

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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Missed boat

Chinese program's end will hurt opportunities

The University of Nebraska Lincoln's academic prioritization process was bound to ruffle some feathers.

After all, when there's talk of cutting certain programs, department heads are ultra-protective of their own corners of the university, which they no doubt deem invaluable.

It makes sense, then, for administrators to take a dispassionate look at all of the university's programs to determine which ones are best fulfilling UNL's mission of teaching, research and service.

It was an error in judgment, though, when administrators decided to gut the Chinese program.

As detailed in a March 9 Daily Nebraskan story, the academic prioritization report sounds the death knell for introductory Chinese courses — in effect, perhaps the first step to eliminating the entire program.

Other languages offered, such as Czechoslovakian and Hebrew, are certainly less valuable — solely on their economic benefits — than Chinese.

Radha Balasubramanian, interim chairwoman of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, said nixing the Chinese classes was a decision based on a limited budget and the lack of student interest.

Few people enrolled in introductory Chinese courses, she said.

A graduate student, Coral Su, teaches Chinese courses in the absence of a professor.

With a university trying to focus its economic and faculty resources on its best programs, certainly some classes will have to be cut.

But it's unfortunate that Chinese — a language spoken by more than 1 billion people — is one of the first programs to surface from the prioritization process to face the ax.

U.S. lawmakers have increasingly lobbied to make China a more regular trading partner — granting it several years ago its coveted status as a "most-favored" trading nation.

Though the university doesn't exist only to fuel the state's economic engine, it just makes sense for it to be actively engaged in a culture — teaching its language and customs and attracting its students — that could prove to be extremely economically significant, to say the least.

Other languages offered, such as Czechoslovakian and Hebrew, are certainly less valuable — solely on their economic benefits — than Chinese.

That's not to say those languages aren't valuable for the cultural and educational elements they bring to campus, but administrators should take a serious look at whether they're being pressured politically to keep certain languages to please certain elements of the state population.

It seems a bit easy, politically, to eliminate Chinese from the curriculum.

The Chinese aren't known for having a big voice in this state.

But to eliminate a language that has the potential — despite the apparent lack of interest right now — to be significant in Nebraska's participation in the global economy seems short-sighted.

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The infamous one-stall rule

You know what I hate the most?

Guys who break the Golden Rule of public restrooms.

Regardless of what most health inspectors think and what those little signs by the sinks tell you, I am not talking about forgetting to wash your hands. Although this is an important bathroom rule, there is one just above it in the hierarchy of bathroom regulations: the one-stall rule.

All men — all guys — all humans with as much body hair as your average golden retriever (French women excluded) know of and practice the rule.

I mean, at least that is what I thought (not about the French women, but the one-stall rule).

Anymore, when I enter a men's bathroom, I am questioning the once proud and strong essence of what it is to be a guy (if it has an essence).

The one-stall rule is sacred.

Let's say that I start a secret order of guyhood. Then let's say that we meet at Hooter's every weekend (for the wings (No, not those wings)).

And while there, we write a guyhood bible. If this theoretical bible had a list of ten commandments — the one-stall rule would be the first, second and seventh commandment.

Guys are made of 30 percent grunting, 25 percent scratching, 10 percent mushy stuff and 35 percent one-stall rule.

Breaking this rule is like stepping on a crack and breaking your mothers back — she ain't going to be happy the next time you come home. The one-stall rule is all about personal space. It's kinda like those space-bubble things that psychologists talk about, but modified for bathroom use.

Basically, if I enter a bathroom all by myself and there are six urinals in the bathroom, I have a lot of open options. Let's pretend that I take urinal one because I just drank a Big Gulp, and I can't make it much longer.

Shortly after I enter, Ghandi strolls into the bathroom.

Ghandi really has to go, and being a guy, he is aware of the rule: He chooses urinal three.

A third man enters, and to conceal his identity, call him Pope John Paul II.

The Pope is well-versed in the logistics of the rule and chooses urinal numero five.

Unfortunately, trouble arises when former TV star Gary Coleman enters.

The short urinal is number six — but Gary knows he cannot break the one-stall rule. Gary is faced with a critical decision of men's restroom etiquette.

Will Gary take urinal number six and possibly freeze up the Pope?

Or will he take stall number one and leave undisturbed the delicate balance of the men's bathroom comfort zone?

If Gary bolts for the sixth urinal like grandpa bolts for the spiked eggnog at Christmas, the atmosphere is going down the crapper



Dan Leamen

— no pun intended.

