

It is difficult to say how the 2,290 students enrolled in Centennial throughout its 11-year history turned out. The fellows remember many who went on to graduate school, but locating the less notable students is difficult. The UN-L Alumni Association lists only 164 Centennial alumni, according to Jack Miller, executive vice president. This may reflect the number of students who felt their Centennial experience worth mentioning when they joined the association, but several other alumni members also may have been in the program, Miller said.

Although the program sometimes was criticized, several participants say they think Centennial did fulfill their dreams. Many were pleased with the interdisciplinary study, communal living, personal exchange and self-motivation it promoted.

Homze said Centennial College approached education more humanistically than the rest of the university. It was not concerned with narrowly molding chemical engineers or farmers. It was a preparation for life, he said.

The human touch partially was established through interdisciplinary study. Students or fellows decided what they wanted to study and how they wanted to approach it. For example, philosophy and science were combined in one project so students could learn the structure of reasoning in science. English and science were combined in an exploration of nature. Economics was combined with other disciplines to search for the identity of quality.

Ryly Jane Hambleton, a Centennial student from 1970 to 1972 who currently is a sports reporter for the Lincoln Journal and Star, said the interdisciplinary method helped her link things she thought were unrelated. For instance, events covered in European history class made more sense to her because of a project she had completed two years earlier on Sir Thomas Moore in Centennial.

Curt Donaldson, one of the students who initiated Centennial, said other students made projects out of searching for "unmet needs."

"I was the illegitimate father of the (University) Day Care Center," he said proudly.

Donaldson suggested to another student that a needs survey should be done. Kari Ronning, whom he later married, followed up on the idea and found the number of kids needing day care, the number of hours it was needed and the amount of money parents could afford for it.

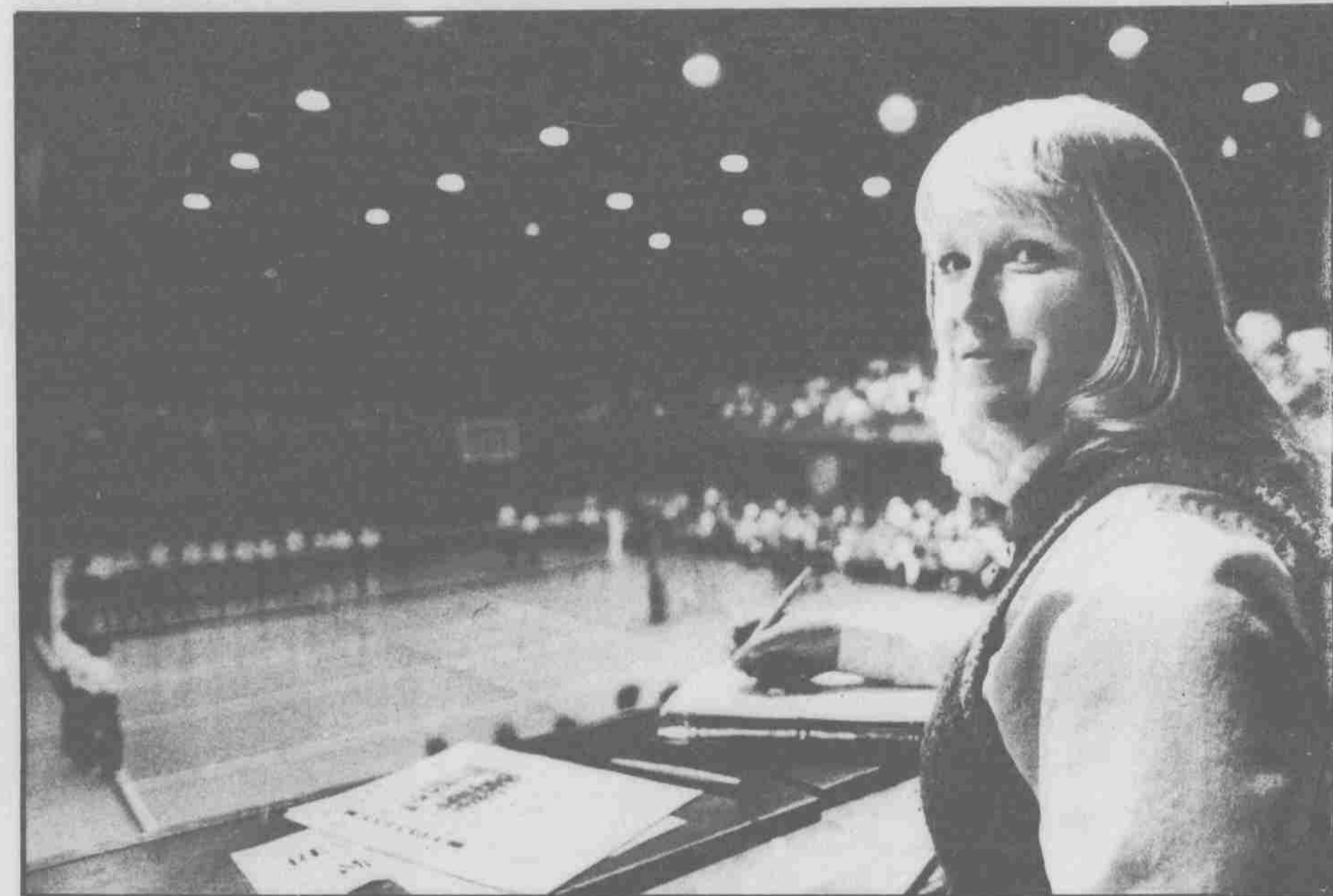
Other students built a harpsichord for the college, another group read "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance," and some studied the writings of Herman Hesse.

