

# UNL grading system challenged

By Brian Sharp  
Senior Reporter

The current grading policy at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is unhealthy, the faculty senate president said this weekend.

And some members of the NU Board of Regents are concerned students may be suffering under a policy that devalues the university diploma. Members of the board's Academic Affairs Committee discussed the policy Saturday.

Fred Choobineh said in a telephone interview Saturday that more than 30 percent of the grades awarded at UNL each year were A's or A-pluses.

The result, he said, is that a 3.5 GPA doesn't pull the same weight coming from UNL as it does from the University of Purdue or Iowa State University.

"Recruiters (for graduate schools) recognize that perhaps our grade point averages are a little bit higher than other institutions," he said.

For example, he said, a UNL grade point average of 3.5 is equivalent to a 3.1 at Iowa State.

Choobineh delivered that message to the Academic Affairs Committee Friday. The issue was raised by Regent Charles Wilson of Lincoln after faculty senates on the Omaha and Kearney campuses voted to add minus grades to their current grading

policy and UNL rejected the proposal. Those actions resulted in an apparent fracture of a university-wide grading policy.

Faculty senate presidents from Omaha and Kearney also spoke at the meeting and maintained their commitments to minus grades.

Regent Chuck Hassebrook of Walthill said Saturday he wasn't convinced the current policy needed changing, but added that if GPAs were being inflated, the value of degrees was being deflated.

Choobineh said the ills of the current system and inflated GPAs were not a result of the policy. The real problem, he said, is the people using the policy.

"It really doesn't make any difference what grading system we use," Choobineh said. "If we use it appropriately, it's going to work."

James Ford, an associate professor of English, has brought the issue of minus grades before the faculty senate for the past two years. The proposal was rejected both times. But now, he said, increasing attention is being paid to the fact that UNL's policy is unhealthy, as Choobineh described it.

Ford said the vice chancellors for academic and student affairs were going over the grading issue and tracking departmental trends. Discussions also have been held about forming a committee to study UNL grading policy, he said.

The academic climate at UNL is such that grades are being awarded on effort rather than achievement, Ford

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**FRED CHOOBINEH**  
Faculty senate president

said. Evaluating student work is not taken seriously, he said.

Wilson said the board's only role would be to review the current policy and recommend possible action. The board's main interest is to make sure any policy adopted allows for easy student transfer among campuses and that it satisfies the faculty and students.

Choobineh said the faculty presidents still were negotiating, and UNK and UNO were waiting to see if they can bring UNL back into the fold.

That is unlikely, he said. Instead, Choobineh said, they should define the translation of grades into linguistic terms, such as excellent, good and poor.

Over the years, he said, definitions have changed. And now, he said, they're not only different outside of the university but within the NU system.

# Landscape weathers unpredictable spring

By Paula Lavigne  
Senior Reporter

Although April showers bring May flowers, March snows don't do them much good.

Blooming daffodils, tulips, yellow forsythia and other signs of spring on campus may be put on hold after this week.

The National Weather Service predicted rain mixed with flurries and temperatures in the 50s for southeast Nebraska today. But Tuesday through Thursday calls for lows from 10 to 20 and highs from 25 to 35.

Above-normal temperatures in February made plants and trees bloom early, more than three months before Nebraska's last freeze date in the middle of May.

But Nebraska's unpredictable spring weather is a factor that Wilbur Dasenbrock, director of Landscape Services at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, has to contend with every year.

Dasenbrock said temperatures below 20 could damage or destroy early-season flowers such as daffodils, lenten roses, tulips, pasqueflowers and magnolia, as well as witch hazel, redbud trees and forsythia bushes.

"What nature hands you, you have to deal with," he said.

Although the flowers and blossoms would be damaged, he said, the plants would be able to survive. But there are never any guarantees.

"Then there are those surprises when we do get wiped out," he said. Some trees, such as the magnolia, have one chance to bloom, he said, and if they freeze, it's "wait until next year."

The university combats late frost by planting a variety of flowers, trees and bushes so there always are backups, Dasenbrock said.

He said irises, roses, chrysanthemums, late lilacs and other perennial flowers that bloom in late spring, summer or fall were safe from frost damage.

Dasenbrock said his department didn't have the manpower or resources to cover all the plants on campus to protect them from frost damage.

"We rely on common sense and planting things that survive the Nebraska climate."

Planting a variety of vegetation helps ward off the effects of damaging temperatures, drought, hail and wind.

