

**Daily Nebraskan**

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Fax number: (402) 472-1761  
 World Wide Web: www.unl.edu/DailyNeb  
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**Tougher standards heighten rigor**

BY BRAD DAVIS  
 Senior Reporter

The university accepted a trade-off this year by preparing for a smarter but smaller freshman class. More rigorous admissions standards, adopted by the NU Board of Regents in 1991, went into effect with this year's freshman class.

The result: Fewer high school students applied and fewer were accepted, said James Griesen, vice chancellor for Student Affairs. This totaled a loss of about 500 students.

But the 1997 freshman class at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has been touted as the smartest ever — mostly because of the new admissions standards.

Peg Blake, director of Admissions, said 347 students admitted to the university in 1997 had ACT scores of 30 or higher, compared to 269 students in 1996.

It wasn't just the top students that had better ACT scores either, Blake said. The mean score for the freshman class was 24.3 — a one point increase from the previous year.

This year, students had to meet requirements including four years of math and English and three years of social studies and natural sciences, along with two years of a foreign language.

If students met the course

“There's an exciting life of the mind that goes on on the campus, and we want students to be coming here for that.”

RICHARD EDWARDS  
 senior vice chancellor for Academic Affairs

requirements, and had either a 20 or above on their ACT or were in the top half of their high school class, they were assured admission to UNL, Griesen said.

Students who had deficiencies in their core classes could be admitted on a “review” basis and were required to make up the deficiency within one year. Students must make up foreign language deficiencies within two years. Another option for perspective students is a deferred admission, in which UNL encourages a student to attend a community college for one or two years.

During students' time at a community or state college, Griesen said, they can ease into an academic climate without the pressures of a major research university.

It's also cheaper to take classes a student needs to make up a deficiency at a community or state college, he said.

Blake said with the smarter students who came to UNL this fall, the

stakes have risen in the classroom.

“We have started conversations about academic rigor that are taking place now fairly openly because we have students who are expecting more, so we are expecting more of ourselves,” she said.

Griesen said along with higher expectations for students and faculty members, the university has increasing expectations for itself.

With improved statistics for first-year students, Griesen said, UNL has improved its national reputation — including a move to the second tier in the U.S. News and World Report rankings for national universities.

But the news hasn't been all good.

The loss of students meant the loss of money for the university, Griesen said.

More than \$1 million in lost tuition revenue and \$207,000 in lost student fees was made up by shifting funds from different university accounts, Griesen said.

The \$1.2 million lost from room and board fees was made up by renting more single rooms, which brings in about \$750 extra per year per room compared to a double-occupancy room, Griesen said.

Despite fewer freshmen students, the residence halls are financially stable, he said.

Administrators planned for fewer students when they initially talked about raising admissions standards, Blake said, but did not plan for a loss of more than about 250 students.

Next year, she said, the university expects to add at least 200 students to its freshman class.

That could be because of high school students' greater awareness of UNL's standards.

Richard Edwards, senior vice chancellor for Academic Affairs, said earlier this semester that the new admissions standards sent a message to high school students that UNL is concerned with the background they bring to college.

“We want to make sure people understand they're coming here as students,” Edwards said, “that there's an exciting life of the mind that goes on on the campus, and we want students to be coming here for that.”

The message has reached high schools, said Judy Zohner, a counselor at North Platte High School.

If students meet UNL's requirements, Zohner said, she tells the students they can get into almost any school in the nation.

Gary Neuhaus, a counselor at Millard South High School in Omaha, said students who have taken four years of high school math will be better prepared to succeed in college.

But with that better preparation, Neuhaus said, he wonders if UNL's classes have become any harder.

“If (professors) haven't increased their expectations, then it wasn't any more rigorous than before,” Neuhaus said.

UNL administrators are encouraging instructors to step up their expectations because the university is no longer “drug down” by the less-prepared students, Griesen said.

But he assured that UNL will not become an elite campus for only top high school students.

“That's not our role,” Griesen said. “We're an institution that has been there for everybody and will always be there for everybody.”

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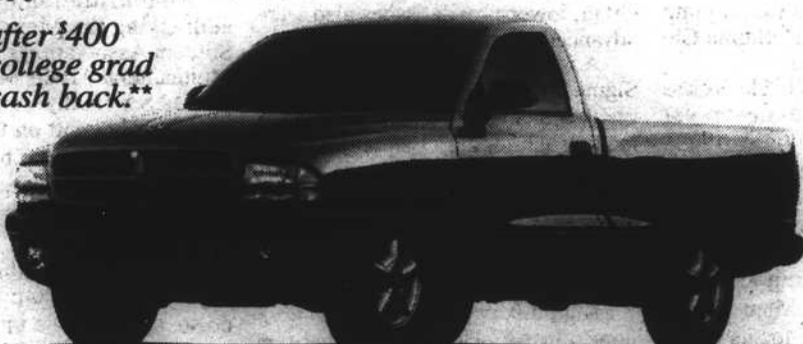
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