

Institution of higher times

Student retention, attention could be ensured by more impassioned professors



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Ladies and gentlemen, a startling revelation has been brought to my attention recently. It seems that last year, millions of disgruntled freshmen dropped out of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. (Okay, not quite that many.)

The reasons they left are numerous, ranging from feeling out of place in college to developing a deep-seated hatred of the frightening appearance of the new Herbie.

Of all the excuses for not enjoying the numerous benefits of the college experience, this is more woeful to me than any other because it just seems so damn pointless.

The bottom line is that last year, approximately 20 percent of the freshman class dropped out after their first go at college life. *Twenty percent.* That's a lot of frustrated youngsters, people.

The question, then, obviously lies in what we can do to keep them here.

Because I am aware that I possess the answer to this question, I sat down and thought (no, really) about it the other day. I tried to decipher what it was that kept me here past my first year, and I came to the conclusion that it was a combination of a few things: 1) I felt a nice sense of achievement. 2) I met a big bunch of cool people and 3) I had a lot of frickin' fun that year.

A-ha! No. 3 must be it. Has anyone ever thought about this? Why in the world would you want to attend an institution that doesn't entertain you at least 20 hours a day?

Something has to keep the froshes' rear ends here for a few years, and I guarantee you that it won't be

garden burger and tofu night at the dining hall.

The staff of the Big Red U must make it more fun.

It sounds challenging, I know. This is supposed to be an institution of higher learning. This is a place to be serious about education. We don't want to compromise our academic standards.

Standards schmandards! Students can all have a swingin' time and still get good grades. The key is getting people to go to class and pay attention. For professors who could use suggestions, I've come up with a few tactics that would be embraced by even the most anal scholar.

1. Enforce recess for classes and labs running over 1½ hours.

Nobody enjoys being stuck in class for very long. Nobody here has an exceptionally great attention span. Everybody, at least once, enjoyed recess.

It's time to put up some playground equipment. I'll bet Pepsi would pay for it. Fellow scholars, wouldn't you be more willing to go to chem lab if you knew you'd get to run outside and play on the jungle gym for 15 minutes? I think we all know the answer to that question.

2. Require your TAs to provide

students with treats before class.

The benefits of this one are twofold. First of all, if the graddies passed out milk and cookies 10 minutes beforehand, students wouldn't want to be late. It would certainly cut down on people like me walking in five minutes into the lecture and getting dirty looks from fellow classmates.

Secondly, it would keep students awake. Passing out Pixy Stix can ensure a wicked sugar high that'll last at least 20 minutes.

3. Give prizes.

It is a well-known fact that promising a student free *anything* will get them to attend events. If classes were set up with material incentives for great work, almost everyone would show up.

Give prizes

for high exam scores, well-written research papers, sassiest wind pants, etc. In all honesty, who among us hasn't relished the thought of winning a year's subscription to Cat Fancy magazine or a lifetime supply of Drano? If you give them free crap, they will come.

4. Love what you teach.

I know, I know, this one is perhaps the most far-fetched suggestion of all. But believe it or not, students are more apt to be enthused about the subject if you are. (Don't despair if you're not quite getting this one. At first it was a difficult concept for even me to grasp.)

The only courses I've really enjoyed were those taught by jazzed people who had passion for what they were talking about.

