

OPINION

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James Mehsling/DN

Minimum benefits

Wage hike will hurt more than help

Every year about this time, millions of Americans receive their W2 forms and are slapped in the face with reminders of how hard they work — and how little they're paid for it.

And this year, like last year, the Unicameral is entertaining legislation to raise the state's minimum wage.

The first, and most obvious reaction is to celebrate the wisdom of such a benevolent act.

That reaction, however, is not the correct one.

In spite of the instant gratification of a minimum-wage hike, proposed to raise minimum pay in Nebraska from \$4.35 to \$5.15 per hour, the negative implications of such a move far outweigh the benefits (which, by the way, are fewer than many would guess).

The most obvious drawback to raising the minimum wage is the potential for downsizing.

Employers, faced with the choice between eliminating jobs or swallowing the costs of increased wages, often will choose the former. Minimum-wage earners cannot afford to be laid off.

If employers choose to keep their full contingent of minimum-wage workers, increased production costs likely will be balanced by increased prices for goods and services. Ironically, this move would nullify the benefits low-wage earners could gain from a minimum-wage increase, because much of their newfound wealth would be consumed by new, higher prices for goods and services.

In addition, even disregarding the potential drawbacks, a minimum-wage increase in Nebraska is unnecessary.

Nebraska, by virtue of its relatively low unemployment rate, has fairly high wages, even at the lower end of the pay scale. Because unemployment is low, employers looking to hire workers have to compete with each other for prospective employees. This competition often manifests itself in higher starting wages.

In other words, a mandated minimum-wage increase is not needed, because salaries are being governed by the free-market mechanism.

That's the way the system is supposed to work.

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MEHSLING/DN



Must you?

Have reason for using technology in class

I was asleep.

Sitting in a technological marvel, with the glowing heavens being spun over my head and frolicsome music playing in the background, I was asleep.

Now let me clear something up — I was not drunk. I was sitting in Morrill Hall's Planetarium, sleeping.

I'd gone there with my astronomy class to marvel over how technology could re-create a star-lit sky without it even being dark outside.

Instead, I learned that it was too dark in the planetarium to use my star wheel, that the professor enjoyed his "high-tech" laser pointer far too much and that the "cosmos" music was just about right to sleep to.

The point of this example is simple. Technology, while new and exciting, often fails to teach students anything when used in the classroom.

Let's face it, technology is part of our lives, whether we like it or not.

One of my friends once said: (spoofing an AT&T commercial) "Have you ever flushed your toilet from another room? Well, you will ..."

Technology has made The Clapper famous, video game systems god-like edifices and holding open an automatic door for a girl utterly impossible for a guy.

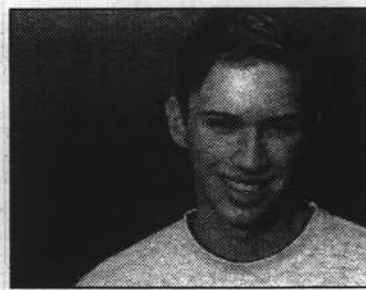
Prevalent as technology is, when should it be used in the classroom?

Technology should be used only when it makes a task a whole lot easier and when there's a clear purpose for it.

To emphasize this, let's go back to my astronomy class. Now, while I was dreaming to "Cosmos" in the planetarium, the other half of my class was back in our usual classroom.

They were taught by our professor, who was in the planetarium with his "high-tech" laser pointer.

How, you ask, can they be taught by a professor who's in another building?



Kasey Kerber

"Technology has made The Clapper famous, video game systems god-like edifices and holding open an automatic door for a girl utterly impossible for a guy."

Thanks to technology, he didn't need to be there. He was simply videotaped giving a lecture, and the lecture was then projected onto a 10-foot high screen.

It sounds great, until you actually start watching the lecture. During it, the professor refers to notes he has placed on an overhead projector. The person videotaping the lecture, however, never zooms in on the essential, have-to-have-them-or-I-fail-dammit!!! notes. Therefore, they appear to be nothing more than a blur, making the entire lecture a failure.

Yet if students walk three feet out of the room and look at a glass case on the wall, they'll discover that inside it are ... (dramatic music) ... the notes!

Yes, the notes were in the hallway the entire time. So why did students watch a lecture from which they had a minuscule chance of getting anything useful?

Well, this was a time when technology was not used to make

things "a whole lot easier." Instead, it probably drove some students to form a violent gang called the "Chronic Eclipse," wasted 50 minutes of the Chronic Eclipse's time and whatever amount of time the professor put into making the videotape.

To see when technology has not had a "clear purpose," we'll take a quick glance at my English literature class.

The second week of the semester, we spent two out of three classes in a computer lab. The purpose was to teach us how to create a web page and expose us to technology that will be the future.

I went to class. I made a personal web page. I had my picture put on it. I learned to change the color of the background screen.

Now let me tell you what I didn't learn: literature.

Yes, the entire purpose of the class had been lost somewhere between text files, color chart numbers, and a high-tech "scanner" camera. For two days, I learned nothing about literature — the whole reason I was there.

Professors often feel obligated to use money in their budget on available technology. If they don't feel obligated, they feel excited. Imagine the joy created by being able to use a "high-tech" laser pointer or by having your face projected onto a 10-foot screen.

I'm not saying that technology should never be used in the classroom. I'm saying it should be more closely examined before being thrown at students with "Ishtar" results.

Technology can be a wonderful thing, but we have to examine every aspect of it. Otherwise it will end up as what one of my friends would say:

"Have you ever eaten a meal in Hong Kong while you're sitting at home in Dallas. Well, you will ..."

Kerber is a freshman news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Please
Write Back!

Send your brief letters to: Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 "R" Street, Lincoln, NE 68588, or Fax to (402) 472-1761, or e-mail <letters@unlinfo.unl.edu>. Letters must be signed and include a phone number for verification.