Hesse's ideas, recorded prior to World War I in "Steppenwolf," spoke to the generation of students, according to Homze. Hesse was a pacifist, an Asian mystic and experimented with drugs.

Drug use gained popularity during the late '60s and '70s and Centennial students were not exempt from experimentation. But Betty Carpenter, a fellow during academic year 1976-77, said drug use only reflected what was happening across the campus and did not set a precedent.

Some students, she said, substituted drugs for the security of friends. There was a notion that you were okay if you were high, she said.

Hambleton agreed that drug use in Centennial reflected society's use. Drugs were taken as an



Dan Dulaney/Sower

experiment and there was less pressure by users on non-users than there is today, she said.

Perhaps it was Centennial's sense of community that kept drug use from becoming an issue. Centennial was a haven where, amid skyrocketing enrollment in the 1960s, students were more than a number.

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The doors of Centennial College opened in 1969 with 125 freshmen and 40 upperclassmen. The college was located in the Neihardt Dormitory Complex. Women lived in Love Hall and men lived in the connecting Heppner Hall. It was the first co-educational dormitory at UNL. When Hambleton entered the program a year later, 200 names were listed on a roster of participants.

"I decided my mission in life was to meet every one of them. And I did. My grades went down but . . ."

Hambleton recalls all-nighters spent playing bridge, listening to music and rapping in "the grass room" (named because of its green carpet and the term's shock value, she said). Or sometimes groups of Centennial students would roam the campus in the dark. Many times they would pile in a car for a 5 a.m. doughnut run.

Terry Wittler, a Centennial student from 1970 to 1972 and currently an attorney, agreed that

Centennial was a comfortable place to be. Students spent hours talking about emotional lives, politics and academics, he said. A man did not have to date a woman just to talk to her, he said, and tensions between the sexes were relaxed. Students would just congregate at about 7 p.m. Saturdays and go out, Whittler said.

Georgia Glass, resident adviser from 1972 to 1974, said visitation hours were not strictly enforced. She said she thinks visitation rules are artificial and keep students from being responsible for their actions. When students have an option, a sense of responsibility is fostered, she said. Nelson Potter, senior fellow from 1974 to 1976, echoed her sentiments.

"You don't need to worry about structure too much if students and faculty are in close contact with each other."

And faculty members were close to the students. Each of the fellows had an office at the Neihardt Complex and spent considerable time in the building. Professors sat on the floor with the students. They went to programs produced by students or attended informal gatherings held in the grass room. Sometimes, to fit student schedules, the professors gave tests at night.

Hambleton said she was well acquainted with nine or 10 of her professors when she went home for Christmas.

"I was more than just a name to them."

Several professors say the same thing. For example, Homze and Jerry Petr, now an associate economics professor, said they feel the most intimate contact they've ever had with students occurred during their fellowships at Centennial.

Petr helped with Centennial's birth, nursed it as a fellow the first two years and returned to it in 1978.

Maybe, he theorized, closeness developed because there were fewer students per faculty

member in Centennial. Or maybe, he said, it was because they spent a great deal of time together. Or maybe joint academic ventures prompted these ties, he said.

Levine, currently an English professor, said there was a sense of "OK, we'll all have to study this together."

Levine said students once wanted to study Latin American literature. She learned as much as the students because it was not her area of expertise.

Academic exploration, however, was not limited to the classroom. Hambleton said students talked about their projects while visiting informally so it is difficult to measure what was learned in class and what was learned while socializing.

Despite this informal exchange, many of the former students interviewed said the Centennial program did not challenge them as much as it could have. Levine answers such accusations by saying it is difficult sometimes for people to monitor their learning progress.

"Sometimes there's a period when nothing much seems to go well academically for you," she said.

Carpenter said the lack of challenge was a problem in the mid-70s, but noted that the program changed direction again before it was dropped in 1981. During the former period, she said Centennial reflected student desire to get good grades without working for them.

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Left: Robert Knoll, UNL English professor and former senior fellow at Centennial College. Above: Ryly Jane Hambleton is a former Centennial College student and is currently a sportswriter for the Lincoln Journal-Star newspapers.
