

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

Editor: Sarah Baker
Opinion Page Editor: Samuel McKewon
Managing Editor: Bradley Davis

Long overdue Building new Culture Center may benefit UNL

It's quaint. It's nice. It's cute. And these are three adjectives that probably shouldn't be used to describe a center of culture on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus.

Why? Because those phrases, while nice compliments, are ultimately backhanded and patronizing. The Culture Center, at 333 N. 14 St. in a former Presbyterian church, has a more important purpose than the quaint, nice, cute building that it is currently in. There may have been a time and place when that church was good enough. Not anymore.

And Interim Chancellor Harvey Perlman, based on the recommendation of the Academic Planning Committee, said this much last week by approving a plan for a new center to be built just east of the Nebraska Union. The plans call for a 30,000 square-foot, three-story building. Let's just say that's a far cry better than the current, too-cozy-for-comfort trap-pings of the old church.

There has been so much talk of the UNL Diversity Plan, which some students might dismiss as just that - smoke and mirrors.

Because of size limitations and the fact that some rooms cannot be temperature-controlled, and therefore, cannot be used in extreme weather conditions, the real potential of a Culture Center has not been realized.

Critics of a new plan might say not much goes on in the Culture Center. But they'd be missing the very possibilities that a new, swank building offer to prospective organizations, bands and special ceremonies. By opening the doors to more options, the Culture Center would grow in its versatility, as well as its reputation. It would matter to students, and therefore, become a greater part of the UNL vernacular.

And while it'd only be moving across the street, attaching the Culture Center to the Nebraska Union itself is critically important. It automatically increases visibility.

Assuming its users take advantage of the new surroundings (and that's a safe bet), foot traffic through the building would increase tenfold. As it is now, the Culture Center doesn't have much "walk-in" traffic - you have to be going for something, or have been invited or be unusually curious to see its insides. The more the Culture Center can enhance its ability to be a place of conversation and commiseration, not just some random dive where your buddy's band is playing, the better.

The plan also sends the message that UNL no longer subtly adheres to any sort of separations of minority and majority students on campus. Not that the current Culture Center is some blatant sign of racism; still, it's hard to deny the separation, which has never been necessary.

There has been so much talk of the UNL Diversity Plan, which some students might dismiss as just that - smoke and mirrors. A new completed Culture Center is a definitive answer to those students.

While this is still in the planning stages, we don't expect the type of opposition to greatly slow its development and construction. For certain, the vision of the Culture Center's inhabitants is just as important as the building itself - it's their job to make this truly work.

And then, cheap compliments won't have to be made in the wake of low standards. The Culture Center will be an impressive, ever-flourishing staple of UNL - all of UNL. Just as it should be.

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Neal Obermeyer/DN

Letters to the editor

Backstabbing journalism?

Well, congrats kids. In one fell swoop a single DN "journalist" managed to lose UNL Alumni funds, insult UNL's third district students, give all journalists a bad name and ostracize the majority of the state with the editorial "Come Bill, Come."

Who knew the power of a simple editorial? The pen truly is mightier than the sword. As a journalism major, I can tell you that this isn't journalism that you printed, it was simply a malicious message from someone unfortunate enough to have an outlet. Regardless of my opinion of the article, however, I think that due to the sheer volume of the responses to the article, not to mention the heartfelt content of those responses, the author of this article, as well as the editorial staff of the Daily Nebraskan, owe Nebraska and the citizens of Kearney and the third district an apology.

I don't know how you can possibly begin to undo the damage to this state and its people you've caused, but you need to try. If you have any pride in Nebraska at all, you'll try to rectify the divide you've created between the two parts of the state. As one writer adequately put it, we are all Nebraskans. We should function as a complete state, and support each other.

Staci Sohl
journalism/advertising
senior

Ranting and raving

Thank you DN for confirming my view that the more things change, the more they stay the same. I graduated from UNL almost 10 years ago. In the time I was in school I was a daily reader of your newspaper and was usually appalled and sometimes even amused by the ignorance and triviality of your editorial page.

Since graduating, I have lived in several different communities in this great state and currently reside in Kearney. This community is one of the most vibrant and exciting places to be in Nebraska and represents our state wonderfully.

I am also one of those ultra-conservatives you so liberally denounced, and I happen to be excited and pleased the President is visiting our community.

In the years since I have graduated from UNL, I have gained much perspective and have changed considerably. After seeing this editorial, I realize that the editorial page of the Daily Nebraskan has not. They are still wallowing in the same ignorance they did a decade ago.

However, the perspective I have gained allows me to see this section for what it really is: a place for children to rant and rave while they are trying to become adults.

R. Mitchell
Kearney

Impeding religious freedom

"When we lose the right to be different, we lose the privilege to be free."
— Charles Evans Hughes



Jeremy Patrick

The proponents of strict separation between church and state have won many important victories in this century: We've seen the end of forced school prayer, religious tests for political office and the teaching of creationism.

Of course, sometimes these issues are re-ignited under different guises: "moments of silence" in place of school prayer and "intelligent design theory" in place of creationism. A slightly different but growing controversy in this country is the dispute over the Constitutionality of so-called "ceremonial deisms."

Ceremonial deisms are the little things government does to invoke religion in specific circumstances, such as opening sessions of legislature with prayer, placing references to God in the Pledge of Allegiance and engraving "In God We Trust" on coins.

They're called "deisms" because they're generic references to a Supreme Being and not references to specific deities, such as Jesus or Jehovah.

Until recently, ceremonial deisms laid largely unnoticed in the war for separation between church and state because civil libertarians had so many other important battles to fight. When legal challenges were brought, they were dismissed out-of-hand as not involving government sponsorship of religion.