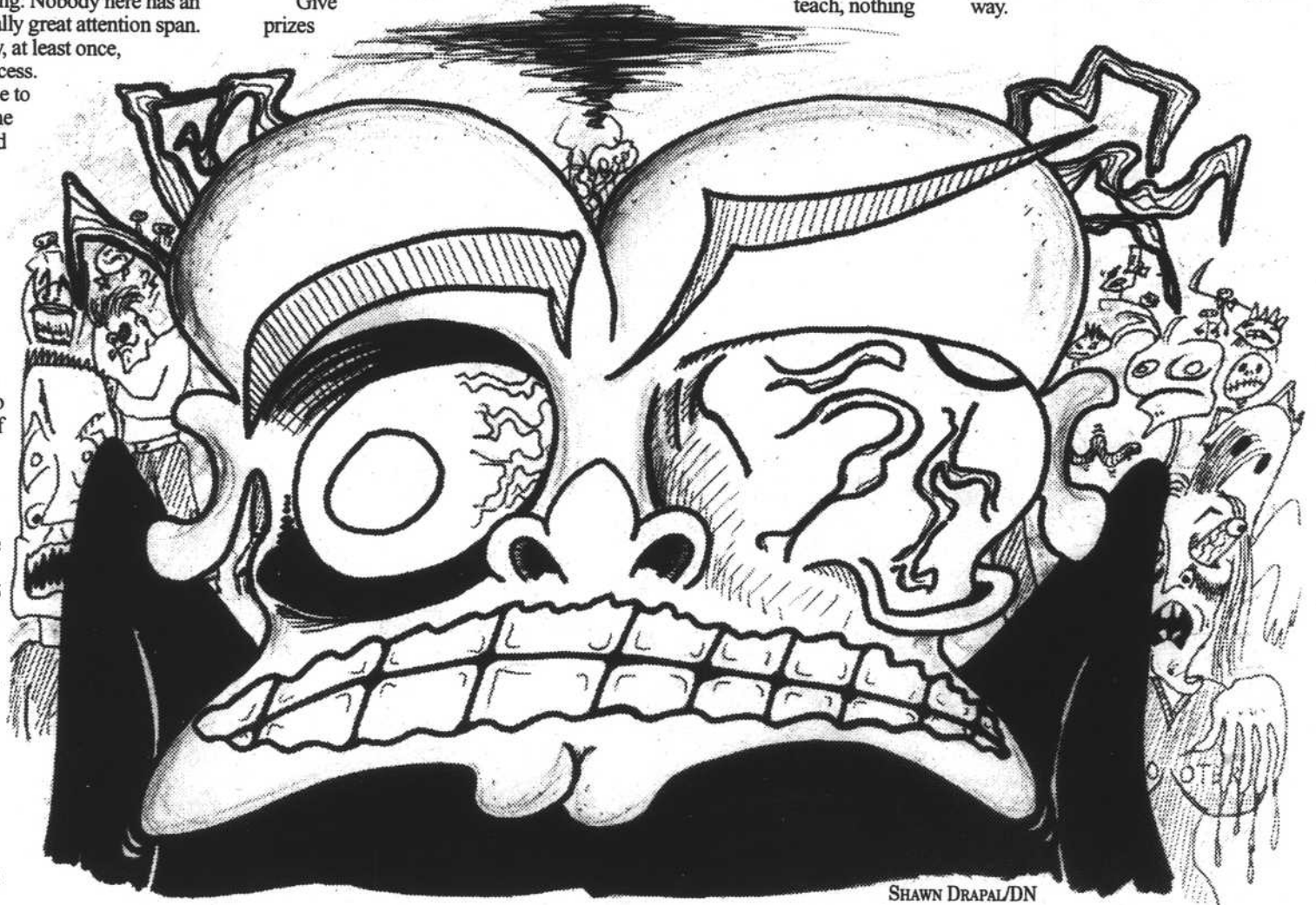
If you don't care about what you teach, nothing

else will work. I guarantee it.

The above are, of course, only suggestions from one *slightly* wearied senior. Although I may have been here a few years, I still remember what it was like to try to keep myself awake during Western Civ. (You bet your butt that's not an easy task.)

Professors, give it the old college try. You really don't have much to lose. As long as your students love you, who cares about maintaining a proper reputation among your colleagues?

Your classes will be interesting, educational and, most importantly, a rollicking good time. Who knows, maybe soon we'll be paying you grotesque amounts of money to take them! Or, um, you may just want to clear off some of that desk space. You know, for all of the apples coming your way.



SHAWN DRAPAL/DN

Suing in our own juices

Citizens should avoid litigation by taking responsibility for actions



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Warning: Reading this column may cause critical thinking about responsibility and society.

Hello ladies and gentlemen, thanks for joining us. It's time to play "The Blame Game: Real Stories of the Lawsuit Patrol."

The object is to act in an outrageously idiotic manner, and then attempt to place the responsibility for those actions on someone else. There really are no other rules, just remember that absolutely no action is too stupid to pass the buck.

Now let's meet our contestants. Names have been omitted to protect these poor souls from mockery and hate mail.

