

# Black student enrollment down 10 percent since '96

## MINORITY from page 1

other countries. Admissions officials said a number of factors could have contributed to the lack of improvement in minority enrollment. Regardless, students say, the numbers show UNL needs to stop talking about solutions and do something.

### Finding the cause

Students leave UNL for various reasons, Harris said, such as financial problems, lack of maturity, the decision to transfer to another school or campus climate.

The admissions standards implemented in 1997 may have partly caused the drop in the black population, he said.

The standards require students to be in the top half of their graduating classes or have ACT or SAT scores higher than an increased base score to be assured admission to UNL.

Assuming that all high school students receive the same education, the standards wouldn't have a significant impact on one population, Harris said.

But he said it's hard to tell whether all students are offered the same educational experience, he said.

Multicultural Affairs Director Jimmi Smith agreed.

"It's no secret that the African-American community was in disagreement with the university in terms of its change in standards," Smith said.

Dissenting, Larry Routh, interim admissions director, said it would be difficult to tell if admissions standards has affected minority numbers.

"I don't think there's any evidence to indicate that," Routh said.

Other reasons offered for the decline in black student enrollment is that the admissions office was in a state of transition last April, the month when many students commit to the university, associate admissions director Pat McBride said.

The former minority recruitment director, Barbara Carrasco-Fechner, left the position to return to graduate school. Cynthia Gooch, then-education specialist in the office of Multicultural Affairs, was hired as the new director.

She didn't start the position until this year, but her efforts have been noticed by the admissions office, Routh said. He has seen more minority faces on campus during recruitment days.

Smith said he wasn't surprised by the decrease in black student enrollment. However, he said, the number of black students in Nebraska's high schools is increasing.

"If they are occupying those seats in greater numbers, then they should be showing up in greater numbers at the university," Smith said.

A troubled relationship with minority students combined with increased admissions standards has hurt retention and recruitment, Smith said.

"You're losing on the retention side.

You're losing on the admissions side," Smith said. "So you're losing big time overall."

Smith said he thinks the Multicultural Affairs office hasn't received enough funding from the university or the state to meet the needs of the minority students it serves.

As an office that focuses most of its efforts on minority students, Multicultural Affairs has received more funding from its own efforts than the university's budget, Smith said.

The office depends on external grants to run many of its programs, such as the TRIO programs, each of which focuses on high school minority students, undergraduate students and graduate students.

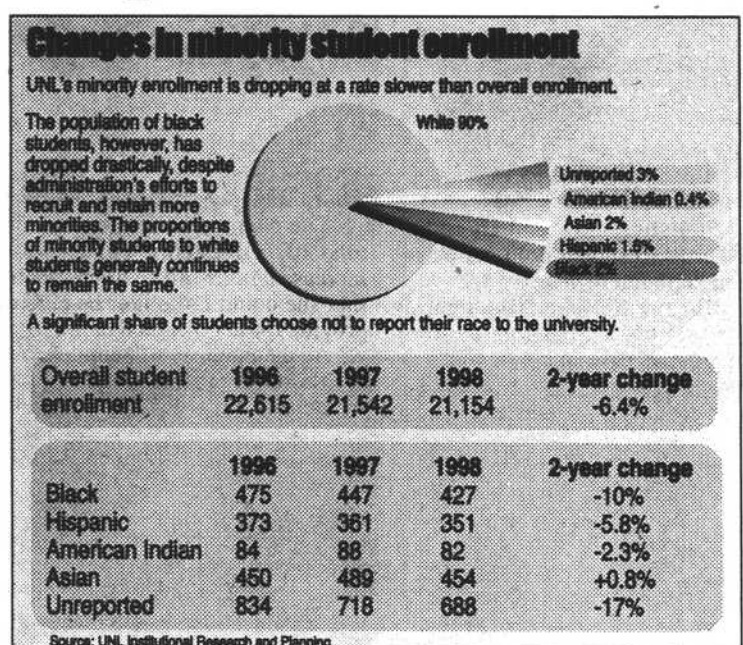
The office offers services such as tutoring and study skills development, counseling and financial aid programs.

### 'A couple of steps'

Letting students know what is being done to recruit and retain minority students, and letting them know they are important to the university is key, said senior Omar Valentine, chairman of the Afrikan People's Union political issues committee.

Each academic college should take its own steps to recruit minority students as well, Bunting said.

As just one example, Bunting said she has noticed the small number of minority students in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications,



JON FRANK/DN

which she said had few black students and professors.

Efforts are being made to change that. Linda Shipley, the college's associate dean, said the college has been trying to get information to more students about minority organizations.

