

Help man

editorial

In the beginning there was Help Line at 472-3311. And it was good.

There remained only one problem, however. Now that all the information of the free world and University of Nebraska had become available to the community at the command of a phone call, members of the community needed an agency they could contact that would provide more than information. An office within the University, yet set apart from the structure, to serve the interests of the University was created.

On March 11, 1972, the NU Board of Regents appointed James Suter, associate professor in the School of Environmental Development, to the position of UNL ombudsman.

According to the document that was used in developing the position, its purposes are fourfold. The ombudsman is to "receive and respond to complaints, investigate complaints, negotiate and to persuade." All four actions are to take place on behalf of a person who is "confused by the diffusion of authority within (the University)".

One of the most advantageous features of Suter's job is that it serves students, staff, faculty and administrators. In effect, it is one of the few agencies on this campus that serves the total community.

UNL Chancellor James H. Zumbege, in a recent letter to all offices on the campus, made known his desire for the success of the Office of the Ombudsman. Zumbege requested each of the letter's recipients to cooperate with the ombudsman and to

provide access to information requested by the ombudsman on the same basis as they would give information to the Chancellor.

The ASUN is to be complimented for its work in this particular concept. The original proposal was drafted by the ASUN Legal Rights Committee. Since last September when the proposal was approved by the ASUN Senate, the whole project has been realized with speed and diligence on that part of student government, the administration and the regents.

In Suter's words, the person occupying the position "reports to nobody, and is responsible to everybody." Furthermore, Suter says the office "cannot be corrupt unless the person in it is corrupt."

Persons wishing to utilize the services of the ombudsmen are reminded, however, that the role of the ombudsman is more than that of an information desk. It also does not serve as a substitution to existing offices. The Office of the Ombudsman is to be of help when University channels become obscured, are unknown or are obstructed to the person attempting to use them.

The presence of an ombudsman on the UNL campus is most welcome and it is hoped that Suter sees success in clearing up problems for those that seek his services.

The Office of the Ombudsman is located in 533 Oldfather Hall. Suter's telephone number is 472-3633.

Barry Pilger

janet white collide- oscope

Rumor has it that computerized psychology 70 is dehumanizing and impersonal—a flunk-out course. And rumor is the figurative one-tenth of an iceberg visible above water.

While it is true that psychology 70 course is characterized by a high percentage of failures, the rate has decreased from 15 to 10 per cent from the spring of 1970 to the fall of 1971.

Student performance in the class has been erratic. The most frequent grade, or mode, in the fall of 1969, the first semester of the course's operation, was C. The mode in the spring and fall of 1970 was F; in the spring and fall of 1971, A. The average or mean grade in the class has risen from 2.374 in 1969 to 2.488 in 1971; in the spring of 1970 it hit the low mark of 2.133.

These figures are more meaningful if compared to freshman attrition rates and student performance in other larger freshmen courses operating on a traditional format. The dropout rate between the first and second semester of the freshman year is eight per cent; between the freshman and sophomore years, 24 per cent, according to 1970 computations. These figures, computed from the 1969-70 class, are almost identical to the flunk-out rate for psychology 70 that year. Seven per cent failed the course in the fall, 25 per cent in the spring.

Introductory sociology (53), a large freshman course taught traditionally, shows average student performance is a grade of 2.3; the same is true of Chemistry 11. Student performance in the psychology 70 course in the past two semesters has

been two-tenths of a point higher than this.

Students in psychology 70 must take at least one test weekly and may take up to three tests without special permission to improve their grade. Tests are given at regular intervals Monday through Saturday. "Canned lectures," tapes and films, are run continuously six days a week; Students attend one weekly. Graduate assistants are available during the same hours to counsel and answer questions.

If a student misses a test, he is sent a note reminding him of the omission and advising him he cannot take another test until he has come in to see a graduate assistant to reschedule the missed exam. This procedure was new last semester, and has helped cut in half the number of failing students.

The students who fail are the ones who do not take tests at regularly scheduled times. Students who get behind are urged to drop the course by the graduate assistants. Graduate assistant Dean Grice estimated that 300 students had dropped the course within the deadline this semester. There remain 77 students who have missed at least two consecutive exams; they are likely candidates for course failure. This number is about one-half of the 155 who failed last semester. It is about five per cent of the present class enrollment.

Why do some student still fail? Speaking with two years of counseling experience, Grice said that failing students are those who won't drop the course because they've all ready paid for it. "They tend not to want to pay any price," he said.

The course is a rigorous one. Test questions require specific application of concepts. Donald Jensen, originator of the new course design, states the course goal is to produce a technical and precise mastery of terms.

The person who does well in psychology 70 must be able to attend to details and schedule himself. This makes it easier to fail, especially because freshmen are habituated to classroom structure, bells ringing and test days designated by the professor.

Jensen admits the course is imperfect, but maintains that it is a step forward from the mass freshman lecture classes of 1968.

Jensen designed the course on the basis of his

findings in a similar freshman course at Indiana State University. As in the former UNL psychology class, three tests were given during the semester. In class surveys,

Jensen found that students tended to study at the very beginning of the semester, and then slack off rapidly. Students would cram continuously the last two days before each exam.

The semester following the survey findings, Jensen scheduled tests every two weeks, to increase the frequency of study. He found that students studied two days before the test regardless of how often tests were given, every two weeks or every six.

As he increased the frequency of tests, Jensen found students' anxiety and hostility growing also. Once into the semester, he began taking his phone off the hook the night before each test because the hate calls had become numerous. To reduce this emotional student reaction, Jensen designed self-scheduled tests and lectures.

Frequent, repeatable, self-scheduled tests and lectures are the backbone of the psychology 70 course.

The mass lecture format is a large problem. It is a strain for both teachers and students; the learning accomplished in cram periods before infrequent tests is minimal.

In the psychology 70 course, students receive comparatively rapid feedback on their test performance. They are rewarded for learning correct answers.

With self-scheduled exams, students no longer suffer with the high emotions aroused by pre-test cramming. Professors, typically reluctant to teach the large lecture, are freed to spend time with upper level courses and graduate seminars.

The computerized course may be impersonal because students don't talk to graduate assistants. "Canned lectures" lack the personal touch, but so do large lectures. What money is available will not pay for both the computer service, with its advantages, and the professors needed to lecture 1,400 students every semester.

The course is not a panacea, but it is an improvement. It is one workable answer to mushrooming college enrollments, and the disadvantageous large freshman lecture class.