

The Man for all reasons

University informs former oppressor of technical minority status



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So I'm sitting in my living room, sifting through the seemingly endless pile of mail that waits for me each day. The bills, notices, fines and other usual annoying letters are there, requesting money or involvement or something else from me.

I notice one of the envelopes has a UNL letterhead on it, and assume it must be a brochure on the Blankety-blank Awareness Week or the This 'n' That Opportunity Fair. Instead, I open it up and this is what I read:

Congratulations, J.J.! We are happy to announce that you will be honored for your academic performance as a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. J.J., you are among an elite group of students of color here at UNL who have achieved a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher. The staff of the Office of Multi-Cultural Affairs Minority Assistance Program invite

you and a guest to join us for an April 25th dinner and program recognizing your academic success.

In case you're reading the Daily Nebraskan Braille edition and can't see my picture, my skin tone doesn't exactly scream "minority."

I am definitely a Caucasian, but I receive these types of minority-related letters for a reason. My dad is from Iran, and I noted this fact when explaining ethnicity on my initial application to UNL. So ever since, I've been categorized as a Middle East-American, or whatever. Therefore, technically, I am a minority. But visually, I'm not.

So UNL had finally one-upped me. The university has told me lots of things during my tenure here, but this time it told me I was a "student of color." Not that there's anything wrong with being colorful, but with one simple letter, this institution has single-handedly changed my character.

See, I've always thought that I was part of the oppressors, not the oppressed. Ever since I was a little kid, society has told me I was in the group that demeans and puts down others. The "us" rather than the "them." The bad guys. That's right, I've always been part of the group known collectively as "The Man."

You know what I'm talking about: "Don't let The Man bring you down!" or "I finally got back at The Man!" People say these things and,

just like saying "minorities," everyone knows exactly what the phrase means.

But to say the least, this letter really shook the foundation of my way of thinking. I guess I can no longer associate myself with "The Man." I must leave the group that the world has told me is my family after 20 short years.

But before I leave this group of oppressive individuals, I feel that it is my duty to pass on the requirements of being part of "The Man" to others. I do this basically because some people may wrongly think they're part of "The Man" when they really aren't. So best of luck to those who can meet these difficult conditions.

Criterion No. 1: Male

This one is just plain obvious. How could a woman even dream of being "The Man?" He is supposed to oppress women in every way. He should not only look down upon females as much as he can publicly, but should also suppress them privately. No true "Man" could allow his wife to work, nor could he ever do any cooking or cleaning. He should objectify the entire female gender in everything that he does.

Criterion No. 2: White

By definition, I'm pretty sure "The Man" has to oppress *all* minorities. So he couldn't be anything other than Caucasian. He must be a racist through and through. No ancestors of his can have any ethnicity besides European. He cannot even speak to

anyone that is not white, unless it is in the form of a racially motivated remark.

Criterion No. 3: Rich

"The Man" has the money and, in effect, has the power. He lives in the suburbs, most likely drives a luxury sport-utility, and works in an office downtown. He gripes about welfare and wants a flat tax. He doesn't care about the underprivileged or down-trodden in any way. He actually is the one taking away their privileges and treading on them.

Criterion No. 4: Protestant

Hey, what does the "P" in WASP stand for anyway? "The Man" must be an active member of the "Christian Right," and look at anyone that isn't Protestant like an alien. He has to be a reactionary, right-winger who loves Rush. He watches CNBC and votes for Pat Robertson. He loves the phrase "moral majority."

Criterion No. 5: Conservative

"The Man's" mascot is definitely the elephant. He wants to abolish government financially, and seriously increase its involvement morally. He loves big business and hates the labor movement. The glare off his shiny white collar blinds the eyes of the working man. He detests unions, supports all wealthy interest groups, and enjoys his mahogany desk on the top floor of his skyscraper. Even hearing the word "left" should make him sick to his stomach.

definitely optional characteristics. "The Man" can frequently gather with others and make rude remarks and shady deals in smoke-filled rooms. He should try to screw the average Joe as much as possible through some type of corporation.

Spitting at homeless people is possibly a part of his daily routine. He could even want to abolish anything that America loves, like cartoons or baseball.

