

Free Universities bring people together throughout the nation

By Jane Owens

A 73-year-old retired banker and a high school cheerleader might share at least one interest: repairing Volkswagens.

Three free universities offer a way to meet and study with others interested in the same subject.

"Communitywide participation is extremely important to the free university concept," Sue Maes, coordinator of the University for Man at Kansas State University (KSU), said.

"Our students come from high schools, senior citizen apartment complexes, the town's Army base, the black community and surrounding small towns," she said.

Coordinators at two other free universities Denver Free University and Heliotrope in San Francisco also said their programs attract diverse persons in the community.

"Most of our students are 20-30 years old, but we seem to attract all sorts," Nancy Smart, a coordinator at the Denver Free University, said. "Less than half our students are regular university students. The others are teachers or just interested people."

"Our students have usually just graduated from college and are working in the financial district, but we get other types as well," Peggy Yoder, coordinator of Heliotrope, said.

The free university does not attract many minority groups.

"We've tried to involve the black and Mexican communities, but they seem to want to stick to themselves,"

Yoder said.

All three of the universities publish a course description catalog available free at public libraries, bookstores, coffee houses and on campuses.

Students can register for courses by mail or at the free university offices.

According to the three coordinators, the universities are

continued on page 7

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