For example, although the Supreme Court has never ruled on the issue, federal courts have thrice upheld the use of "In God We Trust" in coins. The Ninth Circuit says its because the inscription "is of a patriotic or ceremonial character and bears no true resemblance to a governmental sponsorship of a religious exercise."

Other courts hold that no objective observer could consider this antiquated view of ceremonial deisms a beginning to change. Recently, a federal court held that Ohio's state motto "With God, all things are possible" violated the separation of church and state. Although an appeal is pending, the court's decision was sound.

If, for example, the State of Nebraska placed the motto "In Capitalism We Trust" on all of its license plates, would we say it's not an endorsement of capitalism? Could we truly say the State is neutral on whether people should believe in capitalism, socialism or communism?

The fact that ceremonial deisms like "In God We Trust" do not name specific religious figures is irrelevant. Even the term "God" excludes many religions.

Wiccans who believe in a Goddess are not included; Hindus who believed in several gods instead of one God are not included; Native Americans who believe in nature and earth spirits are not included.

For them, the only implication is that they are

not part of the "We" and therefore, they are somehow less-than-American.

The Constitution does not only bar the government from favoring a particular religion, it also bars it from favoring religion over non-religion. Any objective observer would be forced to admit that a phrase like "In God We Trust" clearly indicates that theism is preferred to atheism or agnosticism.

Of course, research studies could easily show what Americans believe the symbols mean, but courts have invariably held that they can tell what an "objective observer" would think without the use of empirical evidence.

When courts act irrationally like this, religious minorities can only see ceremonial deisms as a cry for conformity instead of diversity.

Some courts uphold ceremonial deisms because they believe there is no real harm done. These courts, however, overlook the fact that the existence of ceremonial deisms is used to support other unconstitutional practices.

As legal scholar Steven Epstein put, "the implications of ceremonial deism are far-reaching because courts frequently employ this amorphous concept as a springboard from which to hold that other challenged practices do not violate the establishment clause."

Religious conservatives have realized this as well and often invoke ceremonial deisms to justify other laws. For example, according to the Associated Press, when the Colorado Board of Education considered whether to display "In God We Trust" in public schools, supporters said they "believe the courts cannot object to a phrase that appears on U.S. currency."

Advocates of displaying the Ten Commandments in public schools, placing nativity scenes on public property and having prayers at graduation ceremonies have all used similar arguments.

The line between church and state is not always easy to draw. It does not require government hostility towards religion; an upcoming Supreme Court decision will address whether schools should be required to treat religious student organizations like other student organizations when it comes to the use of school facilities.

For most civil libertarians, this is not a real problem because the school is acting neutrally, and neither the intent nor the effect will be a government sponsorship of religion. An important interest in allowing intellectual discussion to grow unhindered is served.

But the government has no legitimate purpose in using ceremonial deisms. There is nothing served by ceremonial deisms (such as rendering an occasion "solemn") that cannot be accomplished by non-religious invocations. The harm they cause, on the other hand, is very real: They marginalize religious minorities and add strength to those who advocate even more entanglement between religion and government.

And if ceremonial deisms are really so non-religious in character, why do religious conservatives fight so strongly for their preservation?

Blessed are the Meek ...



Yasmin McEwen

By the time she came in, he had already been waiting the past two hours. She felt his gaze, and, in turning, her eyes caught his and lingered, then she moved on with her party. Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, she knelt and quickly said her thanks be to God, then pulled herself up onto her crutches and worked her way back out of the pew, despite her family's stern glances.

Mass is starting you must sit down, said her mother. Instead she headed to the back to find him. His eyes watched her coming toward him, and when she got there, he smiled and told her she smelled nice. "Thank you," she said.

Her hands were trembling, and her eyes were wet. He just looked at her. "I want to give you some money, not to offend you, just so you can get something to eat. Would you like that?"

She wished she had more to give. Yes, he would like that, he said, and she put her shaking hand with the cold rolled up bills into his palm and said, "Merry Christmas." After mass, when he was fading off into the bitter cold night with just a thin jean jacket to cover his tall thin frame, she'd said, "Why can't we ask him to come home and sleep on the sofa just for tonight?"

"Are you mad?" her step-father had said. A month later, she had devised a plan. She would save all her extra money, and when she had a couple hundred dollars, she would put it in a little pocket bible and hand it to him the next time she saw him. But the next time she saw him, he was scrunched up in a thin sweater with holes, sipping coffee as if it were his Last Supper. Huddled over the cup he seemed to be trying to eat the curling steam as it rose to his face.

She wondered if he wouldn't knock the bible out of her hand when she saw her coming toward him with it. Or if he wouldn't laugh in her face when seeing the money, as if he would ever accept pity. In the thoughtless light of the world, it was hard to see that God had ever taken interest in this man's condition. This man, whose Grecian sea blue eyes made her feel ashamed as she zipped into the parking lot in her shiny new red car. This man, whose very gaze spelled out how a perfect world should be: simple, kind, mindful of a common man's needs. This man, whose very presence foretold and warned against the arrogance of people and mocked their inexhaustible quest for material consumption.

This man, she would find him watching her while she and her friends smacked their gum and flipped their hair as they discussed their disgust with the injustices that came of being a college student. She could just feel his beating heart as they passed by him. So many times she wanted to reach out to touch and feel that heart, to take him in and, somehow, find a new world for him to be reborn into. She refused to believe that he was ordinary or human even, and after he had died, she could not believe that he was anything less than Holy. The longing for him refused to go away, and she remembered how she had wanted to be his lover, or wife, or savior.

When he died, he had been alone, outside of a cold building with no where else to go but Home.

Tell us what you think.

(402) 472-2588

letters@dailyneb.com