I imagine that many of you have by now realized that you are not part of "The Man." Maybe you aren't a racist, or maybe you respect women. You think a conservative ideology is truly better for all Americans. Maybe you think a base morality is needed in government. Perhaps you don't hoard your wealth in the 'burbs. You may have elements of "The Man," but you aren't an evil person. Just like minorities don't always want to be grouped by society, neither do you.

Well, brothers, I feel your pain. I'm not the angry, white male the world has told me I was either. We'll have to get together and start a support group or something. Until then, I guess I better realize I'm not "The Man" and get ready for my new group.

Again, congratulations on your academic achievements, and we look forward to seeing you on the 25th.

These are the basics, but there are

Compulsive complacency

Slacking turns into chain reaction as graduation draws near



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Tatiana Cooley is the American memory champion. She won a memory contest called the U.S. Memoriam '99 in New York in February. After looking at a stack of 100 portraits for 20 minutes, she could pair 70 of them. A real (normal) smarty could probably do 20.

Because she's got such an amazing memory, she never had to study in college, because she could just remember what her notes looked like.

I am not Tatiana Cooley.

I do not have a memory of steel, and man, do my grades prove it.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not flunking out or anything. I just can't seem to do as well with the whole scholastic thingy as I could a few years ago.

This is my big question, though: Am I less motivated than I was before, or am I just becoming stupider as the years progress?

Realizing that this is *not* an easy question to answer (like #83 on my theater history test), I decided to motivate myself and do some research on my own academic past. Yes, folks, it's long, and it's getting messier with each passing day. Bear with me.

When I was a youngster I found out I had some kind of disease called "gifted." (If you're unsure, this is a disease teachers treat by "giving extra work," and kids treat by "calling names.")

No one knows exactly when I acquired it, but they kept telling me that it was a good thing. Kids who are gifted are apparently supposed to grow up to run the world and design space

shuttles. Mm-hm.

I lived this interesting little gifted life until I was in about seventh grade. That's the year I took pre-algebra and got a C+.

The world ended.

I actually cried. I wasn't used to getting anything but A's (and a smattering of B's), and I didn't know how to handle myself. I decided then and there to commit to never getting a C again.

Yeah, awfully funny, I know.

Little did I know in my time of seventh grade all-knowingness that I would go on to lose all kinds of interest in high school (with the grand exception of my history, art and English classes, because the teachers were just so flippin' cool). I scored a few more C+'s and practically flunked chemistry.

(Wait, maybe I did flunk. Damn those repressed memories! Damn them to hell!)

I graduated with a respectable GPA and began my quest for scholarly superiority at college four years ago. With motivation oozing out of my ears, I came away from my freshman year with a 3.65. One-tenth of a point away from the Dean's list, I was certain that I had regained all of my smartness and was ready to work toward my 4.0.

Okay, honestly, your laughter is waking up your sleeping classmates. Cut it out. Thanks.

My grade point slipped a little in my sophomore year, and once I took on the task of being an student assistant in the halls, it began to, well, nose-dive. (Recently hired SAs, please take note.)

I am now at the point where I'm attempting to raise my GPA from the dead, Dr. Frankenstein style.

This, as you may be well aware, is not easy. However, because I do have some of my brain left, I understand that it is not impossible. I think.

Truth be told, I've really had to kick myself in the ass this semester and work hard. Of course there's still a little bit of slacker in me that gets in the way every so often.

(Side note: The slacker bug can infect you for three or more years while at college. It is very hard to get rid of. Many, many nights of hard drinking are guaranteed to help. Excuse me,

strike that, guaranteed NOT to help! Sorry, I read my Health Center Wellness guide wrong.)

Now for the meaningful message, kids:

You can't afford to slack off, even though you think you can. Because once it starts, it's an ugly chain reaction that's wickedly tough to stop.

This has been my problem, especially over the last two years. I've taken much, too much advantage of the "freebie absence days" that profs give, and really needed them when I've gotten sick.

I've turned lots of assignments in late because it's only a couple of points off at a time. Things get nasty when those points add up.

I've taken advantage of extensions and never followed through. More than one professor has been disappointed in me.

So there you go. I haven't been turning into an imbecile – I've been screwing off.

