

Husker revision

Rutgers professor defends attack on NU athletics

Editor's note: Each Tuesday this semester, the Daily Nebraskan will print an opinion column from a university faculty or staff member. Each works at the University of Nebraska or is involved with an issue that affects our campus or our students.

WILLIAM C. DOWLING is a professor of English at Rutgers University in Princeton, N.J.

When a story about the Rutgers 1000 campaign against "professionalized" college athletics appeared in the Daily Nebraskan last semester, we got a blizzard of e-mail messages from outraged Huskers.

Most began with a question: How dare we use Nebraska as an example of a university where football overshadowed academic and intellectual values?

Then came the eerie part. Message after message went on to say exactly the same thing: Nebraska had to be a "leading" or an "excellent" institution of higher learning because it had more "Academic All-Americans" than any other university in the world — Notre Dame, or Stanford, or Harvard, or, presumably, Oxford or the Sorbonne.

Each sender clearly thought he or she was making a tremendously original point. At our end, however, the effect was bizarre, as though a huge number of clocks had been wound up to strike together, or a million robots programmed to start chanting "Academic All-Americans, Academic All-Americans" when anyone hinted that Cornhusker football might be just a wee bit more important than, say, Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations or Russell's Principia Mathematica in the life of the average UNL undergraduate.

I want to return to this "Academic All-American" issue, but first let me try to clear up a misunderstanding about our engagement with Nebraska football. It all began when the students in Rutgers 1000 put up on their Web page something they called the Herbie Husker Award. An important fact is that this original use of Herbie made no negative or derogatory mention of UNL. It simply announced that the Herbie Husker Award would be given monthly to that person or group who "had done most to help Rutgers resemble the University of Nebraska."

Notice that there's no insult here. It's true that alert readers might sense a soupçon of irony, but it's also true that the mention of UNL was purely neutral. If you thought that having a huge and prominent football operation was a good thing for a university, as do Cornhusker fans and some Rutgers alumni "boosters," you

were bound by your own assumptions to take the Herbie Award as a genuine compliment. That was part of the (admittedly ironic) point.

Things didn't start to get contentious until Rutgers 1000 got attacked by an outfit called the Collegiate Licensing Company, which kept sending registered letters saying that our use of Herbie constituted "trademark infringement and unfair competition" because Herbie was used by the University of Nebraska "in connection with products, promotions and advertising."

At first, we thought this was a joke. UNL was, after all, an institution of higher learning, not a Jiffy Lube franchise. Then, as we researched the Collegiate Licensing Company, we began to suspect that these people took themselves seriously. One story that turned up, for instance, indicated how proud CLC had been to be associated with the University of Tennessee in marketing 40,000 "Lady Vols" mascot dolls through Wendy's hamburger outlets. ("Imagine," said one of our student members, "if Harvard started merchandising Veritas snack trays through Burger King.") Then someone located, on the Web, the "Husker Mall," an official University of Nebraska site featuring such items as the Husker Video 5-Pack and the Tom Osborne Apparel and Collectibles line. "Uh-oh," we said.

Still, our impulse was to guess that UNL hadn't thought through the implications of being represented in this way. I called Mr. Chris Bahl, UNL's director of marketing and promotions, suggesting that UNL would look a lot more impressive by taking the high road on this one. Send us a letter, I urged, saying that UNL understands that the Herbie award is a bit of tongue-in-cheek irony in the context of a First Amendment-protected public debate.

Take the spotlight off the sordid, commercialized, "Husker Mall," aspect of UNL's athletics operation. He said he'd see what he could do.

We didn't hear from Mr. Bahl. We heard again from our old friends at Collegiate Licensing — another dreary registered letter going on about "trademark infringement," "commercial interests," and "promotions and advertising." So we said: what the hell, we've got better things to do. We'll change the award to Hubie Cornpone, send CLC a letter making it clear why we think any institution of higher learning is sadly diminished by association with them, and forget the whole thing. Then the Daily Nebraskan got onto the story, did an interview with me in which I uttered some home truths about how the "football factory" image wasn't helping the University of Nebraska any, and the e-mail started pouring into the Rutgers 1000 campaign.

Which brings us back to "Academic All-Americans." There are a lot of reasons, I've come to think, why Nebraskans shouldn't keep parroting this nonsense. The first is that, as a little research brought to light, the Academic All-American designation is itself a commercial promotion. What our outraged Husker correspondents call academic All-Americans are properly known as "GTE Academic All-Americans." GTE is the newest corporate moniker for what used to be General Telephone and Electric.

