

## Is image everything at UNLV?

by Roxanne Warren  
Rebel Yell Columnist

What is the undergraduate experience at UNLV? Do you believe UNLV's present image is positive or negative?

In today's fast-paced professional market, it's becoming apparent that specialized degrees and/or graduate school may be important options for upward bound 20-something hopefuls.

Will you be a proud recipient of a degree from UNLV, or like some students, are you just here for a few years until you gain admission to a "real" college? As I enter my senior year, I must say, in some respects the jury is still out. Speaking on image, the administration's continuous campaign for improvement is common knowledge.

Unfortunately, it is also common knowledge that UNLV's reputation has taken some relentless beatings. One of the more memorable moments for me was a "Saturday Night Live" skit deriding UNLV's NCAA controversies and its academic environment. A more recent instance was a very disturbing editorial letter I read in *The Rebel Yell* last spring.

Jessica Van Sickle, a senior majoring in criminal justice bid good riddance to UNLV because she was "embarrassed and ashamed to be a student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas". Van Sickle had harsh words for UNLV President Robert Maxson, J. R. Rider, and the Board of Regents among others. Van Sickle denounced UNLV as being at an "all time low" and disclosed plans to graduate from a "reputable university" in the Midwest.

Though I definitely got the message conveyed by Van Sickle's tirade, she never mentioned her opinion of the quality of education she was receiving at UNLV. Granted, it must be an imposing task to separate UNLV's identity from that of the city in which it resides: Las Vegas! Den of sin, iniquity and decadence.

Couple that with the controversy and scandal that has run gleefully rampant through UNLV's basketball program, and one comes up with what may be construed as an image problem. Recently, some intra-departmental dissent and controversial accusations

have riddled UNLV's history, political science, architecture, and student government entities. What does all this mean...if anything, besides business as usual?

Why attend UNLV?

What is a UNLV degree?

Diana Pop, a sophomore, who plans a double major in communication studies and political science said that a large part of her decision to attend UNLV was financial.

"I work part time and my forensics scholarship really helps a lot", said Pop, who plans to transfer at the end of the year to George Washington University in Washington D.C. "The tuition is much less than out of state, and I think the campus is great."

Pop also believes a stronger academic program is inevitable at UNLV but will take time, unlike the athletics at the school.

"Sports are important, O.K.?", she said. "But the primary reason to be here is to learn, not play basketball."

For years UNLV has been touted as a "laughingstock", a "nationally broadcasted joke of a school and an institution lacking in academic freedom." A good question to ask at the beginning of school is, what's going on? Change and improvement are necessary components in a growing university, but is that happening here?

Consider the history: UNLV began as a seedling. College-level classes were first offered in a spare room at Las Vegas High School in 1951. The first degrees earned from then-Southern Nevada were earned less than 30 years ago.

We're a young university. Academic reputations often take time to build and should be carefully nurtured. Critics would do well to bear in mind that academic successes seldom receive the media attention their athletic siblings find hard to evade. In 1989 and again in 1992, U.S. News and World Report listed UNLV as a "up and comer" in the western region of colleges.

In 1990, amidst the swirling controversy of UNLV's basketball program, President Maxson established the Presidential Task Force on the College Student-Athlete at UNLV. The task force made approximately 50 recommendations, 49 of which are set for implementation. They are designed to reform student athletics at UNLV. The task force's report, along with the recommendations were released by UNLV administration this past May. These are

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two examples that UNLV is moving towards better academics.

"The top students that graduate from the political science department get into the best law schools, and the best graduate schools," said Jerry Simich, a political science professor at UNLV.

Addressing the issue of UNLV's tarnished image, Simich acknowledged that since the media focuses its attention on athletics in covering UNLV, inaccurate perceptions about students may be hard to avoid. Simich added that all was not lost: "As the university expands its programs, the image will change."

Isn't education the central reason for a university's existence?

Is image everything?

I think not.

Is it a factor? Obviously.

How much image matters to the individual is directly related to the degree of truth.

The question is - Are you getting what you need? Do you believe you are getting a good education? Are you spending your valuable time and money wisely?

If not, get out. Transfer. Be gone. If you feel that UNLV is not fulfilling its obligation to provide you with a solid, challenging collegiate atmosphere - or unable to, I respect that. Au Revoir, and Bon Voyage.

On the flip side; however, if you are benefitting from what this campus has to offer, stop whining. Buck up, Briscoe County. If you have questions, ASK THEM. If things need some changes, GET INVOLVED. Every little bit counts. That's how change happens.

I'm sure you have concerns - raise a little hell - constructively, of course. Please, let's not fuel sensationalism, or cede to petty politics for pity's sake. Don't tell me you're moving across the country because of Billy Crystal. I know you have better things to do, like get an education.

Roxanne Warren is a *Rebel Yell* columnist and Political Science major. Her column appears every Tuesday.



## Publish or profess?

### TO THE POINT

by Nick Haley  
Managing Editor

What's on your professor's mind?

If the lecturer appears bored and mentally pre-disposed, it could be he's or she's thinking about the paper he or she has to write.

That's right. Just like you, professors are expected to write research papers.

But for them, the stakes are a little higher than a simple letter grade. It could mean merit pay, a Ph. D. or even a tenureship.

Like most universities across the nation, UNLV uses publication portfolios as a measuring stick of a professor's caliber. Teacher evaluation's are considered, but earning the respect of one's peers is the ticket to a promotion.

According to UNLV President Robert Maxson, there are three criteria used in evaluating a professor. The degree of emphasis may vary from department to department, he said, but all colleges focus on teaching, researching and publishing, and community service.

Said Maxson: "There's no question UNLV has become a more research-oriented university over the past several years. I hope it has not been at the expense of teaching. Undergraduate education is the heart and soul of a university."

But even so, can publishing exist without some compromise to education and, more importantly, does a university even need publishing professors?

It would be easy, but wrong, to simply do away with the research functions of a university. Professors are a major source of scientific and scholarly advancement, and all those in the academic community have a duty to share their findings. From the university's perspective, there's even more at stake. Publication means notoriety and publicity. Research translates into federal grants.

"Every time a professor writes a book and it

becomes widely recognized in academia, it enhances the image of the institution. A reputation for good teaching can also enhance the image of an institution," Maxson said.

Problems arise, however, when a professor no longer has time to perform his lecturing duties and must turn over a class to assistants, guest lecturers or other term-killers. Students need more than to be babysat, they need to be taught.

In extreme cases, students not only fail to learn, they fail to understand. Darrin Munson, a freshman last year at the University of Nevada, Reno had to drop a math class when, two weeks into the semester, a teaching assistant with a thick accent took over the lecturing.

While every college faces the dilemma of finding the middle-ground between publishing and teaching, UNLV must evaluate its own needs. With the continuous expansion of the campus' supercomputer, the completion of the Desert Research Institute on Swenson last year, and the opening of the Harry Reid Environmental Research Center, UNLV has asserted itself in becoming a more research-oriented institution.

If teaching is indeed the top priority of the university, professional merit should be determined with the greatest emphasis placed on classroom credentials. Community service is commendable, but the greatest contribution a professor can make to a community is simply to do his or her job well. And though research and publication are more tangible, and thus more impressive than even the most dynamic lecture, a professor is, by definition, a teacher of higher education.

Nick Haley is the Managing Editor of *The Rebel Yell*. His column appears on Tuesdays.

