

OPINION PAGES

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Our VIEW

Add it up

New math program deserves a chance

The Web site of Mathland, a new, experimental learning program for kindergarten through sixth-grade students opens as such: "Mathland begins with the premise that all students are capable learners."

And so, this program, which has been promoted by the U.S. Department of Education, sounds a whole lot like another educational movement called outcome-based education, which permeates many fields of learning.

Mathland is vastly different from any system currently in place in our elementary schools. It uses learning kits instead of a book. It teaches "practical" concepts like addition and subtraction through adding and subtracting actual items, not just numbers on a page. To understand the concept of a million, children might collect a million beans.

The program also provides numerous "entry points" for every type of student out there. Slower-learning math students would start out with different tasks than the faster learner, but every student would be in the Mathland program. Certain programs have names like "Arithmatwists."

While the U.S. Department of Education can't force anything upon the public school systems by law, it is certain some school districts will try Mathland, along with its more contemporary, less abstract concepts. And that has some leading math experts hopping mad.

More than 200 of them, including faculty members of Cal Tech University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have signed a petition against Mathland, saying it fails to teach the most important elements of the mathematics field in elementary school, like dividing fractions. One, in an Associated Press story, called it one of the worst educational ideas ever.

Obviously, the resistance makes sense. Top-notch, professional mathematicians aren't going to come out for a program that might dumb down the field they excel in. Because they're experts, we should listen to their concerns. But we should also realize they're a little smarter in math than the rest of us.

And math, the field, isn't quite like any other academic discipline. There are so many facets to it — one could excel in calculus and plummet in trigonometry. Both fall under the same heading of mathematics, but both focus on some fundamentally different concepts.

Mathland deserves its opportunity to change learning, for better or worse. We do not want to see our children become poorer students because they use learning kits instead of textbooks. Still, the program seems to be trying to answer years of math problems.

It deserves a look.

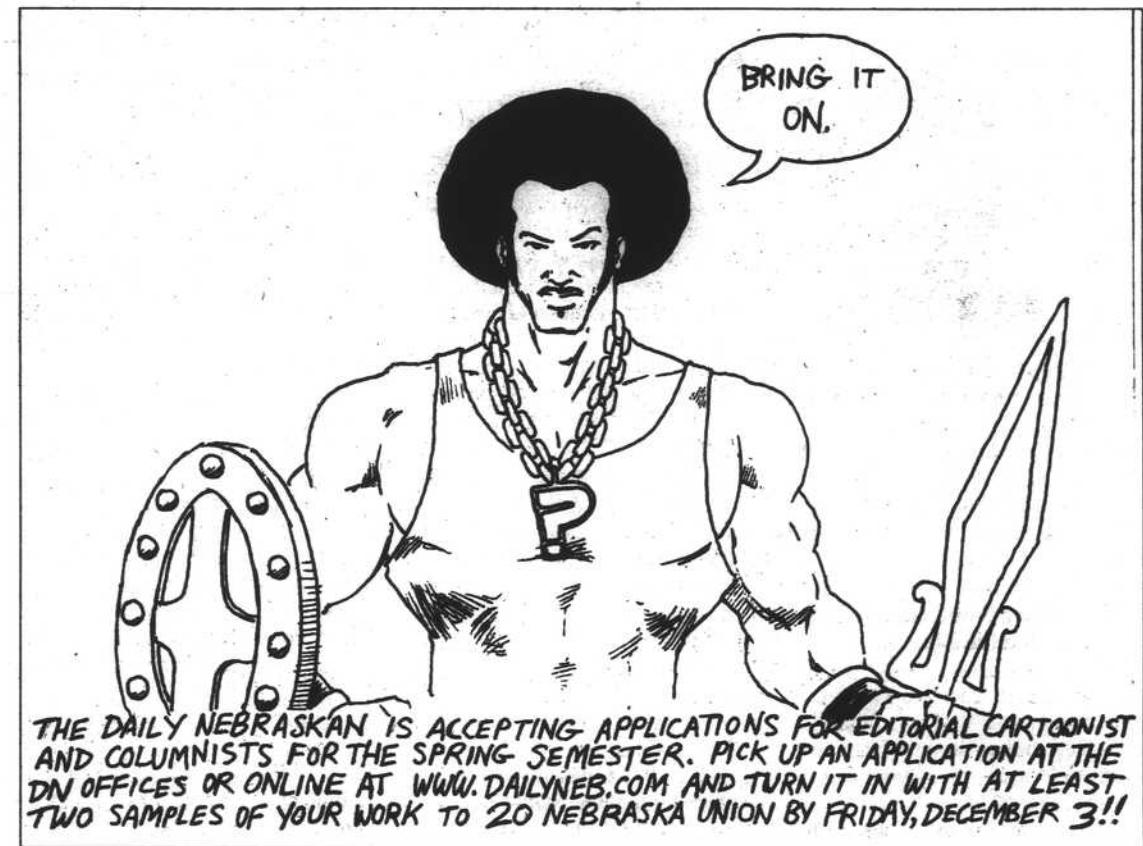
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Obermeyer's VIEW