This explains a trivia question that became popular around Rutgers 1000 headquarters: "When Nebraska played in the Tostitos Corn Chips Fiesta Bowl, how many General Telephone and Electric Academic All-Americans too'd the field?"

The second reason is more serious. The "Academic All-American" ploy is transparently part of the machinery of virtue of the NCAA uses to try to pretend that Division IA football and basketball recruits aren't semi-professional players being passed off as college students. The problem is that such empty PR backfires. If the athletes really were college students, no one would need all this elaborate and costly machinery — tutorial programs, study halls, solemn nonsense about "graduation rates" and "Academic All-Americans" — to get them to do, or celebrate them for doing, what real students at real colleges and universities do purely as a matter of course.

Besides, the rest of country isn't buying it. I remember a joke that went around when UNL

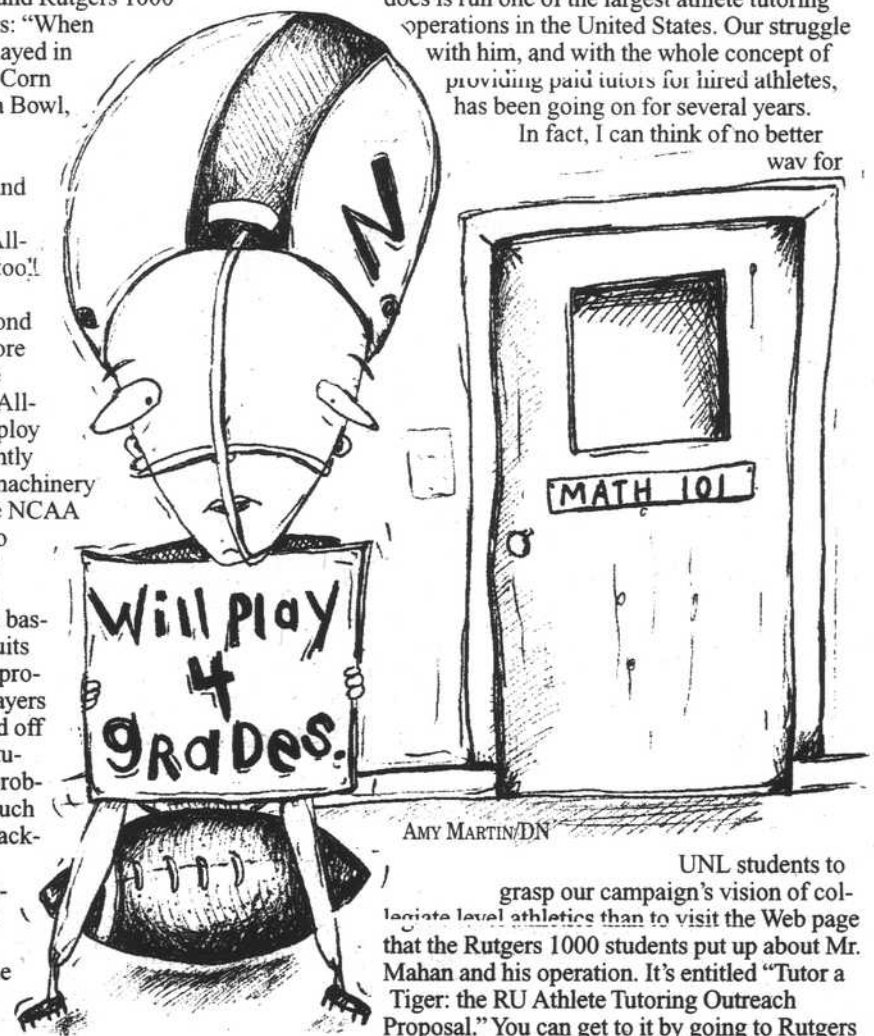
was having one of its intermittent bouts of criminality on the football squad.

Q: "What is an Academic All-American at the University of Nebraska?"

A: "A player who doesn't physically attack the tutor who's writing his paper for him."

This "machinery of virtue" is the hypocrisy we see ourselves fighting against at Rutgers. For instance, the Daily Nebraskan story quoted as one of its main sources at Rutgers, one Michael Mahan, identified as "Assistant Athletic Director for Student Affairs." That may be his title, but what Mr. Mahan actually does is run one of the largest athlete tutoring operations in the United States. Our struggle with him, and with the whole concept of providing paid tutors for hired athletes, has been going on for several years.

