

## A Flawed System

*UNL's ranking fluctuates too much*



minimum ACT score of 20 – providing you were so inept that being in the top HALF of your Nebraskan high school graduating class was beyond you.

"Pathetic" is too weak a word to describe UNL's admissions policy. But the standard is more of an effect than a cause. The best students just don't come here because there are better schools that they can get into.

UNL has only three options: continue to focus on student retention, increase admission standards or fail students who don't perform up to reasonable standards.

Continuing to focus on student retention will only turn UNL into a four-year community college. Since there is apparently a God-given right for Nebraskans to come to UNL, regardless of ability, we can't increase admission standards, either. We have only one method to enhance UNL's reputation: fail students who don't perform.

What effect will failing students have on UNL? First, we get to keep their money. Let students stay here as long as they want, provided they pay for it. UNL should not feel obligated to give out undergraduate degrees simply because a student serves his or her

time. Failing students, though, would only result in the firing of the administration who sought to increase standards. Parents, being the voters they are, would revolt; refusing to believe that their sons or daughters could possibly fail college.

Additionally, UNL can't fail students because of minimum GPA requirements.

Enacted by many businesses – it would only make UNL students unemployable. Because of the extreme incompetence, many human resources departments use a student's GPA as the primary factor in determining intellectual ability.

What answers exist? Listing the average ACT scores vs. grades received for every course offered at UNL would be a good start.

The public would be able to identify the worst departments and affect changes through political pressure.

Listing the percentages of each letter grade given along with the corresponding mean ACT score would give employers an idea of the difficulty of courses.

We simply cannot become a first-tier school overnight. The public, faculty and, most importantly, students, must recognize that college is intended to be a time of learning, not merely a four-year jail term/party.

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*Literary greats not given enough exposure*



There are things that comfort us; certain actions and images that are "right" in our minds. These things range from watching a sleeping cat in the sunshine

to hearing a Frank Sinatra record while reading the paper.

Flannel shirts, the itchy kind, are definitely a "right thing." I have recently been able to read much of the "suggested material" for my old high school classes, and the "feeling of rightness" was prevalent in much of what I read.

The first time through, I hated it. The words of Salinger, Golding and Fitzgerald made me resentful in the years long past when my English teachers made up quizzes about the readings. I hated being made to read something I had little interest in. I would rather read some Asimov or King.

I read for pleasure, losing myself in the worlds and dreamscapes of other men and women. I enjoy reading and to be forced to read "good literature" made me almost froth at the mouth with rage.

I had a 20th Century Fiction class last

semester – one I enjoyed heartily. I had a few private conversations with the students in the class, drawing analogies to "Pride and Prejudice," "Jane Eyre," "Wuthering Heights," "1984" and "A Brave New World," but was met with some blank stares.

I was appalled that these good people, all very intelligent students, had not read Austen, Bronte, Orwell or Huxley. I was shocked at the idea that my high school did a pretty good job in the English department.

I am left with a predicament. The people I resented in high school who followed a certain curriculum and made sure we read certain books had good intentions.

I know I would eventually get around to Huxley, Bronte and Austen, but on my own, later in life. I would probably read them when I was, say, 50, balding with a pot belly and nervously chain

smoking in my basement.

How do I reconcile this philosophy, something I believe in theory but not in practice now that I have the harvest in hand? More power to high schools is my answer.

I want every kid in high school, in junior high, even in primary, to be reading as soon as possible the classics and the greats in the Romance period. I would extend the curriculum to include "The Stand," "1984," the first three books in the "Wheel of Time" and several more. Even though I hated being forced to do it, I enjoy these things more so now.

Even though it may feel wrong to force someone to do something, such as reading Dickens, Twain, Tolkien or Tolstoy, these will incorporate culture into their characters and they become better people for it. I know kids from my high school who now work in factories,

in diners and even Carnival cruise ships who would be able to discuss the merits of "Lord of the Flies" and "Jane Eyre."

Remember what I was saying about "feelings of right?" Well, there is something wrong to me in trying to talk about a subject without Twain coloring the conversation or light shadings of the felicitous Austen.