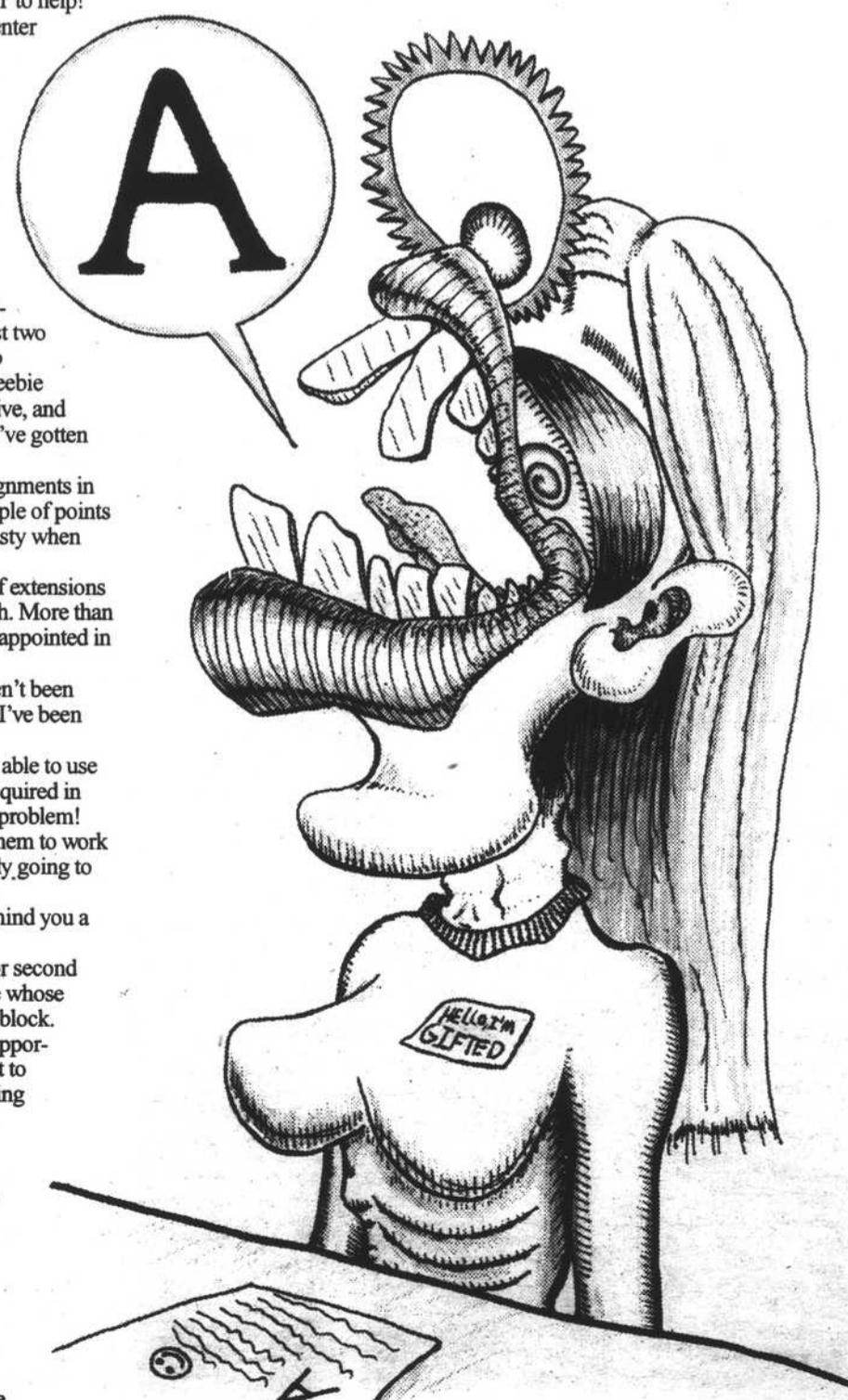
Thank goodness I was able to use the reasoning skills I've acquired in college to actually solve a problem! Now maybe I should put them to work on something that's actually going to matter. Like my classes.

This next part may remind you a little of your NSE tour.

If you're in your first or second year, take it from someone whose been around the screw-up block.

Don't mess with this opportunity. Be involved, but not to the point where you're losing your grip on your studies. (That's why you're here, remember? Yeah, I knew you could.) Don't skip too many classes. Get your work done. Call your mother. Eat your veggies. You know what I'm saying.

Give yourself a chance to do well. It's never too late to light a fire under your butt, so do it.



SHAWN DRAPAL/DN