting of trash and gathering together in small groups to gossip.

These unfair generalizations have been ruthlessly and broadcast around the offices of English professors on campus and have appeared in the local and campus papers.

What frightened me more than seeing these ideas in print was the fact that I heard people on campus — people I know and used to respect — agreeing with many of these ridiculous premises.

This led me to think there might be a grain of truth hidden behind these small-minded accusations. Are there some English professors out there who let students sit around, gossip about their social lives for their entire small group discussions and give them an easy A for spouting garbage in freewriting?

It might be conceivable, although hardly "common knowledge," that in some of the lower-level composition classes, professors allow uncooperative students to get away with lackluster work. But I think the majority of the blame lies on the students who are unwilling to participate in new types of cooperative learning.

In recent years, there have been many changes made in the foundation of our educational system. A lot of people have grown up being used to a traditional education.

Traditionally, the omniscient teacher would spout knowledge from her or his fountainhead into the near-empty receptacles of the students. Students were required to read the "right" books and write the "right" way. Grammar was studied as a science, rather than practiced as a skill or an art form.

Stop me or I'll go on forever. Whenever changes are made, for



I wonder where these people learned to articulate their negative criticisms about the English department of UNL if not in an English classroom?

better or worse, there will always be those people who are too frightened to let go of the security and stability of mommy's skirt.

The changes that have been implemented in the English program are unfamiliar to a lot of people who have had traditional ideas hammered into them. They need to set aside their fear of the unknown and approach it with the open mind of a college student. It might not be the perfect teaching method, but it is arguably better than the simplistic, near-useless "old style" of teaching English.

Some defense needs to be raised for the "socialist" teaching practices of small groups and freewriting.

Obviously, no class can be successfully "on task" for the entire period. I have attended many a lecture in which a huge portion of the audience is either sleeping or babbling among themselves.

I tend to believe that although small groups aren't perfect, they allow students to become more involved with the material they are learning.

Given part ownership of their learning instead of having information monotonously thrown at them, students will be much more likely to actually take part in the process of learning (despite themselves).

Freewriting is another scary idea for students who have always been told what to write and how to write it. But educators have begun to believe

that maybe the teacher doesn't know everything. (Gasp, blasphemy!) Maybe the students know more about what they want to write and the way to write it.

But the key idea that hasn't changed throughout the eras of education is that students are liable for what they learn.

Professors need to take some responsibility for student participation. If they make their lessons horribly boring, then even students who desire to learn have a difficult time. But the fact is that we, as college students, pay for our education.

If we want to spout garbage in our writing or waste our class time talking about how many goldfish we swallowed at a fraternity party last night, there isn't much that professors can do about it.

Despite allegations that UNL is a brain-dead party school, there are many students who are here to learn. I, among them, have found that English classrooms have an environment that is highly conducive to learning.

A final parting question: I wonder where these people learned to articulate their negative criticisms about the English department of UNL if not in an English classroom?

Strauch is a senior secondary education major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Justice

Responding to Sam Kepfield's April 7 column was a difficult decision. Naiveté is generally best left to experience, as life can teach better than anyone. However, this article expresses a viewpoint that must not go unchallenged. I begin with an anecdote.

In 1988, I asked recently retired Nebraska Chief Justice Norman Krivosha to visit my classroom at Lincoln East. A student asked Krivosha why our justice system spent so much time on cases in which the likelihood of guilt was very high. The question was inspired by an attorney who visited the same class a week earlier and openly spoke of defending clients whom he knew were guilty.

The former chief justice answered

elegantly, "In the United States, approximately 96 percent of those who are charged with a crime are convicted. The difference between our system and the former Soviet Union is that 4 percent."

I think it is incumbent on the readers of the Daily Nebraskan to recognize what is expressed in Kepfield's article. I am sure he would be quick to criticize those who argue favorably for the U.S.S.R. and what it represented.

Michael F. Anderson  
doctoral student  
education

### Musician's death

On Friday in Seattle, the singer/guitarist of the rock group Nirvana, Kurt Cobain, ended his life with a

shotgun blast to the head.

Cobain exemplified the aimless experience of so many young people in this country.

Undoubtedly, there are those that will profit from Cobain's death — sensation-seeking media hounds, profit-hungry record labels and the millions of fans who will buy and preserve Nirvana merchandise.

Suicide, as ancient traditions in almost all cultures have warned, is a serious transgression against human evolution. In India, where I come from, there is a strong belief that our desires do determine our fate. If life is meant as a testing ground for our assumptions, then Cobain has failed by choosing not to survive.

Hemant Desai  
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