The Pope freezes up and the rest of us turn heads, panic and break into a cold sweat at the horrific action we have just seen.

If Gary makes a break for the first stall like a group of large women in flower pants and fisherman sunglasses jump on a dollar-store sale, a little sigh of relief is let out in the back of every guy's mind.

Situations like this are very tense and sometimes overwhelming.

What is a brother to do?

When I go to the bathroom, I am not looking to make friends or to be "stall pals."

A men's restroom is a place of philosophy, and all I want to do is read the swimsuit caption of the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue and philosophize.

Many great inventors have conjured up many a technological advancements in restrooms.

Where do you think Edison thought up the light bulb?

And Einstein? Where was he when he thought up the theory of relativity?

Both in the bathroom.

Velcro shoes, sliced bread, doughnut holes, communism, 40 different religions, Barrel 'O' Monkeys and those cute little plastic flowers that dance when you clap — all thought up in the bathroom.

The bottom line is this: A men's restroom is a place of privacy and thought. A guy's palace of porcelain, toilet paper and Sports Illustrated.

When I go, I don't want to know anything about anyone else going and above all else I don't want to hear it.

It is obvious that the guy chain of communication has been broken, and the way I see it, there are only three solutions.

The first is basic: eliminate every other urinal and stall.

No bowl, no go.

Of course, I don't want student fees raised, so a second solution pops up.

A day in all University Foundation classes could be devoted to the one-stall rule.

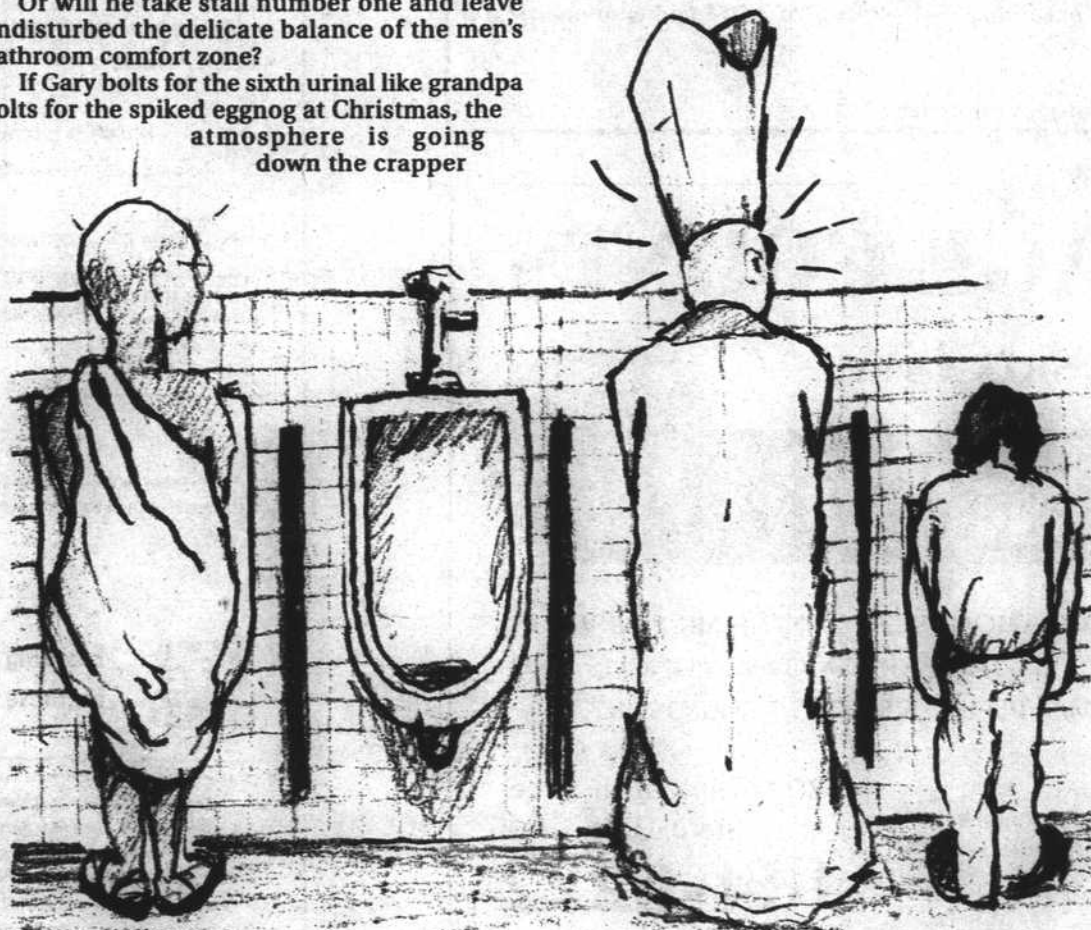
The keynote speaker could be an Upjohn rep. Make it like an AIDS awareness speech and hand out flyers and fact sheets. Bumper stickers could be passed out on the way out.