"As many things attack plants as people," he said. "You get colds, pneumonia — you name it. The same thing is true in the plant kingdom."

# Williams

Continued from Page 1

were responsible for their compensation, he said. Last week's stay sent the case back to the county courts for an evidentiary hearing. Federal officials have since expressed reluctance in continuing to pay Williams' legal fees.

The county has a public defender for that purpose, but Williams has previously raised a conflict-of-interest issue in that a former employee from that office was a witness for the prosecution.

Lacey, who participated in the original prosecution of Williams, said no decision had been reached as of late Friday. District Court Judge Donald Endacott will set the hearing date for Williams. Endacott was out of the office Friday, and Lacey said he was not yet prepared to ask Endacott for the hearing.

Richard Shugrue, a Creighton University law professor, said the issue that resulted in the execution stay was "hardly a technicality, at least at this stage of the game."

At 10:01 last Wednesday morning, before a room packed with reporters and photographers, a stay of execution was lifted by the Board of Pardons.

The meeting grew tense after Secretary of State Scott Moore, the only member arguing for a hearing, charged the governor and attorney general with being involved in "an ongoing battle to see who can be the toughest."

The three-member panel voted unanimously, however, to deny Williams' request for a hearing, which had resulted in a stay being issued Tuesday evening. A representative from the penitentiary then told the board the execution could be carried out in three hours.

Moments later, the Nebraska Supreme Court stayed the execution indefinitely.

The stay came after the court received a statement from Barbara Boyce, a juror in Williams' trial. A jury is instructed to avoid the media, to not discuss the case and to not take notes during trial. Boyce stated that she focused on what was said during the trial and made notes, including the specifics of times and places, when she was alone.

Boyce stated that she used maps at home to verify "how plausible it would be that a man under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol could have executed the flight path he did."

Williams had left Lincoln after committing the murders and traveled to Cherokee County, Iowa; St. Paul, Minn.; and Chicago before returning

to Lincoln, where he was arrested.

"I felt that I could not accept the plea of guilty by reason of insanity. ... I presented this thinking to the other members of the jury ... (and) did explain the specifics of how far apart these locations were."

No such maps or information were presented in the courtroom by either side. After the verdict, Williams' law-

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**RICHARD SHUGRUE**  
Creighton University law professor

yers tried to interview the jurors, Shugrue said, but they refused.

"Had this been known 17 years ago, it clearly would have been a legitimate basis for appeal," he said.

Shugrue said the court would decide if the information influenced the jurors and if it helped determine their decision. The problem, he said, is that not all the jurors can be located, and there is a question of how reliable their testimony is 17 years later, given the obvious pressure on their answers.

In the meantime, he said, Lacey will be under extreme political pressure to not appear as if he is negotiating with the defense.

Lacey said he had not talked to Boyce as of Friday but was interviewing the other jurors.

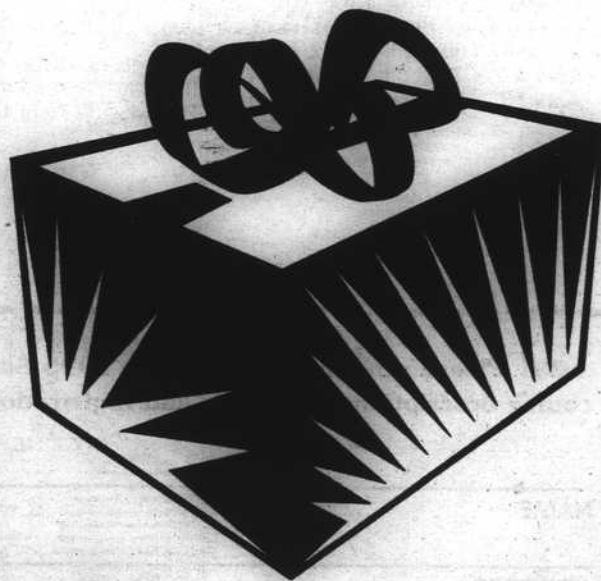
"Jury misconduct strikes directly at the integrity of due process," Shugrue said. "It's a very interesting legal problem. This whole procedure proves to us once again that no system, including the criminal justice system, is perfect."

No matter what the decision, both sides could appeal all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, Shugrue said. If a mistrial is declared, a new trial would most likely result and Williams would remain in prison.

If he is acquitted of all charges, he would then be extradited to Iowa for a rape and murder he allegedly committed there the day after the Lincoln murders, Powers said.

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