

# Pressing the issue

*Journalists, readers should strive for mutual respect, sensitivity*



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The Daily Nebraskan has a problem.

Like the student population it strives to accurately and objectively inform, this newspaper suffers from a serious deficiency in ethnic diversity.

Aside from the meager representation of a couple of reporters, the DN staff is entirely white. Considering the comparable makeup of the university population, this deficiency is to be expected.

That this lack of perspective rarely compromises the paper's reputation is a credit to the competence of the staff and an inevitable effect of a largely homogenous perspective on campus.

Unfortunately, this deficiency is usually only recognized and regretted by those involved when the paper's credibility is challenged.

I come neither to bury the DN nor

to praise it, but to suggest the necessity of a working relationship of mutual respect and sensitivity between the student press and population.

The press should strive to serve the public's interests rather than its own, a concept largely forgotten in the increasingly corporate world of professional journalism where the ideal has been corrupted by elitist condescension and political correctness.

Consequently, the working press is expecting less of the so-called "ignorant masses," and the reading public is becoming increasingly skeptical toward the objectivity and sensitivity of the press.

The word sensitivity can send chills down the spines of the heartiest journalists, many of whom would argue that caution castrates objectivity. Indeed, how can news be hard-hitting when journalists must pull their punches?

Instead of reporting the news sensitively, however, I would suggest that reporters gather information with prudence. And while journalists should never pull their punches, they should recognize who is taking the worst beating and consider why.

At the same time, the reading public should be aware of the difficulties inherent to relaying and interpreting the truth. If the news betrays a certain bias, consider questioning rather than accusing the messenger.

Perhaps an example of the alterna-

tive and its consequences is in order.

Seven years ago, a black NU football player stripped naked and assaulted a woman in public. When police arrived and arrested the man, a DN photographer was on the scene to get the scoop.

On the following day, the paper's front page boasted a photograph of this naked and bound black man being escorted to a police car by white officers.

Many black students and staff were outraged by the racist implications of this photo, claiming that it reinforced stereotypes and portrayed an obvious allusion to slavery. The football team demanded an official apology from the newspaper.

But the DN's editor stood by the picture's publication, arguing that it was irrefutably a representation of objective fact.

After several reportedly hostile public forums and a host of death threats, this young woman saw her support dwindle and eventually decided to finish her education elsewhere.

An unfortunate lack of sensitivity on both sides of this controversy resulted in the polarization of campus and the resignation of a devoted editor in chief.

Hindsight is indeed 20/20, and although the racist connotations of this photo would seem obvious, I can also imagine the excitement in the newsroom as such a poignant story and

telling photo came together.

It may have been insensitive to run the photo, but running the editor out of town seems a bit extreme, as well.

During recent years, administrative measures have been taken by the university and College of Journalism and Mass Communications to prevent such racial tension and encourage a more welcoming environment for minority students.

But no matter how many diversity contracts and journalism scholarships are offered, cross burnings, sidewalk slurs and, indeed, wayward snowballs make for more lasting impressions.

Even the training provided by the journalism college, which preaches accuracy and objectivity as guiding principles, is little match for the latent bias affecting every reportorial and editorial decision made by the newspaper's staff.

Indeed, all of the above measures are little more than fingers in the proverbial dike.

Encouraging diversity in the newsroom is certainly the long-term solution, but the bottom line is that the press remains 90 percent white, according to the National Association of Black Journalists.

This must be an intimidating figure for any prospective minority journalist, and while there is an abundance of opportunities for people of color in the press, the fact remains that journalism is a tough job that rarely pays well for

anyone.

Bringing diversity to the newsroom is going to be a slow and painstaking process, and the press and its consumers must decide how to get along in the meantime. This can only happen if a civilized discourse between the press and the public it serves is encouraged, whether through letters to the editor or guest-perspective columns on the opinion pages.

It should not be overlooked that working for a student newspaper is as much an educational experience as attending classes.

The educational microcosm that a student newspaper presents can provide an opportunity for student journalists to test the waters and establish an effectual relationship with their reading public in preparation for the "real world."

This is not to question the culpability or legitimacy of the DN, the professionalism of its staff or, indeed, the reality of the world the paper is printed in. Rather, it is the professionalism of the very profession that has become questionable.

It will be the responsibility of the next wave of professional journalists to regain the credibility that previous professionals have lost, instituting this relationship on the grander scale and confirming the continued viability of the press as a provider of reliable information rather than sensationalistic entertainment.

# Cycle of life

*Biking beats road rage, parking tickets as form of transportation*



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Soon, the dance of the cosmos will sashay its way towards spring. And with all the ritual of a fine druid festival, bicycles around town will be awakened from their user-imposed hibernation and return to grazing on the UNL campus.

Oh yes, spring is in the air. Excuse me while I step on the soapbox for a bit.

