

# OPINION PACKAGES

## OUR VIEW

### Unforgettable UNL must remember its mission: education

Almost 200 students who were accepted to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln this year did not have ACT scores high enough to meet the new academic performance standards that will take effect next fall.

That's not really a high number, considering the freshman class has thousands of students, but it could be the start of something worrisome.

Chancellor James Moeser came to the university with several goals in mind, but he strongly emphasized one goal, which was "to make a degree from this university mean something."

Though the stricter admission standards were in place before Moeser arrived, he commended them and didn't rule out the possibility that they could be raised again in a few years.

He also pushed for creating a separate honors college, recruiting more students from outside the state and competing with Ivy League schools.

This is admirable, and will mean a great deal to the prestige of Nebraska's alumni.

But with all the excitement for a top-notch university, UNL should not lose touch with its roots and the people it represents.

So far, UNL has maintained a tradition of adhering to its land-grant mission: to use Nebraska resources — students in this case — and give a product back to the state. It has also lived up to the expectations of a state with a concentrated urban population balanced with a scattered rural one.

Basically, it was here to serve the students — not itself.

Raising academic standards to make the university join the upper crust of the nation shouldn't turn it into an elitist institution leaving some students with the crumbs.

It would be more admirable if a university was brave enough to take on those students who didn't meet the standards and say, "OK, before you graduate, we will work with you and help you become as intelligent and prepared as your fellow students who started here with 4.0 GPAs and ACT scores above 30." Let them in, but don't let them flounder.

And it's probably just accepted that a top-ranked high school scholar can go through the new UNL honors program and come out with an honorary degree.

But if you really want a degree to mean something, offer the chance — and the help — to those students who never thought they could earn one.

## BRIEFLY

### Isn't that convenient?

Nebraska Unions Director announced recently that a planned convenience store to be included in the renovated Nebraska Union will become part of University Bookstore. Convenience? In the bookstore? Is that really possible?

## MEHSLING'S VIEW



...MEANWHILE AT A UNL PARKING COMMITTEE MEETING...

## GUEST VIEW

### Free minds, open expression *Behavioral expectations' trample civil rights*

**Editor's Note:** This guest column was written by Dwayne Ball, associate professor of marketing; Joseph R. Stimpff, assistant professor of anthropology; and David Moshman, professor of educational psychology.

The past decade has seen numerous attempts at U.S. universities to promulgate harassment guidelines, speech codes and other behavioral regulations. Sometimes, perhaps, real harm to students or employees has been prevented. As an additional result, however, students and faculty who have asserted controversial ideas or used unpleasant manners of expression have been disciplined, expelled or fired. Expensive legal battles have erupted over civil liberties. Many of these codes have been withdrawn in whole or in part. It is against this background that we wish to respond to the recently released report of the Chancellor's Task Force on Conduct Standards and Behavioral Expectations.

The task force was created partially in response to concerns over the way in which off-campus violence by a football player against his former girlfriend was handled by university authorities last fall. We share everyone's dismay over any act of violence such as this. We share the desire of many people to see a municipal, state or federal court system deal firmly, swiftly and effectively with criminal violence.

Yet, at many points, the report refers not to violence, other illegal acts, or even to academic dishonesty, but to "negative behaviors," "inappropriate behaviors," "abusive behaviors," "verbal abuse," "disrespect," the "disintegration of behavioral standards" and "problems concerning the attitude..." of some students. The task force has recommendations. For example, as a student or employee:

■ you would be offered the opportunity (it's not clear if you would be required) to attend education sessions to inform you as to what "inappropriate behaviors" are; and

■ you might be required to sign

a statement that you agree to follow a "creed of behavioral expectations," although there is no specific statement of exactly what would be included in this creed.

In addition, the task force asserts university authority to require you to report yourself to the university if you've been convicted of crimes against persons or property off campus. You'd have to report your arrests, too, even if you are innocent. If you are an "agent of the university," you would also have to report on your friends applying for admission or a job.

We are not concerned by some of the 16 categories of recommendations in the report. But we are very troubled by how far the task force may have gone beyond addressing the problems of illegal acts and academic dishonesty on campus. Some of these recommendations run contrary to what a free citizen should expect from his or her government or from a tax-supported state university.

To begin, the coerced signing of a creed of behavioral expectations smacks of the anti-communist loyalty oaths of the 1950s. Further, with so many undefined words for "negative behaviors," it is impossible to tell from the report how far the university is supposed to go in regulating us. Today, some people would define mere rudeness, name-calling and loud disagreements as "abusive" or "inappropriate." Would discourteous speech become an offense? Which words, gestures or other acts would be punished? The report does not say, nor does it offer guidance to future decision-makers. But even more worrisome than these specific recommendations is the pervasive assumption in the document that the university has any authority at all to regulate "negative behaviors" without specifying precisely what those are at the time the authority is claimed.

Let us put forward some alternative propositions. Here are a few basic rights we believe you should have as a member of any university community:

■ You should not be required to sign any oaths as a condition of

employment or student status.

■ You should never have to fear that the university will monitor your behavior off campus at all, nor on campus for anything other than illegal acts or academic dishonesty.

■ You should expect that the university will respect your right to hold your own opinions, no matter how offensive or unpopular, and not coerce you to attend events to "improve" them.

■ You should be able to express an opinion on any matter using any words, pictures or gestures you wish (away from someone else's private living or working area), no matter how offensive or upsetting it may be to anyone (and allow others the same right).

■ In a classroom, you should be able to express whatever opinion you like on the topic under discussion (and allow others the same right), without fear that anyone who finds it offensive can have you charged with some sort of violation, reduce your grade or otherwise affect your status as a teacher or student.

■ You should be in all ways free from university regulation of your behavior, within civil law, except in specific and well-defined cases in which the university simply could not conduct teaching or research without such regulation, and can prove it.

We believe, not in a bland "balance between the... rights of the individual and the needs of the university community," as the task force does, but in the aggressive assurance of individual rights first and foremost. There are too many examples in history of well-meaning attempts to create a well-ordered society by compromising civil liberties. Once such a "balance" principle has been established, further destruction of individual rights is almost inevitable.

Responsibility, decency, compassion, respect and courtesy are signs of the good society that all thoughtful people seek. But if such behavior is purchased at the cost of official coercion or intimidation, we no longer have a community of free people, and the university's mission has lost its meaning.

**EDITOR**  
Doug Kouma

**OPINION EDITOR**  
Anne Hjermsman

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

Doug Peters  
Matt Waite  
Paula Lavigne  
Mitch Sherman  
Beth Narans

## EDITORIAL POLICY

Unsigned editorials are the opinions of the Fall 1996 Daily Nebraskan. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, its employees, its student body or the University of Nebraska Board of Regents. A column is solely the opinion of its author. The Board of Regents serves as publisher of the Daily Nebraskan; policy is set by the Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board. The UNL Publications Board, established by the regents, supervises the production of the newspaper. According to policy set by the regents, responsibility for the editorial content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its student employees.

## LETTER POLICY

The Daily Nebraskan welcomes brief letters to the editor and guest columns, but does not guarantee their publication. The Daily Nebraskan retains the right to edit or reject any material submitted. Submitted material becomes the property of the Daily Nebraskan and cannot be returned. Anonymous submissions will not be published. Those who submit letters must identify themselves by name, year in school, major and/or group affiliation, if any. Submit material to: Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St. Lincoln, Neb. 68583-0448. E-mail: letters@unlinfo.unl.edu.