

OPINION PAGES

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Our
VIEW

Obligations of access

Cable company should offer more services

The city has taken the short end of the stick from its resident cable monopoly.

As we move toward the day when cable companies supply some share of our Internet access, the agreement between the city and Time Warner needs expanding and enlarging.

There is only one cable supplier in the area, which exists under obligations to the city government to supply facilities for public access, among other things.

However, cable companies in similar cities, under similar contract, offer more, and very specific, services to the cities they serve, according to "The Cable Television Franchise Needs Ascertainment Study for the City of Lincoln, Nebraska" released in July by the independent River Oaks Communications Corporation.

In it are the recommendations of the group, which the DN endorses, particularly the following:

"Upgraded equipment for the State-of-the-Art Mobile Studio - Dedicated to the City within 30 days after the signing of the franchise.

"An up-front payment of \$700,000 to upgrade equipment and provide digital equipment at City Channel 5.

"Fully equipped digital production studio to be used by the City, LPS and private schools (K-12).

"Free Internet service for students at LPS and private (K-12) schools."

These and other obligations to the city represent an increase by millions of dollars in the cable provider's responsibilities, and careful attention should be paid to ensure that all new demands are met in a timely manner.

One thing in particular the report mentions that can be seen as a failure of our cable provider to live up to even its current contractual obligations, or to have fulfilled them only in the letter of the law, is public access.

As it stands, public access programming is available on channel 80, but not to all subscribers.

Depending on the age and make of your television set, public access may appear on other channels or not at all.

This is unacceptable and should be addressed in any future franchise agreement between the city and Time Warner.

It makes little sense to have cable companies competing in Lincoln for your business. Therefore, whoever is allowed to control cable access in the future has dues that must be paid in terms of free services to schools, libraries, government offices and the community at large.

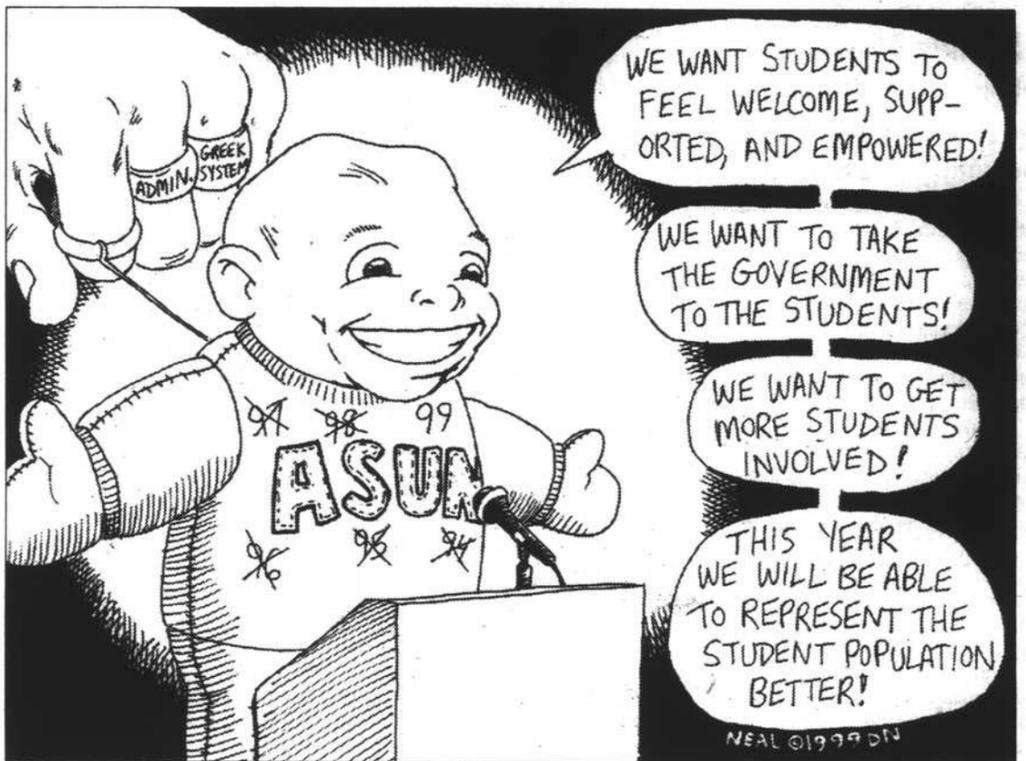
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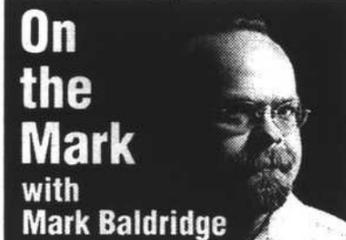
Obermeyer's
VIEW



Let it pour

Profits from university should come right back to it

On the Mark with Mark Baldrige



I see it happening all around me. I've bought my books, and I go to classes, but somehow it lacks authenticity. I remain unconvinced.

What are we playing at? Why are we pretending?

Compared with the work of feeding your face, keeping a roof over your head, doing what pleases you or even just thinking about what pleases you, this business of schedules and assignments seems like a pointless ritual, an arbitrary frenzy.