I still love watching my cat in the sunshine, and I love reading, but I think about all the agonizing faces from my past as they trudged through Shakespeare.

I think about the terror the boot-wearing, tobacco-chewing cowboys had etched on their faces, the banal looks of the cheerleaders, the "I don't care" looks from the stoners. I think about the people from my past, and I think about these "right books" in a world full of wrong. That makes me smile because these people were given the right touch.

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*Putting the teach in teacher*



"That's a really good class, as long as you have Professor X. If you take that class, make sure you don't take it with Professor Y. Oh, I had to drop it; I just couldn't stand the teacher!"

These are statements heard daily here at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, particularly around registration time. Everyone seems to have an opinion regarding past teachers and almost always are willing to share opinions with anyone who will listen.

I know that I am always happy to sing the praises of my "good" teachers and to warn others about the flaws of the "bad" teachers with whom I have had contact. This is partially to help my friends avoid facing the same problems I have had. But I suspect I also am trying to enact some small revenge on those professors who I feel have done me wrong.

Many students do not feel that course evaluations actually accomplish anything. So these students feel the only option is to spout off to the entire campus about what these professors have done to upset them.

A common perception among students is that quality of teaching is simply not a high priority among administrators and department chairmen. Because UNL is extremely focused on research, students often feel left out and neglected.

Many people start to believe that as long professors keep up with their research, how capable they are of actually teaching students is not a crucial issue. This often leads to resentment and even hostility in students who feel as though they are being ignored by not only the professors, but by the university as a whole.

What seems to be missing from many professors at UNL is a genuine caring and enthusiasm for the students. Most of the time the professors who are liked by their students are those who display some level of interest in their students' educational progress, if not also in their personal lives. These professors have put forth that little extra bit of effort to try to connect with the students and to show that they are valued.

Some very basic ways of doing this are learning students' names and asking questions about students' majors and career goals. This is fairly easy to do in small classes, but a professor who really wanted to could make a connection with students in larger classes as well. Professors could try sharing their own personal information, which would help students to feel more

comfortable coming to office hours and asking questions in class.

I have had many professors whose names I never knew because they did not even bother to introduce themselves. This certainly did not lead me to believe that these professors had any interest in me as a student, or even as a person.

Taking the steps to show caring to students is something that comes naturally to most teachers, which may explain where the problem is. Almost none of the people standing up and lecturing in front of classrooms here at UNL is a teacher. These people are scholars and academics who usually have little or no training in how to teach.

In order to teach at any other level, from kindergarten through high school, one must go through an intense process of learning how to teach. He or she must take class after class, covering topics as diverse as educational theory and how to deal with difficult students. Then the potential teacher must go through a semester of student teaching to prove that he or she is capable of effectively leading a classroom.

But no such regulation exists for teaching at the collegiate level. There is no clear-cut training or schooling a person must go through to become a professor at UNL or at any other university in this country. It seems that all a person needs to do is be extremely knowledgeable in his or her particular field and to regularly conduct research and publish the findings. The result of this lack of training is apparent: Many of our classrooms are led by people who are simply not truly capable of, nor fully interested in, doing so.

The best professor I have had the pleasure of working with in college possessed several qualities that led to her success. She is an English professor here at UNL, but she worked for a few years as a high school teacher in the Lincoln Public Schools.

Working in that atmosphere was essential to her becoming the motivating, encouraging, inspiring teacher my classmates and I found at the head of our classroom, helping us to progress further than we had ever thought we could. It was her training and experience in the education field, along with her passion for working with students, that made her a truly great teacher.

I would guess that almost all students at UNL could name similarly truly excellent professors who teach. To these teachers, those who are willing to put forth that small amount of extra effort to become true teachers rather than mere academic figures, my fellow students and I thank you. You show interest in us, encourage us to work hard and are truly happy to see us succeed.

It is this caring that makes the difference and helps us to achieve our goals. I hope you can help encourage your colleagues and show them this type of investment in students will pay off in the future.

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