

Just another number

Columnist is caught between the cracks



LANE HICKENBOTTOM is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan photographer and columnist.

If you are new to this university, you have yet to feel the funk of how little this place cares about you.

If you don't like feeling like a statistic, then you have until next Wednesday to quit the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and still keep every stinking cent of your tuition.

If you enjoy feeling like a simple number, then UNL is the place to be. It offers e-mail accounts that are numerical with no suggestion as to whom the account belongs. Grades here are posted based on the last four digits of your Social Security number. Speaking of Social Security numbers, be prepared to dish it out approximately 5,007,319 times in your four- to five-year stay at this fine establishment.

To further prove my point that the students at UNL are nothing more than numbers to the U's administrative staff, let me demonstrate what kind of first day of school I had.

On Monday I met a girl who was desperately trying to get into a class I had to drop. Since I had to get out of the class and she needed to get into it, we decided to walk to the administration building together so she could take the spot I would leave available.

At the registration window, I told the lady working the desk my university name, 123-45-6789. Then she told me that I couldn't drop

because I wasn't registered.

"Not registered?" I asked "For the class or not at all?"

"You are not registered at all."

I found this pretty surprising because for this semester I had made damn sure I registered during priority registration (I have had a history of trying to register on the last possible day. Take my advice: it is a bad habit).

She went on to tell me that Love Library put a hold on my registration and that I had been dropped from my classes last week.

Only after giving the librarian my Social Security number was she able to tell me that I had a late fee of \$15. Turns out that all along they had been sending the late fee notices to an address that I had more than three years and five moves ago.

So while at the library, I filled out an address form complete with my legal name, Lane Hickenbottom; my university name, 123-45-6789; and my e-mail address, 0976836295628016238381723@bigred.unl.edu.

I find it hard to believe that the university does not have the technology to link the student address database of administration with that of the library.

So there it is: I got dropped for \$15. When you consider that I have a tuition bill of over a thousand dollars each semester, it seems silly that the university decided that a fine, about 1.5 percent of my tuition bill, was more important than my total bill.

If administrators view me as an important part of the university, they would have made a better attempt to get a hold of me to clear the matter up.

There isn't a good reason for their inability to contact me; I'm not that hard to get a hold of. If the Love Library people hadn't heard back from me after sending notices to a bunk address, they could have simply dialed zero on their phones

and

asked the university operator for my number or address. They could have looked in the Aliant Communications phone book or dialed 411 for information. **And most logical of all, before telling administration to drop me from classes, they could have asked administration what my address is.**

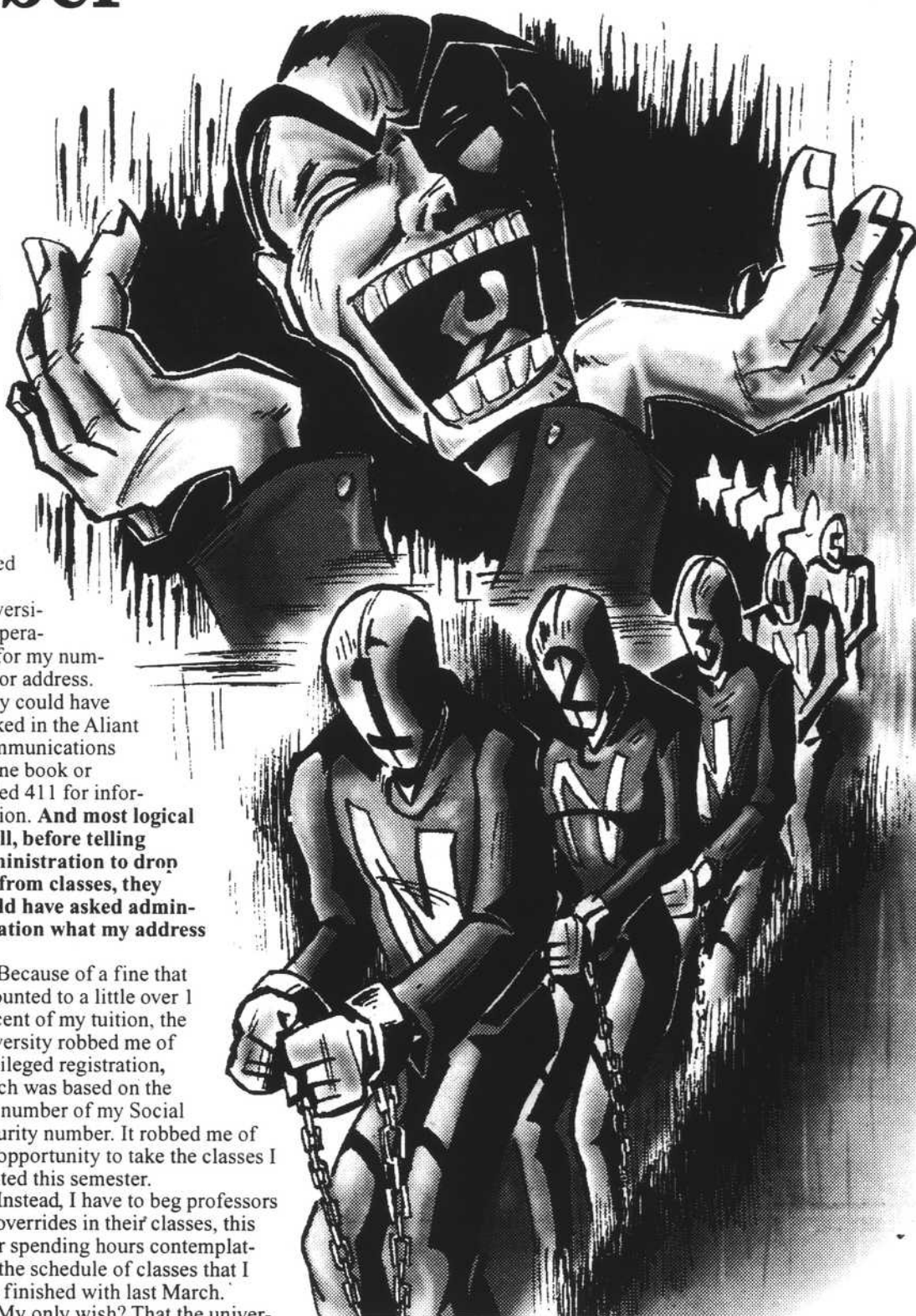
Because of a fine that amounted to a little over 1 percent of my tuition, the university robbed me of privileged registration, which was based on the last number of my Social Security number. It robbed me of the opportunity to take the classes I wanted this semester.