Yet they tell me this chaos is worth dollars and cents to the state. Billions of dollars and, I don't know, a lot of cents.

In fact, the state spent \$342 million on the university system in 1997-98 and boosted the economy by \$3.5 billion.

That's "billion" with a "b", friends, and it represents a return on investment of slightly over 1000 percent - this according to a study released Aug. 25 by the Bureau of Business Research at UNL.

That's a pretty hefty payoff and one the state would be hard-pressed to beat in any conventional investment opportunity.

How is it done, this division of so many loaves and so many fishes into casseroles for the multitudes?

Where does all that money come from?

From you, in part, from your pockets and your parents' pockets.

Deep pockets indeed: Student expenditures alone supported 6,000 off-campus jobs. That's a lot of pizza, guys.

And it's ongoing work. The university itself supports 26,000 jobs off campus, resulting in a total of nearly \$960 million in earnings.

Sometimes, to the NU Board of Regents and even to state senators, it may seem like the university is some kind of money-devouring machine, as chaotic and unreal as I suspect it may really be.

They may wish, at times, that they could somehow surgically separate the football team - which has obvious value to the state - from the sickly, parasitic

twin of academia.

But it turns out the U more than carries its weight in terms of those same regents' and senators' most earthly value, the almighty buck.

And the study cited does not even begin to touch on the value added to the state by an educated citizenry, as taxpayers, innovators or future leaders.

Nor does it cover the value of research that goes on at the university or the incoming population of out-of-state students who settle in Nebraska.

In fact, this is sort of a bare-bones, conservative estimate of the financial impact of the university, and in no way can it paint the full picture.

Nevertheless, the picture it paints is green.

It would seem the annual harvest of new students is the state's No. 1 cash crop, the best way to throw money away.

Maybe I don't believe it's real. Maybe it's not real.

But the university is as real as good business, as real as dividends on Wall Street.

As real as, in this crazy world of inverted values, it gets.

And the state should prick up its sow's ears and open its silk purse.

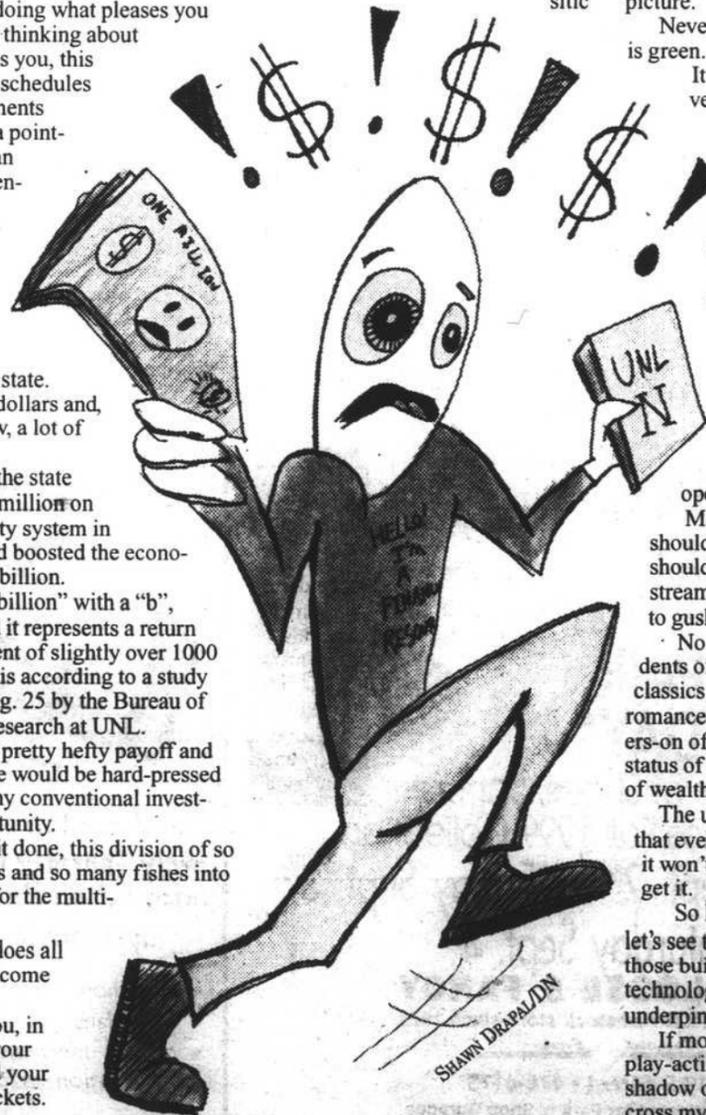
Money for the university should be plentiful and easy. It should flow in like a steady stream, since it seems inevitably to gush out in torrents.

No longer the impractical residents of fanciful ivory towers, the classics professors, the students of romance languages, even the hangers-on of higher learning enjoy the status of a Trump or a Gates, creators of wealth.

The university is the best thing that ever happened to this state, and it won't do to let anyone, ever, forget it.

So let's see those allocations; let's see those programs funded, those buildings refurbished, those technological underpinnings, er, underpinned.

If money is enough to make this play-acting real, well, the smallest shadow of a doubt should never cross my mind.



Mark Baldrige is a senior English major and the opinion editor of the Daily Nebraskan.