

OPINION PAGES

Our VIEW

Too good to be true

Stadium is only sweet deal on paper

We like sweet deals.

And the new proposal regarding a baseball and softball complex for Nebraska's respective teams seems like a pretty sweet deal ... on paper.

On paper, the NU baseball and softball teams get brand new ballparks, complete with all the amenities. It's a heck of a recruiting tool, too.

On paper, the proposal, which was approved last Friday by the NU Board of Regents 7-0, doesn't ask for a cent from the UNL students. Instead the \$10.6 million the university has to put up will be supplied through private donations, that NU Foundations, the fund-raising arm of UNL, must get.

Yep, a sweet deal. On paper.

But on the practical side there are problems to consider, the same old problems that come up whenever there's another glut of spending like this one. Spending usually leads to more spending. More facilities beget more facilities. That's the way competition works.

The Nebraska baseball and softball teams were successful in 1999. For the baseball team, it was the first time in years. The program seems to be moving up under Dave Van Horn, but, in fairness, it was about the last sports team at UNL that had truly earned new digs, sort of like the Nebraska men's basketball team didn't really earn the new HuskerVision boards.

But so be it. Clearly, the baseball team needed an upgrade from Buck Beltzer Field. The softball team, while its current facility isn't the worst, could stand an upgrade, too.

The key here is wondering just how many more programs will ask for more money. They, too, could use upgrading. And the football team could always stand to have a little better equipment, even though the team is among the best now. At what point does the spending ever stop?

Meanwhile, the academic side of UNL is in the doldrums. Since NU Foundations raises money for all UNL-related issues, time and money will have to be diverted from academic fund-raising to find money for the complex. And frankly, academics needs all the fund-raising it can get, considering recent cutbacks.

The baseball and softball stadiums will be built. Of this, there is no doubt. The baseball complex, of course, has to be built, since a Northern League professional team will play there.

Does the spending stop here? Which team is next on the docket? What will it want? And if the spending doesn't end here, when will it?

On paper, a sweet deal doesn't ask those questions. But that doesn't mean the questions go away.

Obermeyer's VIEW



DN LETTERS

And Speaking of Tongues...

I just finished reading Cliff Hicks' column entitled "Speaking in Tongues" (DN, Friday) and was compelled to write. Though I do not agree with all of Mr. Hicks' positions, I do agree that a review of UNL's foreign language requirement is in order.

While I agree with Mr. Hicks that some working knowledge of a foreign language should continue to be part of the requirements for graduation at UNL, I also think UNL should not be teaching entry-level foreign language classes.

Students should be required to have a minimum level of institutionally established proficiency in foreign language before they are admitted and, in most cases, those and any additional requirements should be completed before a student ever sets foot on campus.

In recent years, UNL raised its entrance requirements. Entering freshmen must have achieved a certain level of proficiency in English, math and science through their respective high schools or from some other educational source in order to be admitted.

The idea for this was to help raise the level of academic rigor, improve retention rates and elevate the overall quality of students attending UNL.

Clearly, that has begun to be achieved and has resulted in fewer remedial classes because students who did not meet the minimum standards have either gone to institutions with less stringent entrance requirements or to community colleges to improve their skills.

However, the modern languages department continues to be forced to teach students who come to 101 foreign language classes with little or no prior understanding of the language they are trying to learn.

Granted, many incoming freshmen do take some or all of their foreign language requirements before they get to UNL, and they should be applauded for doing so. However, there are great numbers of students who must muddle through once they get to campus.

For the most part, these students have no desire to learn the language,

and it has been proven that the later in life one tries, the more difficult languages are to learn. As a result, getting through the foreign language requirement becomes a frustrating chore. Students soon learn that understanding the language is not important, getting out with your sanity and maybe 16 hours of "C" is.

This is not a condemnation of the modern languages department. In fact, I have great respect for these people because they are forced to teach section after section of students who, for the most part, are frustrated, angry and looking for a way to end the misery.

The instructors in the department are caught in a classic paradox: They can never truly teach the kind of proficiency that would allow one to capably converse in another language in 16 credit hours, yet, because of the requirement, they must keep up the pretense that they can.

These instructors should be teaching students who have chosen foreign language as a major or minor, or those who truly wish to expand their skills in another language.

May I make a few suggestions:
1: Establish some minimum level of language proficiency as terms for admission and strongly encourage incoming freshmen to fulfill all the foreign language requirements before they come to campus.

If these students fulfill their requirements through an acceptable agency (high school, community college, etc.) they should be exempt from taking the foreign language placement exam and need not take any additional foreign language classes as terms of graduation.

2: Partner/contract with the community college system to provide entry level foreign language education to high school and college students. In general, community colleges can do this for less money and with more efficiency, while maintaining a high quality of instruction.

In the long run, resources in the modern languages department would be freed to spend on motivated students and provide additional support for graduate students, faculty and facilities.

3: With minimum entrance

requirements met, lower the number of credit hours to fulfill the foreign language requirement from 16 to 10 and make it a requirement for every student at UNL. Currently, some majors do not require a foreign language to graduate. This will standardize the terms of graduation across campus and make up for any lost revenue due to the loss of billable credit hours.

4: Place more emphasis on teaching practical skills and cultural understanding. What's more important for most students? The ability to discuss complex concepts in six Spanish verb tenses or the ability to ask where they can get a meal in one?

J. E. Buchanan
arts & sciences, 1997

More 'Tongues' Talk

I am writing to comment on the article about foreign language studies by Cliff Hicks.

I could not agree more. I am a transfer student from the University of Nebraska at Kearney, coming here for more technical classes offered in my major, geography. Instead of being able to take a full load of these classes, which would be beneficial to my career, I am stuck wasting some of my precious credits, and money, on this foreign language requirement.

I work full time and go to school full time, so my time is very limited. Therefore my foreign language class always gets shoved to the side so I can concentrate on the classes that mean something to me. These are the classes I should be taking and paying for.

I understand that UNL wants to get their two years out of me, and that's not what bothers me. Let me take two years of classes that I am going to use.

Two semesters of this foreign language requirement is plenty. My graduation has been bumped up one year as a result of this.

Thank you for letting me get this off my chest. It has been pissing me off for three semesters now.

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