DN LETTERS

Loaded Gun

Attention Scott Ebke and photographer Matt Miller; you better hope no one at the Game and Parks Commission on East Campus read (or for that matter looked at) the DN on Tuesday!

Granted, that was a very scenic picture, but the last time I checked, it is highly illegal to be in possession of a loaded firearm on a public road or road ditch while hunting in the state of Nebraska.

The presence of oncoming traffic (in the picture!!) is the main reason this rule exists.

Please take this advice in order to uphold the reputation for the rest of us who enjoy pheasant hunting in this state.

David Franzen
senior
agribusiness

East Meets West

"He's from East Campus so there may be some excuse for his lack of social etiquette." (DN, Nov. 23)

I found this remark of Silas DeBoer's extremely offensive. Have you ever been to East Campus, or are you just narrow minded?

First of all, who are you to stereotype all of East Campus by observing one man?

Secondly, many of UNL's students find East Campus much nicer than City Campus.

I have classes on both campuses. People on East Campus have enough social skills to hold doors for people, to smile and say "hi" to the average passerby and to lend a helping hand if needed.

I believe that is a more accurate

description of proper social skills than the rude, self-absorbed people who make up the majority of City Campus.

Jenny Mentink
junior
animal science

WTO SOL

Tuesday tens of thousands of people convened in Seattle to protest the actions of the World Trade Organization, or WTO.

The diversity of viewpoints is stunning. Groups represented include: the Teamsters and other labor unions, Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, environmentalist groups, communists and other anti-capitalists and agricultural organizations.

The fundamental fact that all are reacting to is that the world's economy cannot be sustained. Where there seems disarray, there is in fact an implicit, even unrecognized, unity.

These groups each urge the same action, even if they describe it differently.

The interests of big business should not ride roughshod over the interests of everyone else. The WTO should be either reformed or dissolved.

Patrick Monaghan
senior
philosophy

Double standard

This is in response to the "Abortapatch" column by J.J. Harder (DN, Nov. 10.)

I am tired of flippant columns

toward the issue of abortion. Although this one is clearly sarcastic, your belief rings through: Women have abortions as easily as drinking.

I'm having a hard time swallowing. Women are not mindless bimbos who bounce around every weekend, getting pregnant and then having abortions.

Women take pregnancy seriously; don't you take it seriously? Oh, excuse me, you aren't a woman. You can't get pregnant.

But, if men could get pregnant, contraception and abortion clinics would be advertised during "Monday Night Football."

During the Super Bowl, everyone would sit on the edge of their seats waiting to see which clinic had the best commercial.

In our society, women are held responsible for the actions of both partners. If they get pregnant, it was their fault for not using contraception.

Men may have to pay child support, but their lives don't have to change as the result of a pregnancy. Women's lives dramatically change.

Contraception and abortion are ways for women to bring some power into their lives.

Women may be the gatekeepers, but men maintain structural power over women in many relationships.

Men have had the privilege of sex for enjoyment, without any stigma. I don't understand why I should be denied the same privilege.

I would like to have sexual relationships and have choices in my life.

Theresa Reutzel
senior
sociology

A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste



If you want to offer the campus a piece of your mind, there is not a better way to do it than to have it printed weekly in the Daily Nebraskan. Apply for a columnist or editorial cartoonist position at the DN and you too can have one of those cool mug shots run with your silly ideas. Get an application at the DN offices or online at www.DailyNeb.com, and return it with two sample columns to 20 Nebraska Union by Friday, Dec. 3, 1999. The Daily Nebraskan is an equal opportunity employer and adheres to all applicable hiring guidelines.