Since I was a freshman, I've found myself on the bike-geek side of the transportation spectrum and have come to the conclusion that cars suck.

Allow me to explain. When compared to driving to campus, the bicycle wins hands-down. Unless you live out near the interstate in a human anti-farm-style apartment complex, riding a bike to school will be just as fast, if not faster.

A shorter commute to campus equals more sleep. That's a good thing. If you don't believe me, read on. Thursday, I met Bossman Cliff out at his apartment. We left at the same time from 27<sup>th</sup> and about Old Cheney to meet at his desk at the DN. He drove his car, I rode my bike. I was there four minutes sooner, and that's without running stop signs or lights and saying "howdy" to half a dozen trail users.

Biking saves money. Sure, plunking down a few hundred dollars on a bicycle might seem like a lot. But just think of how much money four years of parking permits costs, not to mention parking tickets. When you factor in essentials like gas, insurance and upkeep, riding a bike becomes even more practical.

More money equals more fun.

That's a good thing.

Don't believe me? The last repair on my vintage Toyota cost over \$200. The last repair on my bike was three bucks. What's more fun, using that \$200 to fix a car or a night in Vegas with a woman whose name is Rio and dances in the sand?

Riding a bike isn't only transportation; it's exercise, unless of course you've got a weight machine in your vehicle like Sly Stallone in "Over the Top." On an average day, I ride about 10 miles between home, school and work. That's at least 50 miles a week and way more cardiovascular exercise that the surgeon general suggests. If you don't have time to go to the rec, bike to campus. You'll get a workout just the same without having to deal with hassle of the rec. Hmm. More exercise allows more room for doughnuts in one's diet. Mmm. Doughnuts are a good thing.

There's also the tree hugging aspect of riding a bike. The only fuel that bikes burn is food and if a gallon of gas were converted to calories, a bike would get 3,000 miles a gallon. A clean environment to live in is a good thing. Europeans might stink up the place with their B.O. but they're on to something with expensive gas prices and all those bicycles.

Then there's the best reason of all. Riding a bike is fun. Driving isn't. There's a reason why road rage exists, and that's because driving sucks. What sounds more appealing: fighting traffic before getting to circle campus for 20 minutes in search of a parking stall or a leisurely ride down a trail and being able to park no more than 10 feet from class?

If you've read this far, you're now brainwashed, so let me fill you in on a few rules of the road.

Riding on the sidewalk downtown is illegal. Don't do it.

Riding the wrong way down the street is illegal. Don't do it.

Running lights and stoplights are illegal. Don't do either.

Riding at night without a light is illegal. Don't do it.

Riding without a helmet is legal, but, if you know what's best for you, you'll wear one all the time.

However, one must work and play well with others.

Cyclists, motorists and pedestrians - when the three are mixed together, the result is a Mexican standoff better than any that Tarantino could create.

To the average driver, bikes and people are just a nuisance who should kneel before the power of the all mighty auto-mo-bile.

To those on bikes, cars are the enemy and people using their feet are just in the way.

Then, the pedestrians - well, they just hate everybody.

In the spirit of Rodney King, "Can't we all just get along?"

I think we can.

If you drive to campus, or in general for that matter, give a person on a bike the respect they deserve. If they're riding in front of you, pass them in a safe and courteous manner. Don't honk your horn and tell them to get on the sidewalk. The people on those bikes pay the same taxes you do and bikes have the right to be on the street.

Also, when at a stop sign or crosswalk, don't pull out into the crosswalk or stop in front of the sign. It's very annoying and also illegal for you.

Cyclists, give motorists the respect they deserve. If a car wants to pass, give them some space and wave nicely as they drive by.

Also as mentioned above, don't run lights or stop signs. Cars can't do it and all it does is give the law-abiding cyclists a bad reputation.

If something bad happens involving a car, think before you do something drastic like flip off a motorist. Is it really their fault they didn't see you when you're dressed in all black and riding without a light? Getting pissy solves nothing and only leads to trouble.

Most importantly, DON'T speed through campus. Speed to campus but when you get here, slow down. It isn't safe or smart for that matter to make a slalom course with pedestrians.

This is college, not second grade. Nobody cares how fast you can ride to your next class. Besides, it's hard to play "lookey

lou" riding a Mach 3. And when you do pass people at a safe and prudent speed, say something like "On your left" so you don't scare them.

Folks with the moving feet, when a bike is coming towards you, don't start doing the "Bus Stop," just keep walking straight. The person on the bike doesn't want to hit you either and it's a lot easier for the bike to get out of the way. Trust me, the bike will move.

Also, the next time you walk to class, think about the possibility of you and your chums walking in a quasi-single file line to make it just a bit easier for the bikes to get around you.

If we can all act like this, at least just a little bit, life may some day emulate that classic show "The Get Along Gang."

I call dibs on being Montgomery Moose.