Instead, I have to beg professors for overrides in their classes, this after spending hours contemplating the schedule of classes that I was finished with last March.

My only wish? That the university would have tried contacting me rather than simply processing me.

Yes, Wednesday is the last day to drop from UNL and still keep all your money.

So if you want to avoid asking for an override to get into a lecture



class that "teaches" 500 students in one big room, giving your Social Security number to everybody and their kid sisters 5,007,319 times over the next four to five years or becoming a statistic, then before

Wednesday call N-Roll at 472-7272. You'll have to punch in your Social Security number one last time, but after you are logged into the system press 9 for your transaction code. You won't be sorry.

Talk is cheap

But obligatory introductions are in order



MATT PETERSON is a senior English and news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

I've never been one to dwell on myself much. Whether it be in writing or in everyday conversation, I simply don't have much to say for myself.

But as this is the first column of my post-secondary portfolio, I feel obligated to share where I'm coming from, first geographically, second philosophically. Perhaps somewhere down the line this account will help justify the alleged ignorance of the moment.

Not that I expect people to pin this article to their bulletin boards and use it as a reference for my future

exploits. If, however, this column manages to strike a chord in even a handful of readers willing to bear with me in the weeks to come, it will have served its purpose.

I've been a Nebraskan all my life and hope to remedy the situation as soon as possible.

Not that I hate this state. After all, Omaha was a great place to grow up — low crime, a good education, and practically zero unemployment (hallelujah for telemarketing, right?). And Lincoln's a great place to visit (preferably on Saturday afternoons during football season), but, quite frankly, I'm tired of living here.

Nebraska has been good to me, and I'll have no misgivings in eventually claiming my Midwestern roots. I simply share the unfortunately prevalent assumption that upon receipt of my college diploma, this state will have nothing more to offer me, and therefore destine me to the fate of a Husker expatriate.

Now that you know where I'm from, you should know who it is I think I am.

Most of my acquaintances agree that I'm not the easiest person to know, so perhaps I can shed some

light on the subject whether it be for them or for those friends I have yet to meet.

I don't talk much, although I don't see myself as being particularly shy. I simply don't have much to say, and thinking — and occasionally listening — usually takes precedence. Talk's cheap.

As far as my social platform is concerned, I try not to devote myself to anything — most causes have an unfortunate tendency to disappoint.

During high school, I fancied myself a nonconformist (the name of my newspaper column was "Against the Grain"), but came off as self-righteous and pretty pretentious in the process. Now, I simply am too indifferent to rebel against anything.

I think my sense of morality is fairly square, probably too much so, because I have a hell of a time finding trouble, even when I'm looking for it.

I've lived a great deal of my life in an attempt to avoid regret, and now I have a feeling I'm going to regret it.

Most of my friends consider me cynical, but I prefer the term skeptical. If, as I've heard it said, a skeptic is one who questions everything

while a cynic is one who knows everything, then I have a long way to go before stepping up to cynicism.

While I apparently have yet to determine who I am, I have a fair idea of what this column should be. It has always been my understanding that a newspaper column should be primarily persuasive rather than either expository or argumentative.

All too often, I read columns expounding the details of another uneventful summer vacation or exorcising the idiosyncrasies of an annoying roommate. Granted, there is a certain appeal in realizing just how similar the human condition (or should I say the college condition) can be, and there will always be room for the occasional Dave Barry column (especially when I'm up against a deadline, and the only thing I can think about is my roommate's slovenly ways ... although, he's a hell of a good guy). But in the end, I'd rather a column make me think than make me laugh.

The catharsis of such a public forum can also prove disastrous to a writer's credibility. I equate this iniquity to the story of "The Boy Who Cried 'Wolf.'" Ranting usually lacks

eloquence, but in abundance, it inevitably lacks effect.

I would also contend that an opinion column should be a work in progress rather than in stasis, even upon its completion. My own opinions are constantly changing whether by conscious or subconscious means, and therefore I see this as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

In its purest form, an opinion column should discuss a perceived problem and present a solution; its purpose should not be to pick a fight or make a friend. Such ulterior motives are at cross-purposes to the persuasive intent of opinion writing.

During my own lackluster career as a "journalist," I've broken every rule I just laid down and quite a few others I'd rather not mention. For that matter, I'm sure this very column, as well as many to come, will be guilty of these same transgressions.

I've spent the past three years coming to terms with my shortcomings without subjecting any more innocent bystanders to my writing than necessary. We'll have to see, fair bystander, just how far I've come.

But enough about me ...