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Foreign Students Face Financial, Language Problems

By David Nordstrand
NU Journalism Student

Lincoln is the capital of a foreign state in a foreign country for many University of Nebraska students. Fifty-three countries are represented at NU, and, according to some foreign students and advisers, the resulting collision of so many cultures with the American life-style causes a range of specific financial, scholastic, social and language problems. One major area of difficulty is finance. According to

statistics supplied by the Foreign Student Office, only 48 of the students have full scholarships. According to these statistics, governments pay for 33, while organizations such as the Institute for International Education take care of 15. The University provides 104 assistantships, but most students rely on personal funds, according to these statistics. The \$300 proposed tuition increase will create special problems for foreign students, said Ivan Alphonse, one of the

international student advisers. Alphonse said that before a student comes to this country his finances are planned carefully, and that frequently the family must live on a tight budget to send the student to school here. "Three hundred additional dollars can be a great, if not impossible, burden," he said. "One must think in terms of the earning power of a native. In some countries \$300 can represent one year's wages for a worker. The Africans and Indians suffer the worst from this sort of unexpected financial change."

Several factors heighten the problem, Alphonse said. It takes time for students to get money out of their home countries, Alphonse said. He said that applying for additional money from a home government would involve tremendous red tape and could take months. Sometimes the money problem is aggravated by political policy. Claudine Kaiser-Lenoir, a graduate

student in comparative literature from Argentina, has been supported by her parents until now, she said. "Recently there was another coup in my country. The government won't let dollars or domestic currency out of the country. This means that my parents are unable to send me the money that I've been living on." Alphonse said the current dollar instability of foreign currency markets will not help the situation. He said it is difficult for foreign students to get money in the United States. The State Department had not issued working permits this year for foreign students, presumably because of the tight domestic job market, he added.

"When they are issued, they will be issued only for part-time jobs," he said. "We have 300 kids who cannot work here now because they do not have a permit." Mrs. Rowena B. Boykin, an international student adviser, said a problem related to

financing is money handling. "Many of these students have little or no experience in handling their own cash," she said. "Our credit system makes it tempting and easy for them to fall into debt and to get weighted down with impossible monthly payments." She added that many foreign students felt they needed cars to get around or wanted to have one because everyone else seemed to have one. She said that many students had bought expensive cars without consideration of the financial consequences.

English is also a problem area. Some foreign students said that American idioms were their worst language headache. They said they tended to take them literally. "Up tight," "where it's at," and similar expressions gave them trouble, they said.

To many students who are burdened down with academic pursuits, the task of picking up student jargon is too time consuming, Alphonse explained. He said that last January 60 students needed remedial English, yet, despite the efforts of the English Department to secure classroom space and finances for teachers, none was made available.

Because failure or success at the university depends greatly on mastery of the English language, prospects for these 60 students do not look good, he said.

Mrs. Boykin said multiple choice examinations were a good example of how a deficiency in English can cause academic problems.

"This type of question requires a sensitivity to the fine definitions of English words," she said. "Most of our foreign students are having their problems handling the rough definitions."

Joseph Hsu, an engineering student from Hong Kong and president of the Chinese Student Association, said lack of communication was not just due to lack of language fluency. Hsu said that the Chinese students, who are the most numerous on campus with 185, were too "scholastically minded," while the American students were

more "socially and politically minded."

"Chinese students spend all their time studying and don't try to mix enough," he said. "This just points to the basic division between the two cultures." He added that even a simple thing like telling a joke can show a breakdown in communication. Chinese people have a different sense of humor, and the American overstatement type of joke just "doesn't hit their funny bones." When a Chinese tries to translate a joke into English, he said, Americans laugh politely without really feeling the humor in it.

The Chinese students also find the American idea of student-faculty relations difficult to adjust to, Hsu said. "In the Orient the teacher is revered by the students and there is a great distance between them," he explained. "When our students have problems here, they are reluctant even to see their adviser about them. They just can't get use to the informality."

Holidays give rise to some special difficulties. Foreign students cannot go home for most vacations. Provisions are made for those students who remain on campus, but these are not always satisfactory. Mrs. Boykin said Abel Hall provides a single large room for male students with one overhead light bulb.

Dorm food is a problem area for at least two groups of foreign students. Mrs. Boykin said the East Indians, who are accustomed to eating heavily spiced food, cannot adjust themselves to the dorm food, which is bland by comparison.

"Hindu students are forbidden by their religion to eat meat," she said. "They get slim pickings in the residence hall cafeterias which serve so much meat."

The Foreign Student Office is responsible for helping visiting students with their problems. Mrs. Boykin said that five years ago a staff was created to handle 150 foreign students. Today this staff is the same size, yet it must take care of 600 students.

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