

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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Brent's Blunder

Single student throttles DN's funding while on power trip

Fifty thousand, eight-hundred and sixty-two dollars was never so sweet as it was Wednesday night.

ASUN deliberated on the Daily Nebraskan's \$1.19 per student allocation for three meetings, finally voting to grant the newspaper its full funding, 14-7 with 2 abstentions.

Even though getting the money is sweet, to be sure, we still can't help but have a bad taste left in our mouths.

The system has gone sour. It needs to be examined, not only because of the ludicrous situation this newspaper faced, but for the simple reason that any student fee user's budget can be held hostage.

All it takes is one power-hungry student, as we've seen this year in Committee for Fees Allocation Chairman Brent Stanfield, who will be back next year to serve a second term.

CFA is a subcommittee of student government that pores over fee-users' budgets and makes recommendations to the senate on the amount of student fees to appropriate to each organization.

Stanfield, who represents CFA at ASUN meetings, has continually touted only his own agenda, never speaking on behalf of CFA, which approved the newspaper's student fees request 6-2.

He presented his 80 percent cut—he wanted to give the newspaper about \$9,000—in the face of a 20-year agreement made between the Daily Nebraskan and the vice chancellor for student affairs.

The agreement states student fees will be used to pay for only a portion of the newspaper's production costs. Considering only the production costs eliminates any concerns about student government tinkering with the newspaper's editorial freedoms.

In other words, a senator with an ax to grind against the Daily Nebraskan because of a story or cartoon it ran couldn't financially ruin the newspaper if he or she only is allowed to consider a portion of its printing budget.

Not only that, but ASUN having total control over the campus newspaper's purse strings would be equivalent to the government running a newspaper.

The existing system of granting student fees requires fee users to present their budgets to CFA, whose members examine expenditures to determine the level of student fee funding each user should receive.

That's why it's so important for senators to respect the decisions made by the bodies they appoint to conduct their business, bodies like CFA. But this year, the system went awry when the power-hungry Stanfield got in his mind that he would slash a fee-user's budget, which he set out to do—basically unchecked.

Stanfield made CFA's work looking at the newspaper's budget moot. And the budget-slashing torch he carried almost hornswoggled the entire senate.

Had the senate bought Stanfield's argument and voted to cut the newspaper's student fees, his agenda would have been realized, and the voices of students would have been trampled.

That's unprincipled and unscrupulous, and fortunately, more than a few ASUN senators came to realize Stanfield's tricks.

Led by ASUN President Joel Schafer, who vetoed a bill that would have given the newspaper only \$9,513, the senate eventually honored the will of the students.

In the future, the senate should be on the lookout for people with axes to grind against certain student organizations.

Senators shouldn't let one person's voice overpower that of an entire student body.

