

OPINION PAGES

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Quotes OF THE WEEK

"I think they finally opened their eyes."
Neda Molai, a junior management information systems major, on the university's decision to cancel classes on Martin Luther King Jr. Day

"I will vote on probably 400 bills. Which one beside this will save lives?"
Sen. David Landi, on LB505, which would raise the state tax on tobacco

"When you develop a reputation in the wine business, you develop an international reputation."
Local wine merchant Ken Meier on his notoriety in the wine world

"It's a composition about your point of view and expressing it in a sort of whimsical way."
Elizabeth Ingraham, one of the professors of Visual Literacy II, on the students "Visual Snorkel" assignment

"Our mentality was to have fun. No matter who you brought in, we would have come out with a victory."
Brooke Schwartz, NU guard, on their win over the Jayhawks

"I don't feel it is anything I am doing myself. My teammates deserve a lot of the credit."
Nicole Kubik, NU guard, on her team's successes

"It's kind of like in football, when they make a big deal out of changing to AstroTurf from grass."
Ryan Johnson, cast member of "Picasso at the Lapin Agile," on performing in an area they have never rehearsed in.

"Don't let your kids grow up to play lame sports like football or baseball. Let them do something that's cool and be extreme athletes."
Robbie Richards, bicycle racing champion, on what parents should do with sport-inclined children

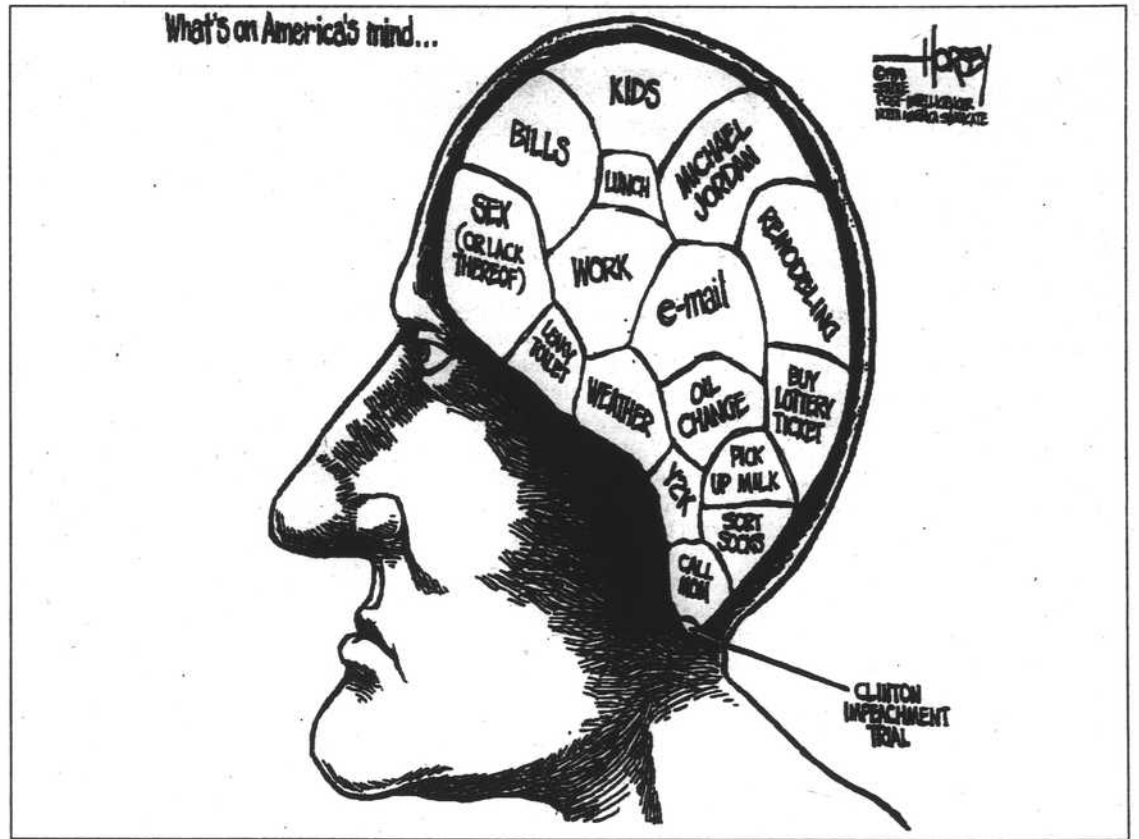
"Working with future generations is what makes me happiest."
Courtney Brown, NU gymnast, on how she likes teaching freshman as much as competing

"We wanted to let people know that this wasn't a closed shop for upper-middle-class white people."
Robin McKercher, Lincoln Community Playhouse's artistic director, on their non-traditional casting and contemporary play selection

"The best feeling in the world is leaving a silent gym."
NU forward Andy Markowski on leaving the court after beating Oklahoma in Norman

"What a neat place."
Ken Dewey, professor of climatology and meteorology on Nebraska being a windy, blizzard- and tornado-ridden state

Horsey's VIEW



Higher learning No rhyme or reason in standardized tests



CLIFF HICKS is a senior news-editorial and English major and the Daily Nebraskan opinion editor.

