

OPINION

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NEW MEANING FOR 'TOWN AND GOWN'

UNO shows public spirit

Starting in the Middle Ages, university life has often been marked by the concept of "town and gown."

University life, that tradition held, should focus inward. Students and instructors would regard themselves as separate from the local community. Indeed, they would strive to maintain that cultural insulation.

In this country, one of the great advances in American civilization has been the jettisoning of that tradition and the pursuit of a quite different goal — the strengthening of ties connecting universities to the surrounding community.

Nebraska benefits enormously from that approach.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln, for example, has pursued that vision, building on UNL's land-grant origins. The University of Nebraska Medical Center deserves commendation for its multifaceted work to bolster health services statewide. In Omaha, Creighton University admirably pursues civic connections under the leadership of the Rev. John Schlegel.

And at UNO, Chancellor John Christensen this week presented an important vision for making his campus's community-focused work even stronger.

As noted here on several occasions, UNO has a commendable record on this score. Indeed, its public service involves help not just for Omaha but also for Nebraska as a whole.

UNO's College of Public Affairs and Community Service, for example, ranks as one of the top programs nationally in its field and delivers an impressive array of help to Nebraskans through training, research and service work.

UNO lends support to organizations such as the Neighborhood Center, which provides impressive support for neighborhood associations in Omaha as well as Council Bluffs.

In his remarks at the 2009 fall convocation on Wednesday, Christensen described his vision by which UNO would raise its civic commitment even higher.

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THE PUBLIC PULSE

No more on-the-job fundraising

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Firefighters on duty, using city equipment, are scheduled to report to various stations to hear the presentations for all three shifts to raise money. Other on-duty firefighters escort the speakers for the fundraiser in city vehicles to the different locations and help the speakers with the materials.

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Citing the availability of space on campus as the College of Business Administration and the College of Education relocate to new UNO locations, Christensen recommended using some of the freed-up space to house a University/Community Engagement Center. It's a compelling idea.

Such a facility could serve as a hub for the focused study of community issues in the Omaha area. It would create new opportunities for community organizations such as Omaha By Design, the Omaha Community Partnership and the OPPD Energy Research Project. The facility would provide Omahans with space to gather with experts and discuss community problems and collaborative solutions.

At the Wednesday convocation, Christensen noted that the articles of incorporation launching UNO in 1908 stated that its mission must include the study and response to the "social and civic problems" facing Omaha.

As UNO begins its second century, Christensen urged the university to build on that tradition and make civic engagement nothing less than a "core institutional practice" that will "permeate the academy."

Christensen is right that UNO should be rightly regarded as a "national prototype for innovative interactions within our community, particularly in the areas of service learning." The proposals he outlined would broaden those efforts, to the mutual benefit of the university, Omaha and Nebraska.

For centuries, "town and gown" was a slogan for separation and even distrust. In this century, UNO is admirably showing the way by converting that phrase into a slogan for community dialogue, fellowship and mutual support.

PREVENTING HEART ATTACKS

Smoking-ban data

Millions of Americans are more comfortable since many states enacted smoking bans. Now studies are indicating that the bans are making people healthier.

These findings are directly relevant to Nebraska, given the years of public debate on the issue.

Two independent studies looked at the aftermath of smoking bans in a dozen places in the United States, Canada and Europe. What they found was startling: The bans led to almost immediate, impressive declines in heart attacks, and the longer the bans had

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With the decision of Omaha's legal department against on-the-job fundraising, the city should call the United Way of the Midlands and tell them that the City of Omaha can no longer participate in this worthy cause during work hours.

Jim Clines, Omaha
Retired Omaha firefighter

Take a stand to prevent suicide

Many kids are tragically committing suicide because of things almost anyone could prevent.

Some kids commit suicide because of bullying. Kids in every school should be taught about how bullying hurts people.

In Blair schools, students learn about bullying and how to stop it. I think all schools should do more to try to stop suicide.

Many people aren't doing enough to prevent suicides, which break many hearts. These people then wish they had done something or even knew there was a problem.

We need to stand up and say no to suicide and stop it once and for all.

Michael Reed, Blair, Neb.
Blair High School student

Best of luck to Bright Futures

From the standpoint of crime prevention, Building Bright Futures is a great idea, and I commend the people in the program.

It's wonderful that after such a long period of time and so much money donated, day-care programs, health clinics and other learning opportunities are going to be offered in numerous schools to low-income students.

I think it is especially important to start kids off early with excellent-quality child care and then help keep these same kids in high school, because crime rates and large numbers of high school dropouts are directly related.

Although it is almost impossible to guess how people would've done had they finished high school, it is probably very likely that they wouldn't have become quite as interested in crime.

So, my hat's off to all in the Building Bright Futures program, and I wish all students in the program the best of luck.

Rachel Sjoberg, Omaha

Donate to help pets and owners

How ridiculous to fine someone for not licensing an animal after it has died. I think the main blame should go to the Omaha veterinarian for charging such an exorbitant amount for euthanasia.

Realizing he had a very sad situation, with a young man who didn't have extra money, the veterinarian should have offered his services for putting the dog to sleep in

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