Editorial Board

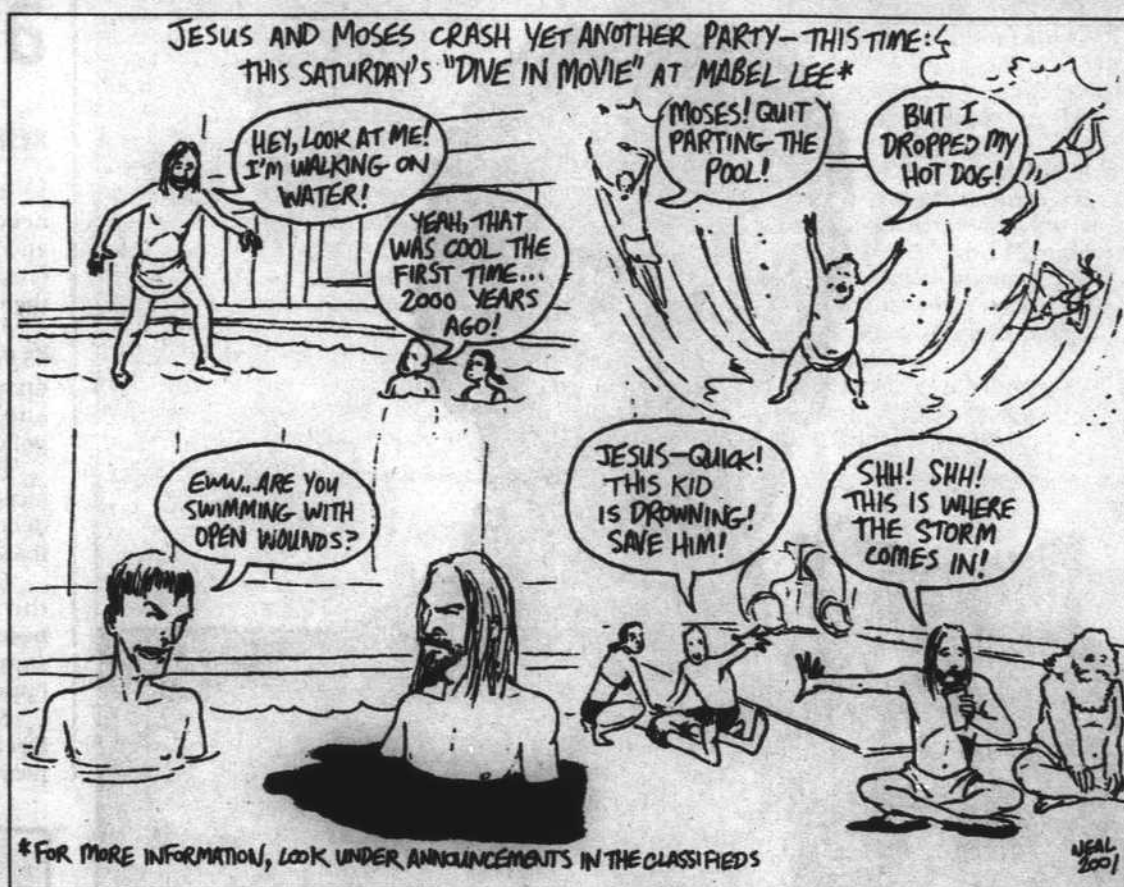
Sarah Baker, Jeff Bloom, Bradley Davis, Jake Glazeski, Matthew Hansen, Samuel McKewon, Kimberly Sweet

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Editorial Policy

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Walking from McLuhan to Lao-tzu

I woke up the other morning. (This is not a column on oral sex.)

And on my bedstand was a copy of the Tao Te Ching, that wise text of old, which I have been poring over quite a bit lately.

The last time I had flipped through my worn and beaten copy was probably, oh, a year ago.

In the pursuit of knowledge, every day something is added. In the practice of the Tao, every day something is dropped.

I had fallen asleep, meditating on the text. The Tao has almost always been a sort of guilty pleasure—sort of like my enjoyment of Enya and my fascination with Yanni (though that was long ago, back before CDs were affordable. I have two Yanni tapes still buried in Rubbermaid containers in the corner of my parents' basement.)

Why the guilt? Well, Ayn Rand looms on the same bookshelf as the Tao, her fat books of fiction and her thinner, though no less substantial, works of nonfiction forming a big black barrier to the contemplation of the "no-mind."

I can feel of Ayn, looking down on me and shaking her head, sometimes. I have forsaken her.

He who has power over others can't empower himself. He who clings to his work will create nothing that endures.

How I came to this betrayal was interesting. Quite.

Marshall McLuhan wrote a book titled "Understanding Media." Now, this book is the sort of thing that ten different people can read and come away with ten different ideas because the prose is like a great, Amazon canopy—thick, tangled and leafy. So my interpretation, understand, is little more than a swinging at the piñata, if you will. But anyway.

McLuhan writes, among other things, that the use of a phonetic alphabet (which most of the Western world uses) is connected deep down with our bias, as westerners, toward inferential reasoning.

This is quite something for one who has sucked at Rand's dry treat for ... perhaps a tad too long. Suppose, for a moment, that my bias toward reason in my everyday encounters is due less to the fact that Logic is some god by which reality abides, but to the fact that I have been taught to view the world as a set of logical sequences through the use of language and a phonetic alphabet.

I mean, there isn't anything sequential about the human consciousness, for example. It makes no sense to try to take it apart bit by bit and to understand it linearly. Much better to find a more global, nonlinear approach.

Perhaps this is what the Tao Te Ching does.

Throw away holiness and wisdom, and people will be a hundred times happier.

Throw away morality and justice, and people will do the right thing.

McLuhan isn't suggesting that useful or meaningful truths can be arrived at without reason; he merely suggests that there exist other, more accurate views of the world, which do a better job of understanding than does the paradigm of logical rules and inferential logic.