Right now, somewhere in America, a high school student is hunched over some books, studying in vain for the ACT or SAT or even both.

No matter how many hours that student puts into the books or courses in preparing for the standardized tests that are going to have major impact on their college outlook, it's all really for naught.

Boil it all down, and standardized tests aren't worth the paper they're printed on.

Set the Way-Back Machine for 1994. Enter a young writer, not the greatest academic shiner in the world, but a relatively bright kid.

He's me.

So, there I am, surrounded by lots of other kids with sterling GPAs, all of whom are in the National Honors Society and any other self-righteous collection of academia that they can find, while I'm off working on the newspaper and doing the occasional theater thing.

Now, realize that all of these students who slept and ate with their schoolbooks took the same tests I did.

And when the results were handed down, many of the NHS squadron ranked in the 90-95 percentile of college bound seniors. In English, it means they were in the top 5 to 10 percent of scores.

Some of the "best and brightest," if you will, and they were happy to be part of that top 5 percent.

This, of course, surprised the hell out of me. That's because I placed in the 99 percentile — the top 1 percent of college-bound students.

According to the tests, I was smarter than most of the NHS students.

Remember now that I didn't put any real time into studying for the tests. I mean, I brushed up on my algebra and glanced over a few obscure words that teachers insisted I should know.

I had figured, going into the test, that it wasn't going to be that hard. I'd looked over a few of the sample tests that the brainiacs were using, and it seemed like common knowledge to me.

So what does a standardized test reveal about a student? Anything, really?

From what I found, the tests were a basic combination of general knowledge with high emphasis on grammar and vocabulary, coupled with a degree of ingenuity and basic math knowledge.

See, this is what *really* burned the eggheads of my school. With a basic grasp on algebra and trigonometry, I was solving problems they were using calculus to do.

One of them asked me after the test how I did a specific problem without using calculus, so I showed him, briefly, how I did it.

"That'd take forever!" he wailed at me.

"Not if you do it right," I responded.

What was a simple logic jump for me was an insurmountable complex for the honors student. He couldn't see how simple it was to use what he had learned in ways they hadn't taught him to.

The problem was that so many of these so-called "best and brightest" had no idea of how to really apply any of what they had learned in the real world.

I can't tell you how much it bugged me to know that the majority of the people in NHS couldn't change the tire on their car, nor could they figure out how to use algebra to figure out the interest on their credit cards.

These are basic facts of life, folks, simple things that everyone should be able to do, much less our "best and brightest."

My point is that there's a very basic difference between academics and knowledge.

Just because a person does well in school offers no insight to how smart they really are, in my opinion.

Don't, by any means, take this as a

"I'm so great" column, because I'm telling you up front that I'm not. Sure, I like to think of myself as sharper than the average pointy stick, but I'm not a fountain of resounding brilliance. Heck, I rely on spell-check just as much as anyone else.

When students take these tests and get evaluated and judged by universities, many of the potential collegiate students are never even met. The art of interviewing prospective students is dead.

It had to happen, unfortunately. With more and more people trying to gain higher education, administrators needed to find a quick and easy way to discriminate between those who were capable of higher learning and those who weren't.

It's still wrong. There's no way that a single test, designed for "everyone" can be fair to "everyone," no matter how much research is put into it.

It can be hard for some students to pick the "least correct" answer or the "most correct" answer. Committees have swarmed these tests with enough politically correct jargon that the typical student needs an interpreter with him at all times.

Even here at the university, large-scale classes often feel impersonal, and the tests aren't always accurate reflections of what students feel like they've learned.

It's especially true in the foreign language classes where tests are often formed by committee, and not always reflective of what a specific teacher is teaching.

Is this really the solution to our problem?

No, it isn't. The solution is smaller classes, more personalized attention, more intensive work and learning tailored to the students' needs, not some teacher's time constraints.

The solution is more teachers. Not some digital-era nightmare where the only person who ever touches a test is some student who may or may not have any idea of what's on it.

It doesn't work for high school students and it doesn't work for college students.

Bring on the essay questions and let your knowledge shine.

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