

Editorial: Phone use should be permitted for academic purposes

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In 2025, the state of Nebraska ruled that all schools must have a policy restricting cell phone use; as a result, Yutan changed its policy. Our old policy required students to put up their phones in a classroom phone pocket at the beginning of class and not get them until class was over. However, if needed for academic purposes, students would be able to retrieve their phones and use them with teacher permission. Even though the new state law says phones may still be used for educational purposes, Yutan changed its policy to only allow students to use their phones during lunch and passing periods; no phone usage is allowed during any class period for any reason. This has created problems for several classes, and we believe that with teacher permission, students should be allowed to use their phones during class for educational purposes.

One key example where the new policy has caused problems that we have experienced firsthand is in our journalism class. Our journalism advisor even admitted, “The lack of exceptions in the policy has created some challenges for journalism, as we used phones for several legitimate purposes in the past. This required us to be creative and come up with alternatives, particularly for our broadcasts and interviews.”

For most of our stories that get published, we record student or staff interviews so we can pull direct quotes into our stories. In previous years, we would ask for teacher permission to grab our phones out of the phone pocket to record these interviews using a specific app. This year, we have to record using our Chromebooks. One downside to recording with our Chromebooks is that they don’t have as high-quality microphones as phones do. Due to this, many of the recordings sound jumbled, and it can be hard to decipher what the interviewee is saying. “The speakers are on the bottom of the Chromebook, so the sound always gets muffled and it’s not as clear. It just makes getting direct quotes hard because of the quality,” one junior said. “When we could use our phones, everything was a lot easier.”

Another problem with recording on Chromebooks is that for some students, their microphones would simply not work. Because of some settings set by the school, Chromebooks had to be completely restarted just to use a single tool on them. “My microphone just randomly stopped working, and I really needed to get my interviews done, so I had to do them over email, which aren’t as good because sometimes people don’t give as good [of] answers,” one freshman said.

Besides regular interviews for stories, we had previously used our phones to record broadcast interviews. The class would all have access to good film quality because we could use our phones. Plus, we would be able to record at the same time. But due to the phone policy, we had to work around it and record on a few of the school’s iPads. When we started using the iPads, however, students quickly found out that because the school’s devices are several years old, the camera quality, even on the highest setting, didn’t compare to a phone’s. Our advisor had to bring her personal iPads from home because of the decreased camera quality of the school’s iPads. This also limited how often we could record since there was a limited number of iPads, which caused students to have to work around each other’s schedules. “We had to re-record all our broadcast interviews, and it pushed our timeline back. We would have been a lot farther ahead if we didn’t have to re-record because of the iPad quality,” one senior said.



Another problem that affects many students, not just the students in journalism, is access to our college classes. For those who have decided to take one or multiple college classes, Southeast Community College requires online students to use a two-step login process to ensure no one else can access their account. The two-step login process can be accessed through an authenticator app, text or email. However, the email option doesn't work because students also need the two-step login to get into the email provided by Southeast Community College, which leaves the app or text option. With phones being banned, students now have to make sure that they are logged in to their college classes before school starts or during the short three-minute passing period. Even then, sometimes the tab will "time out," and we would get logged out with no way to log back in because of the phone policy. "It's just a hassle having to make sure that I'm already logged in before class starts because we can't go on our phones even though it's for our college class," one senior said.

Overall, a complete ban on phones during classes is not necessary, especially because phones can have academic purposes. The old phone policy we used to have worked perfectly; it kept students off their phones when they weren't needed, and when phones did need to be used, teachers could permit it so students weren't breaking any rules. This new policy shows distrust in students and in staff, and honestly, it's not fair to all of us. Rather than banning phones or having a strict policy, our school should recognize that phones can be used academically when permitted by teachers.