A drunk Contestant #1 is in the Windy City and needs to relieve himself. Instead of finding a restroom, he

ignores warning signs, climbs through barriers and urinates on a 600 volt electric train rail. Through the wonderful laws of science, he receives a severe electrical shock and sues the Chicago Transit Authority for negligence. What does he win, Bob? \$1.5 million. Woo-hoo!

Contestant #2 jumps in front of a subway train and is, naturally, injured in the process. He says the train should have stopped and sues the city of New York. Jury says: \$650,000.

Young Contestant #3 is being a good, little boy, playing with a handgun. The gun goes off, and he accidentally shoots himself in the leg. Does mom lock up the ol' pistol so we all keep our limbs? Heck no, in the blame game, she rightly sues the gun company. After all, there isn't any warning label on the weapon that says to keep guns away from children.

Unfortunately, the son of Contestant #4 commits suicide. Deaths are always tough, so good luck. Most of the blame comes back to the family, so we need to look hard here. Of course, who else but Ozzy Osbourne could be to blame? The kid did watch his video, "Suicide Solution."

Contestant #5 smoked like a chimney for forty years and her black lungs finally sent her to the grave. You'd think those comments from Mr. Surgeon General would make for a

difficult lawsuit, but Big Tobacco coughs up \$400,000. Bonus points for suing three different companies.

Contestant #6 is playing in a school softball game and breaks her finger trying to catch a fly ball. The gym teacher gets this lawsuit because the girl wasn't properly coached. (We also would have accepted suing the glove manufacturer for faulty merchandise.)

Contestants #7 & #8 are cute high school sweethearts. After two long months of dating, they decide to have sex. Opting to use "protection," how else would they get condoms than stealing them from the local pharmacy? Oops, a little leakage and #8 is shopping at USA Baby. Don't get a job, little daddy - sue the drugstore for allowing faulty condoms to be placed where they could be stolen.

Poor contestant #9 is lonely, so he goes next door and rapes his neighbor. Turns out the woman has AIDS, and #9 gets a big plus on the HIV test. Uh-oh. Time's running out! NNNNNNNN what's this sound like?! (The correct answer was sue the woman for not telling you she has AIDS.)

In the process of breaking into a Texas high school, Contestant #10 crashes through a skylight and is severely injured. Lightning round: Sue as many parties as possible! Architect? Uh-huh. Builder? Yes! No whammies, no whammies - stop! School district?

Terrific. DING-DING-DING-DING-DING.

And that sound means that our time is up. Judges, do we have a winner? Okay, audience you know it, so say it with me:

"NO ONE!"

That's correct, when society plays the blame game, everyone loses.

Thanks for joining us. But tune in next time for our tournament of champions featuring the McDonald's coffee-burn granny. Don't change that dial, relatively sarcasm-free actual commentary is next.

All right, you get it. We have an overly litigious society. All of these outlandish lawsuits resulted in big bucks for each plaintiff, no matter how ludicrous the case. Who cares? We'll just tell a few more lawyer jokes and get on with our lives. And the Republicans will eventually get some serious punitive damages legislation passed, so forget about it.

Wrong.

This sue-happy society isn't just obsessed with blame in the courtroom. There's an obvious lack of responsibility at the heart of our world, daily sucking the dignity from our veins.

When we were kids, we'd just instinctively point our fingers to shift the burden of blame to another. Mom handed us a sucker and said don't do it again.

Folks, we're grown up and should have learned by now that we pay the price when we screw up. Effects, results, outcomes, consequences - do these words mean anything to anyone?

Sharing is okay in life, except when it comes to blame. And that means socially and mentally, too. Don't give me this "troubled teens" crap. I had a screwed-up family, and you know what? I dealt with it. Life is an obstacle course.

For you army-ignorant ones out there, the purpose of an obstacle course is to get through it, not sit down halfway through and cry in your wet diaper.

By now you're probably seeing my frustration. Lawsuits are out of control, blame is rampant and responsibility is nonexistent. So let's be men and women of action.

When you hand that paper in late, don't whine about the Kinko's computers - be honest. When you fall down on a dry Hy-Vee sidewalk, don't dream dollar signs and call up your favorite ambulance chaser. And if you commit some heinous crime, don't complain about mommy and daddy not giving you a pony or whatever.

Be responsible and take it like an adult.

Warning: Accepting responsibility for one's actions may result in a better society.