In fact, I can think of no better way for



AMY MARTIN/DN

UNL students to grasp our campaign's vision of collegiate level athletics than to visit the Web page that the Rutgers 1000 students put up about Mr. Mahan and his operation. It's entitled "Tutor a Tiger: the RU Athlete Tutoring Outreach Proposal." You can get to it by going to Rutgers 1000 on Yahoo, or by going directly to <http://members.aol.com/rutg1000/mahan.htm>. As you'll see, it makes its point through a bit of mild satire, just like the campaign's original use of Herbie Husker. And as I hope you'll also see, there lies behind it a serious moral vision about what Rutgers — and, who knows, maybe UNL — might someday be as an institution of higher learning.

Some guys have all the luck

Women choose to date competitive, aggressive jerks for genetic reasons



JAY GISH is a senior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Nice guys are suckers.

I was reminded of this fact while visiting with an old friend over semester break — because both my friend and I happen to be nice guys. Being kind and considerate may get you some things in life — like a good reference from your church pastor — but not dates.

And don't tell me nice guys finishing last is just a cliché. Sure, there are your oddball girls who really do look for a responsible, parent-approved guy early on. But come on — the large majority of women reading this have dated at least one real jerk, and probably several. At the same time, there are really good guys around them whom they've snubbed and/or ignored.

This "nice guys" cliché is not a fallacy, it's the norm.

One second — I know what you're thinking.

For God's sake, don't chalk this column up as sniveling for sympathy. I realize that, of our 3 billion women on the planet, any guy who totally concentrated his efforts could get one (particularly with today's media pushing promiscuity like it's a panacea). I just think it's time that we really recognized how the deck is stacked against courteous, dependable guys — "nice guys."

There's a theory to support that old nice guys cliché, and it makes sense — at least to guys like me who know nothing about sociology or biology. I'm sure it will enrage a whole bunch of people, so let's go over it.

(Let me just say I'm not insane, and I realize no theory can describe every woman. So, for those gals who can honestly handle a nice guy, call me. And for those girls who can't, and get really enraged by this ... call me. I bet you sound sexy when you're angry.)

There's that big stage of women's lives in which they're fertile — between puberty and menopause (surprise, surprise!). Within that stage, a lot of women have two sub-stages — so goes the theory.

The first stage is what frustrates we nice guys, because it's the time in which many women go after jerks. (Yeah, I know, ladies ... we're all jerks. Pipe down.) You know who I mean — guys that do everything from forcing their girlfriends to pay for everything, all the way up to abusing them.

There are a bundle of guys out there who probably don't deserve to even look at a woman —

but they nevertheless find lovers. Women love these jerks, defend them, sometimes have their children.

It's amazing how often nice guys get to hear about their female friends' bad relationships, or lack of dates altogether. You know who most often gets to hear the phrase, "Why can't I get a good man?" Good men who, for some reason, don't get much consideration.

I can hear you saying, "B.S.! Is your dad a jerk, then? He got a woman." (And it couldn't be put more eloquently, could it?) Well, the good news for nice guys — while small consolation for years of loneliness in school — is that second sub-stage favors them.

After a woman has had two kids with her bastardized boyfriend, she begins to want a different type of man to fill different needs. The kids are into their troubling adolescent years, and she needs more adult parenting help than her Kurt Cobain wannabe can provide. He's given her excitement and youthful desire. Now she wants to relax and be provided for. In steps the nice, comfortable guy for the long haul.

This all doesn't sound so ridiculous when you're given the anthropological reasoning that my friends and I have uncovered. These jerks (not my friends, the guys I've been talking about) are what they are because they're very competitive.

They're selfish, and they're always ticking people off, because if they weren't for society, they'd kill anyone who got in the way of what they wanted. That would be the Neanderthal's method

of dealing with things. They simply settle for yelling, fighting, racing cars — the usual insensitive guy activities.

So it's really no wonder so many young women stick up for their embarrassingly crude and dangerous boyfriends, is it? They can't help it. They want them for their genes.

So what's left for really nice guys who are sick of being ignored by women? Should you just start acting like jerks? Don't bother. I doubt many of you could pull it off. (Although I've had people who should've known better slap some really nasty adjectives on me, so you never know.)

Those girls dating jailbirds aren't doing it because they have no ability to judge character (no matter what their fathers may believe). They judge people quite instinctively, and they pick men how they inherently want them.

No, fellas, better get yourselves some really interesting hobbies. Try weightlifting, so you can eventually beat up the young punks looking sideways at your future wives. Go ahead and follow Ann Landers' advice, and join some clubs or something, too. It can't kill you (except for the medieval combat club; those nuts are out for blood). And there's the chance you'll either find someone, or become preoccupied with those group activities.

Oh yeah, get really comfortable with yourself, too. A lot of time, the only one who's going to be around to help you deal with the loneliness is you.

Take that however you want.