The last resort would be a trap door leading to a pool full of rabid sea turtles.

Whenever the rule is broken, the victim simply tugs a cord and the offender is deposited in a pool of unmerciful pain as the sea turtles snap away.

This, of course, could cause some legal-type issues that I am not prepared to address.

But until true action can be taken, I can only encourage you to ask friends, strangers and family (your dad was supposed to include this in the birds and the bees speech) about the rule, and if that doesn't work, at least give it the ol' courtesy flush.



Mind Kontrol to Major Tom

During a commercial break, a Burger King pitch man calls out, loud and clear: "You know you're a moron, don't you?" And I wonder, is he talking to me?



Mark Baldrige

If I'm remembering correctly (television dulls the mind), I'd just been watching *The Lone Gunmen*, Fox's spin-off from the X-Files, the show that taught us that paranoia can be entertaining.

So I immediately suspected "Mind Kontrol."

Beginning in the early 1950s, the CIA engaged in an extensive program of human experimentation using drugs, psychological and other means in search of techniques to control human behavior.

CIA documents and a 1963 CIA Inspector General (IG) report state quite clearly that MK ULTRA was a program "concerned with research and development of chemical, biological and radiological materials capable of employment in clandestine operations to control human behavior."

I got the foregoing off the Internet, which demonstrates my idea of journalistic integrity.

But back to the matter at hand: Do I know I'm a moron? The King of Burgers wants to know. Well, if I say "no," then it's apparent I do not know that I'm a moron, which is pretty much par for the course, moron wise.

Then there's the issue of talking back to the television, which makes you look like a moron, regardless.

And if I'm not a moron, which is the position I want to defend, why am I watching such a freaking moronic show?

(Note to the morons who produce *The Lone Gunmen*: Byers is the funny one, you dopes! Because he doesn't make jokes. And you could replace Frohike with a muppet when he inevitably keels over. I hear ALF needs a job.)

In this particular episode, the gunmen, lead on by the mysterious Zuleika Robinson (who's too sexy, apparently, to be bothered to actually pronounce her words), stumble across a Studebaker that runs on water.

Which, the script tells us, must be destroyed. Why?

Because, really, we're told, it wouldn't make any difference. Sure, we might not need to make gasoline from petroleum, but roadways would still be paved with it and plastic turn signals made from it.

Water-powered cars would mean many more cars on the road and lead to even more consumerism.

So these guys were supposed to like, after pouring in a pitcher and taking the old jalopy for a spin, mothball the whole thing, preserving it for a more enlightened age.

Who's the moron now?

Nope, it's still me. Because I'm the one watching this suckfest. Because I actually care that besides making absolutely no sense, it's also badly written.

It's me who cares that the acting sucks. Me who butchers good grammar so atrociously in dissing a show (and its attendant adds) that really doesn't warrant even thinking about, much less writing about, and at such length!

Do you get the whiff of impotent rage? Or is that Burger King?

"Morons!" I feel it shilling inside me, "Morons, morons, morons!"

But they can't hear me where they are, leaning back in their New York offices and at their Los Angeles poolside. They get to come into my home ... actually I saw this at a friend's house.

They get to come into the home of my friend and call me a moron while acting like the worst kind of morons themselves because they have sweet deals with Fox and fast-food royalty.

They are the moron elite.

And what have I got? I've got a mute button, sure, an off switch. I can read a good book or go for a walk instead of sucking down this suck cocktail called prime time.

And then it hits me: MK ULTRA was a grand success; it's a celebrated event. Every year, more hideous aspects of its hideous plan appear, and we suck them down.

We buy their burgers, watch their driveling television and just generally dumb down like they want us to.

And all the while, the secret soundtrack of all sitcoms, a toilet repeatedly flushing, brainwashes an already empty-headed populace.

You know you're a moron, don't you?

Of course, it could be that I'm reading too much into this.

Maybe there's a less ambiguous meaning to all this, something that escapes me by being too obvious, too out-in-the-open.

Something simple.

Maybe what the burger man really wants to say is simply:

"Shove more stinking meat sandwiches in your stupid face, MORON!"