

UNICAP assesses child problems

A UNL project has spent its first year serving Nebraska and training students, according to Janet Jensen coordinator of the University of Nebraska Interdisciplinary Child Assessment Program (UNICAP).

The program is an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing "enigmatic" children across the state, Jensen said.

She defined "enigmatic" children as those whose "problems are so complicated and so interlocked that the people in the community are not able to handle them (the problems)."

The children, suffering from what she called "a variety of learning and behavior disorders," have been hard to help, she said, since the problems have not been definable by a single professional.

"That's what's so exciting about this program," she said. Faculty members from five University departments—the Graduate School of Social Work, University Health Services, Division of Speech Pathology and Audiology, Educational Psychological Clinic and the Psychological Consultation Center—work together to analyze the child's "pattern of problems" in a multi-pronged attack, she said.

UNICAP also allows undergraduate students in the five departments involved in the program to observe the evaluation sessions with the children, and permits graduate students to participate in the sessions, Jensen said.

A student observer, Kathleen Kavan, said she plans to continue in the program because it gives her a chance to see before graduation the way professionals in her field, speech therapy, work.

She said she's also been impressed at "the different approaches different disciplines use to analyze a child," and "the variance in the child's behavior from evaluation to evaluation."

"I would have put too much emphasis on a single evaluation before I went through this," she said.

"Now I have more of a 'whole-istic' approach."

Jensen said children are referred to UNICAP primarily through school counselors or nurses, but also by family physicians and social workers.

All applications are signed by the child's parent, though, she said.

UNICAP has seen about 20 children this year, Jensen said, ranging in age from two-and-one-half to 17 years, averaging about eight years.

The children are seen by graduate students in each of the five divisions, Jensen said. They give the children tests, write reports on the tests and present the reports to a meeting—a "staffing"—of everyone involved in the evaluations and any other professionals who've worked with the child.

The graduate students are always supervised by a faculty member, she added.

At the staffings, each division presents its analysis and proposals, and all discuss and contrast the child's reaction to their particular tests, Jensen said.

"And sometimes the group comes up with a very different conclusion collectively than any of the divisions did alone," Jensen said. The collective analysis is an advantage, she said, which lone professionals seldom have.

Proposals that cover "anything under the sun" are then offered to the child's parents, teachers and doctors, Jensen said, plus help in implementing them.

A follow-up program is then maintained, and UNICAP members periodically call to check on the child, "or receive calls from parents yelling 'Help'," she said.

"Any problem (in a child) you can name, we've seen," she said, including reading problems and hyperactivity (shortened attention spans and an excess of physical activity). Other problems include a poor home environment, severe emotional disorders, poor hearing and reading problems. In addition, an inability to verbally express ideas often leads teachers to think a child doesn't know the answer instead of just not being able to say it, she added.

She said the equally diverse proposals offered to help the child have included medication, emphasis on visual teaching techniques rather than verbal, or advising teachers and parents to let a child work alone.

CSL

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development.

In its open forum, CSL heard a complaint by foreign students Arvind S. Iyer and Eman Behroos (an ASUN senator) that the UNL summer orientation program doesn't serve the needs of foreign students.

CSL member Ely Meyerson, interim executive dean of Student Affairs, said he has asked the foreign student office to develop an orientation program with an appropriate budget.

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