Our written language involves too heavy an emphasis on the visual sense at the detriment of the other senses—the result is a failure of communication, which, it could be supposed, eventually results in a larger scale of misunderstanding in general.

He gives, for example, an exercise of Stanislavsky, where an actor would pronounce the word "tonight" with fifty different forms of inflection; an audience would record the meanings and shadings of each. The exercise exhibits just how much is really meant when we speak. And how much we must cut out when we write things down.

And so, with time, a society's understanding of concepts is directed by the expression of those concepts. Inaccurate representations of nonlinear ideas as linear ideas continue and shape future minds. So we all get these dissociated notions of truth, emotion, irrationality, etc.

The human consciousness, in other words, is wholly cheated by our written and spoken language. We come to understand ourselves in terms of rules, rather than intuitions, when really our intuitions prove more accurate.

My mother's been trying to convince me of that for years.

The more you know, the less you understand.

Unfortunately, none of this is very conducive to living, working and learning in a university environment. You tend to get less enthused about sitting in class when you are convinced your time is better spent ... well, somewhere else.

I suppose it's good that I'm to graduate soon, then.

A time for getting real

Calliope is a member of six university organizations.

Four select. Two secret.

She is treasurer of her sorority. She loves to spend her free time taking naps that involve mental problem-solving exercises—five-minute naps that are designed to help her focus on writing her international relations honors thesis.

She works part-time as a page in the Legislature because she knows it will look good on her resumé. And although she doesn't know who her senator is, Calliope looks positively adorable in her little powder blue sweater and matching gray boiled-wool skirt.

Calli also has a planner.

Later, outside of Love Library, when she is returning a book, she bumps into Jacob and his Patagonia hiking pack.

It can hold up to 50 pounds. But tonight, it's only been filled to 30.

Jacob is in ASUN and is tired from studying for the last eight hours in one spot, without food or drink.

The two of them, planner and backpack, laugh cheerily as they do a tired attempt at a clumsy high five, neither stopping, just calling out "Harry's Wonder Bar on Thursday."

Two frosty smiles hang in the crisp air, leaving the campus empty until the lingering sounds fall and disappear into the lonely night.

They were together, once. Together together. But there were Calli's grades and then there were Jacob's grades. Calli chose to be friends, then Jacob chose one of Calli's sorority sisters on a fraternity dare.

To make up for that, Jacob did something desperate, even foolishly romantic, the kind of thing he dreamt about but never did. A very unelite thing to do. It just might have been ... embarrassing.

Jacob had driven to Calli's house late in the evening hours and stood on her stoop waiting patiently for her to come out. The wind whipped its scolding breath upon his face and with each gust Jacob says,

"sorry, so sorry, so sorry," underneath

his own.

That was four months ago, and his brothers had faithfully helped him to move on.

"For the love of God, get your priorities straight, man, you've got to stay focused," they said.

"Here, have another beer."

Jacob gets home to his fraternity house, and he has to wade through the usual sea of self-absorbed but good-hearted men to make it to his room. And when he makes it there, he opens the door to the sounds of "Survivor."

Various members of his roommates clan are lounging noisily in his room. He looks forlornly at his couch. He just wanted to come home to his room and fall on the couch. And he is too cold; somebody opened all the windows again.

Calli gets a call!

She is in the running for a Rhodes Scholarship and he wanted to congratulate her. If she wins, it will mean traveling across continents to study for two years. She remembers that Jacob is planning on studying abroad in Germany next semester.

Clearly, Calli notes, it wasn't meant to be. Had it been once? Was there a connection? They met at a leadership conference about shaping campus life and diversity and didn't seem to disagree with one another.

Big plus.

Once, they both were wearing matching Abercrombie & Fitch color schemes. They liked the same drinks. Once, in a fit of wild abandon, they threw up because they were really drunk.

But relationships are like passing planets—orbiting each other briefly and then rotating on, Calli thought.

She had better things to do these days (a Rhodes!). She was accomplishing too much. She could not deal with the pettiness of closeness.