The college also has a program in which it actively recruits minority junior high and high school students.

The students attend a weekend workshop in the summer where they learn journalism skills. The college also brings in minorities who are professional journalists to talk to the students.

"It is a slow process, but we have been trying to do more," she said.

The college also helps admissions with the recent implementation of minority recruitment days, Shipley said.

On recruitment days, Valentine said it is important to show prospective students what minority organizations are available to them.

Those who already are on campus need to know what is being done as well.

Not many know about the soon-to-be-implemented diversity plan, which is aimed at increasing diversity and diversity awareness in the student, faculty and staff populations, Valentine said.

Bunting has high hopes for the diversity plan, but said the university

has to be committed to make it work.

Administrators released the first draft of the plan last January. Writers of the plan constantly have sought student input through faculty and student forums, with the latest of its drafts coming out in September.

Chancellor James Moeser sent a campuswide e-mail asking for input on the newest plan.

### 'Beyond good intentions'

Harris said the University of Missouri-Columbia has focused on increasing its black population and has been successful.

It has nearly doubled the number of black students from 642 undergraduates in 1993 to 1,126 in 1997.

"They went beyond good intentions," Harris said.

Programs Missouri started included summer enrichment programs, overnight programs for prospective students and minority recruiters in both St. Louis and Kansas City, Mo.

A black student culture center was recently built there as well, Harris said.

Harris said change will come when the university and the state commit to doing things like Missouri has.

"My hope is that (UNL's) efforts become very specific."

## Hostile climate may fend off students

BY LINDSAY YOUNG  
Senior staff writer

A cross burning and an allegedly racist e-mail are still on the minds of many minority students and administrators when the topics of UNL recruitment and retention come up in conversation.

These highly publicized incidents no doubt had an impact on students' decisions to come to or to stay at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said John Harris, special assistant to the vice chancellor for student affairs. However, the incidents played only a part in students' decisions, he said.

Students and administrators agree these events may have left minority students wondering if UNL has a campus that welcomes minorities.

In January 1997, about 30 Sigma Chi Fraternity members burned a cross as part of an initiation ritual.

The ritual was not meant to be racist, members said, but many interpreted it that way. An uproar ensued throughout the state and the country.

A year later, in February 1998, then-English professor David Hibler sent an e-mail containing prose with the word "nigga" to about 300 faculty members and students. He said it was the principle of academic freedom that permitted him to do so and that the prose was merely literature.

Many thought otherwise and branded him racist and insensitive.

Another event not racially motivated contributed to an atmosphere some students considered intolerant.

In fall 1997, anti-gay messages were written on campus sidewalks during National Coming Out Week.

When things like this happen, the admissions office has to be prepared to answer questions from prospective students' families, said Pat McBride, associate admissions director.

McBride said what has happened could have potentially affected students' decisions to come here.

"People will ask, 'Is this a good atmosphere for my kid to go to school?'" McBride said.

Senior Omar Valentine, chairman of the Afrikan People's Union political

issues committee, said news of those events spreads quickly.

Valentine said that when he attended the Big 12 Conference on Black Student Government last year in Lincoln, many students from other schools asked him and other UNL students about some incidents.

"Everybody got ahold of it," he said.

UNL has received credit for its handling of such events. Student leaders have said it has improved in the time it takes to denounce such actions.

Chancellor James Moeser responded immediately with a public statement when he heard about Hibler's e-mail. The university has held forums and has visited with students about these incidents.

What the university has done to improve diversity efforts will be helpful, but the fact these incidents keep occurring shows more steps are needed, Multicultural Affairs Director Jimmi Smith said.

"The institution has not sought to correct those issues in some quality way."

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\*Source: Research Associates Marketing Survey, April, 1998

**Nov. 17, 18, 19 FORUMS FOCUS ON DIVERSITY PLAN DRAFT**  
The campus community is invited to a discussion of the working draft of a Diversity Plan for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Three open forum sessions have been scheduled for faculty, staff and students to provide input.**

Bring your ideas to the following sessions:

- **Faculty:** 3:30-5 p.m. Nov. 17, Nebraska Union.
- **Management/Professional and Office/Service Staff:** 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Nov. 18, East Union (feel free to bring your lunch).
- **Students:** 3:30-5 p.m. Nov. 19, Nebraska Union.

\*check the calendars on lobby kiosks under the heading UNL Diversity Plan-Open Forum for room numbers.

Another way to give input is to send comments via email to: <lcrump@unl.edu>; <bcurrin1@unl.edu>; or <ejacobson1@unl.edu>.

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