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David Creamer/Daily Nebraskan

Kerr uses a viewing room to watch students as they counsel patients.

UNL center counsels gifted adults living in 'anti-intellectual' atmosphere

By Colleen Kenney Daily Nebraskan Staff Reporter

A well-known, creative artist had a problem — something equal to a writer's block. He needed to consistently produce material, but found that drawing from the back seat of his car, making house payments for an ex-wife and two girlfriends and living a "Bohemian" lifestyle interfered with his productivity.

He came to the nation's only counseling center for talented adults, here at UNL in Bancroft Hall.

Barbara Kerr, the director of the Guidance Laboratory for the Gifted and Talented, showed him how his life had too many "crazy relationships," which caused a creatively destructive environment.

"I helped him to change his lifestyle to have more stability," Kerr said.

Kerr started the center in 1982 and counsels about 50 gifted people a year. She and five assistants deal with problems not usually thought to be associated with the gifted: Depression, anger, low self-esteem and underachievement.

"Traditionally most psychologists and counselors thought that the gifted had everything going for them. They just were not interested," Kerr said.

Sometimes gifted people think they need to live stereotypical roles, as the artist did, she said. But most often they will suppress their abilities so they don't fit into the intellectual's "social worm" typecast.

"How many people do you know that brag about having a 4.0 (GPA) or a high I.Q.?" Kerr said. "Our society is so anti-intellectual that nobody who comes here will even admit to being gifted."

that you can put to a talent or gift," she said. "People can take away a job but no one can take away a vocation."

Kerr is the author of "Smart Girls," a book that will be released in March. The book focuses on the problems faced by gifted women.

Kerr says many women have "camouflaged" their abilities to meet society's standards.

"It's not too smart to be a smart woman," she said.

Other women fear success, but most become aware when it is "too late" that they have cheated themselves, Kerr said. Because the gifted people in general are well-adjusted, many gifted women have compromised their talents to fit society's expectations, Kerr said.

"For these women, underachievement is the norm, not the exception," she said.

Kerr says that since she started researching her book five years ago many more gifted women are entering the professions.

"More and more bright women are realizing that marriage and a career are not mutually exclusive," she said.

The Bancroft Hall center also counsels gifted children and adolescents. Every Friday about 10 high school juniors from Nebraska come to the center for special career counseling.

"The gifted children of today will become the leaders of tomorrow. But without adequate guidance it's not going to happen," Kerr said.

She devotes a large amount of her free time to the center. It is the first and only of its kinds for talented adults. "There's an excitement in charting the unknown and an excitement in helping the very creative to be productive and happy," Kerr said.

Kerr said she is considering writing another book on talented adults a year from now.

Profile

A close friend or superior usually points out to the gifted what they probably already realized — that their unique abilities have caused unique problems. This word of mouth reference brings them to UNL's center.

An artist has a block. A talented writer can't make a living freelancing. A classical musician is "married" to his instrument.

These problems are individually rooted, Kerr said. Her counseling sessions consist mostly of talking and listening.

"We don't offer a package deal," she said. "It's whatever works."

For the blocked writer, she might suggest an abstinence from writing. She might help a musician to understand that "Mozart is perfect, but relationships are not," Kerr said.

Unemployment is a main problem root, Kerr said.

"We're living in a generation where there's too many bright young adults and not enough leadership positions," Kerr said.

"We redefine their lifestyles and rechannel their energies in such a way that they learn to distinguish between a job and a vocation," she said.

"We get them past the feeling that there's always a dollar value

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Non-traditional student...

Continued from Page 6 still enjoys politics and keeps her eye on the Legislature. She said she did not run again for a Nebraska legislative seat because she is nearing her graduation goal.

Her organ teacher, Quentin Faulkner, associate professor of music, also is Crosby's church choir director. Crosby plays the organ once a month at the church, Cathedral of the Risen Christ.

"I'm not a virtuoso but I'm adequate," Crosby said.

Robert Sittig, professor of polit-

ical science, said Crosby really adds to his American Presidency 427 class.

"Because of her experience, she can clarify and add to what the rest of us have to glean from public sources," Sittig said.

Crosby said some of her friends have a hard time realizing the commitment she has to make in being a college student. She said eventually people understand, especially her close friends.

"I won't skip a class to go to a meeting," Crosby said.