

MICHAEL JUSTICE

# Late fees can punish innocent

'Tis the season to rejoice and celebrate. A time when joy and happiness penetrates the general madness, greed and insensibility that runs unchecked in this country.

It also is time for New Year's resolutions, which are feeble attempts at self-reform dictated by a change in calendar — as if it were time to buy new milk — that will ultimately fail, because time is sufficient motivation only when it nears expiration. People are procrastinators.

My resolutions usually are simple improvements that, with minor effort, could be achieved. This is, of course, the best way to look good. By setting expectations low, one can be endlessly impressed with the routine things that get accomplished.

This is also the line of thinking here at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln: Aim low, shoot high.

Well, as improbable as it is, I would like to see UNL offer one resolution in particular: Eliminate some of the idiots in the Administration Building.

Sure, parking is frustrating, as is the potential waste of funds for a new engineering school; and it would be nice to have new, functioning equipment in various departments on campus.

But there's nothing worse than spending an afternoon trying to communicate with people who don't listen.

I'm certain that everyone has a particular horror story that they keep close to their heart, and I would like to share mine.

Last spring semester — my first here at UNL — I encountered silliness in action. My student loan was late, and I did not have the funds to pay for my tuition by the due date. I figured that the financial aid people would be understanding, because I couldn't avoid paying them: They get my check first.

Well, they charged me a \$20 late fee, which did not brighten my day. I told them about the situation, and



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all they could say was, "But you were late." For some reason, it did not matter to them that the federal government was late. Oh no, I had to come up with \$5,500, even though I didn't have it. I asked if I should knock off a gas station, but they didn't get it.

After dancing around in circles for 20 minutes with a group of individuals who seemed to share the same brain, I was asked why I hadn't requested a temporary loan to cover the bill until my real loan came in.

By the way, how much can I borrow with this temporary loan? What's that? Only \$1,000? Maybe I've been speaking French this whole time — I said my bill was \$5,500. What will \$1,000 do for me?

None of them had an answer, and that's because there wasn't one. The system is set up for that kind of failure, to generate more revenue from the financially strapped student body.

Guess what, friends: It happened again. Only this time my check came on time. It was my bill that never came.

Early this semester, I gained residency, which lowered my expenses dramatically. While filling out the necessary forms, I changed my address to my current one. Now, one would assume that the departments, not to mention the computer system at UNL, all would be interconnected, yes?

No. My change of address never made it to the student accounts people, or whatever they call

themselves. So I never received a bill. About a week after the due date, I went to find out why UNL hadn't been hounding me for money. Believe it or not, college can get hectic, and bills are not a priority. Once again, they didn't understand.

Here's a sample of my conversation with extra-chromosome lady:

"You have a late fee."  
"I never got a bill."  
"You owe \$20."  
"But, I never got a bill."  
"You're late."  
"But listen ..."  
"\$20 or you can't register, Lateboy."

I would like to tell you that I took control of the situation by slugging her and changing my status on the computer, but that's not true. I'm not good with computers.

As it stands, the university has \$40 of my money that they shouldn't have. I could eat for two weeks on that, pay my phone bill, actually see a movie on the big screen! UNL should not be collecting fees from students who cannot pay because of bureaucratic incompetence.

It is bad enough that we endure steady tuition increases. Late fees are an inexcusable slap in the face to students and need to be eliminated.

Justice is a junior news-editorial and broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

MICHELLE PAULMAN

# UNL lessons learned and lost

There's a line in a Tom Waits song that goes: "I never saw a sunrise until I'd stayed up all night."

If that's true, then I've seen my share of sunrises this semester. In fact, I saw one on Monday morning as I was finishing up the last history paper I would ever have to write. That's E-V-E-R. Ever.

Yep, graduation is barreling down on the last class of 1994 like a crazed rhinoceros in a party hat. If I sound a little loopy, that's because I'm writing this during my 36th straight hour of involuntary sleep deprivation. That graduation rhino is prodding me along: Finish your senior thesis. Don't skip your art history class. Remember to mail that check to your professor. Otherwise, YOU MIGHT NOT GRADUATE!-ate!-ate!-ate-echo-echo.

That phrase fills me with dread, like the thought of the Grinch stealing Christmas drives little kids to tears. All semester, I have been looking forward to the day in December when Spanier Claus will give hundreds of good — and not-so-good — University of Nebraska-Lincoln students what they want most in the whole world: a fancy piece of paper often referred to, for some reason, as a "sheepskin."

Before we get our lamb's flesh, however, we'll have to listen to some schma about how we are about to enter a brave new world and how our education at UNL has prepared us for this brave new world by keeping us up all night studying things that we will forget three hours after leaving this campus.

Call me a cynic, but if you asked me right now to list spe-



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cific facts or theories I have learned at this institution that will prepare me for a brave new world, I would say: 1) Hablo un poco español (I speak a little Spanish) and 2) President Ronald Reagan screwed up his policy in Lebanon in part because he ignored Syria.

The first statement is very useful, in my opinion. The second is not; I just remember it because Reagan and Syria were part of the huge paper I just finished Monday after a sleepless night. Give me time, and I will forget that I even wrote a paper.

Through this haze of graduation fever, I remember that as a freshman, most of my classes were cut and dried — this is the answer, learn it, regurgitate it, and you'll do just fine. Thankfully, that has changed. My last semester was filled with self-generated ideas and projects. It was challenging. It was exciting.

It was marked at times by a severe lack of sleep. It was also one of the few semesters that fit those descriptions. Sure, there has been the occasional class that breaks the mold and stimulates my neurons (I'm pretty sure I learned about neurons in psychology — wait, did I take psychology?), but those classes were too few and far between for my liking.

Somehow, some way, all of us have learned something from this fast-food education — the pack-'em-in-like-cattle lecture classes, the endless-red-tape bureaucracy, and the multitude of I-need-your-student-ID-number transactions.

Some learned to conform. Others deliberately bucked the system and learned free thinking. Most of us have achieved a delicate balance, reserving our thought processes for things that truly deserved our attention and breezing through the rest. And when we're done, we're rewarded with a hunk of ewe's epidermis.

In college, we metamorphose from children who put "Kick Me" signs on their friends' backs to mature young adults who put "Hire Me" in masking tape on their mortar boards. But we don't recall exactly how we got there.

Just like I never saw a sunrise until I'd stayed up all night, I never really saw UNL until I was about to leave it for good. This place has been my home for a quarter of my life, and I'll never see it again ... choke, gasp, sob.

Thanks for the ram's hide, UNL, and everything else, too, whatever it was.

Paulman is a senior news-editorial and history major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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