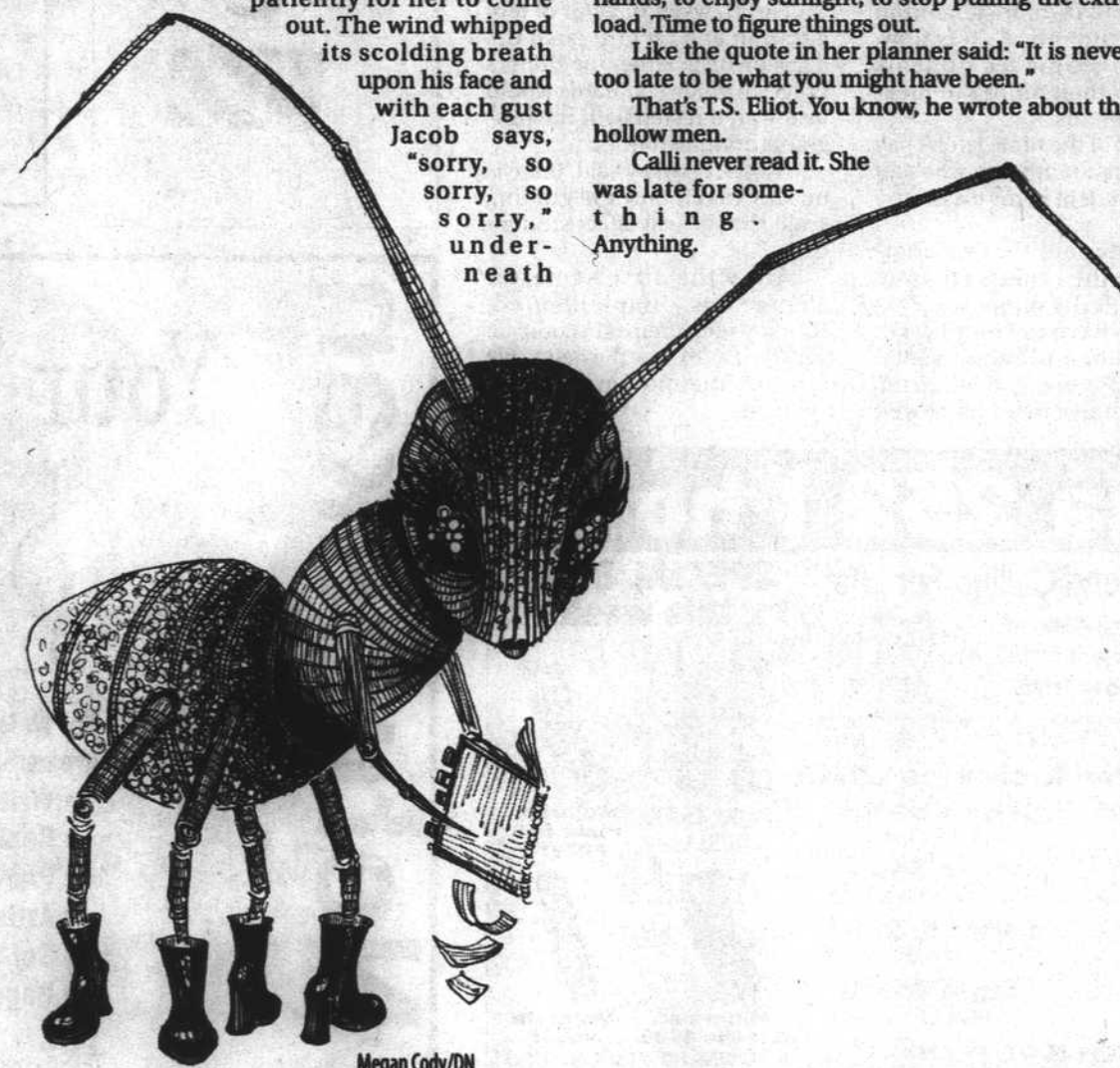
Calli almost thinks that the future success of humanity rests and rides on our ability to withstand human contact. To not give yourself to someone else. To resist trust, physical love, uncertain futures, sacrifice. It's a good plan for now.

She figures, hey, it'll be there, the times to hold hands, to enjoy sunlight, to stop pulling the extra load. Time to figure things out.

Like the quote in her planner said: "It is never too late to be what you might have been."

That's T.S. Eliot. You know, he wrote about the hollow men.

Calli never read it. She was late for something. Anything.



Please write back!

Comments? Questions?

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