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Our
VIEW

Driving drunk kills

Student's death is tragic reminder

Laura Cockson should not be dead today. She should be as alive as your best friend, your girlfriend, your sister, your cousin, your student, your employee.

You.

Laura was killed Saturday when 25-year-old Jeffrey Ireland, later arrested for drunken driving and motor vehicle homicide, rammed his car into the side of the vehicle in which Laura was a passenger. Laura's two sisters, Sarah and Erin, also were critically injured.

In 1997, about 95 people were killed in drunken driving accidents in Nebraska. Laura could very well be another statistic, another number to simply add to this year's list.

Tell that to her sisters while they recover. Tell that to her parents. Tell that to her sisters at Gamma Phi Beta Sorority.

Tell that to our senior sports reporter who was Laura's roommate.

It hits home.

But for some people, it just doesn't hit hard enough. There's a point to how many times someone can preach "it could happen to you" where it's obvious that no one is listening.

Too many supposedly mature college students still think drinking and driving is cool.

Is it just as cool as thinking about the twisted metal and glass embedded in the body and face of your best friend?

Is it just as cool as getting a call from your parents saying they think your sister is dead but aren't sure because they can't recognize her bloodied face?

Is it just as cool to spend the rest of your life holding Mom's hand through slots in the jail cell bars because you were too "embarrassed" to call a friend - or a cab - for a ride home?

If this warning has to be graphic enough to scare you into reason, then so be it. Whatever it takes is better than mourning the senseless death of another University of Nebraska-Lincoln student before the year is through.

On St. Patrick's Day in 1995, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 55 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes nationwide. That's about one for each state. Don't let it be Nebraska.

Let this word of caution - and the death of your fellow student - weigh heavily on your conscience as you toast the Irish at the bars this evening.

Do not drink and drive. Do not let your friends drink and drive.

Do not take this as a generic public service message.

Take it to heart.

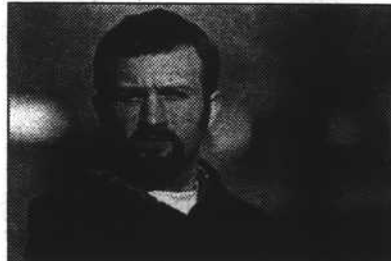
Our staff extends its condolences to Laura Cockson's family and friends, and to her roommate, Shannon Heffelfinger, Daily Nebraskan senior sports reporter.

Haney's
VIEW



Unfinished business

Affirmative action still vital in our imperfect society



SHAWN MEYSENBURG is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Racism lives. Yes, even in 1998, people continue to be judged by what they look like rather than who they are.

For this reason, we need affirmative action.

Programs used by government agencies, businesses, schools and the like to give minorities a fair shake in obtaining employment have endured much criticism in recent years. Why?

A variety of reasons exist for this phenomenon.

First, many people believe that affirmative action gives an "unfair" advantage to members of minorities. Some are afraid affirmative action policies could hurt their chances of finding employment; they believe whites might miss out on job opportunities.

Is this true? In some cases, maybe. But ask yourself this: If affirmative action policies did not exist, would minorities get a fair chance at finding a good job? Not always.

Though most companies, colleges, etc., would probably be fair in hiring and accepting minorities, there may be some who would not. We need to ensure that equal opportunity for minorities is protected; we need affirmative action.

The day may arrive when we'll live in a color-blind society. Hopefully, affirmative action will one day not be needed. That time, though, is still far away.

Another thing to remember about affirmative action policies is that they're set up only when needed. Also, they're usually set up to be done away with once their objectives have been met.

When affirmative action is not needed, it's not used.

Therefore, any law that would prohibit affirmative action would be dangerous.

While companies would still be prohibited from practicing discrimination, they might not do all they can to ensure that their hiring practices are fair. This could cause problems for members of minorities.

Affirmative action policies are needed to ensure that equal opportunity exists for all.

Affirmative action also attempts to right the wrongs of the past, some say. Minorities have, after all, suffered cruel discrimination for hundreds of years at the hands of white people.

Some would argue: "You can't make up for wrongs done in the past." That's a bunch of crap. Yes, it is difficult to right the wrongs of the past, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

A couple of weeks ago, the Daily Nebraskan ran an article about a local African-American man who had served in a highly regarded Army Air Corps unit in World War II. He retired from the army as a lieutenant colonel and began teaching here in Lincoln.

When he attempted to purchase a house, his would-be neighbors protested, believing the presence of

an African-American family in the neighborhood would devalue their property. This event is not ancient history; he still lives in that house.

The point of this story is this: Although this man can no longer benefit from affirmative action, his immediate offspring can. He can, at least, have the satisfaction of knowing that his children may not have to suffer the same types of discrimination that he had to suffer.

In this way, affirmative action can be used to right the wrongs our society and country has committed against minorities.

To be sure, our country has come a long way in the battle against racism. Opportunities exist for minorities now that they could not have dreamed of a generation ago.

Members of minorities have come to occupy high positions in the public and private world, and racism is no longer as socially acceptable as it once was.

Still, we're not rid of this problem yet. As long as minorities occupy prisons in disproportionate amounts, we need to work against racism.

As long as people continue to be judged by the color of their skin instead of by what they do, we need to wage war against the festering cancer that is racism.

For this reason, we must not do away with affirmative action, despite people's objections to it. No, it's not perfect and it will always be controversial.

Still, I believe affirmative action is necessary to ensure that all people in this great country of ours have the opportunity to make something of themselves.

Let's keep the American dream alive; let's hang on to affirmative action.

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