



NOVA (Nebraska Opportunity for Volunteers in ACTION) is ending in June because of inadequate funding.

NOVA burning out; volunteer force to die

By Jim Fullerton

When President Nixon visited UNL in 1971, he proposed the formation of a new volunteer agency called ACTION. Out of that agency sprang NOVA, the Nebraska Opportunity for Volunteers in ACTION.

But like its astronomical counterpart, NOVA flourished a while, and then began to die. The program ends in June because of lack of funds.

On January 14, 1971, the President congratulated the national champion Cornhusker football team before 7,000 students in the Coliseum.

During his 30-minute talk, he said he would send a special message to Congress proposing a new volunteer agency that would encompass the Peace Corps, VISTA and other federal agencies under the jurisdiction of one agency—ACTION.

He said he hoped it would "give young Americans an expanded opportunity for the service they want to give—and that will give them what is not now possible, a chance to transfer between service abroad and service at home."

The agency soon was established and spread across the nation. A drive for campus youth involvement, called University Year in ACTION (UYA) found its way to 55 universities.

UNL started one of the first UYA branches when the NOVA volunteer social work program began here in August 1971. The NOVA program enabled students to do social work in the field and still take courses at the university.

In a rating last year from the ACTION headquarters in Kansas City, the program at UNL was listed as the most successful UYA effort of 12 Midwest universities.

According to Merry Ann Coe, NOVA supervisor, the main reason for the program's demise was lack of funds.

She said the original federal allocation to NOVA was for three years, and that period is coming to an end. She added that the funds were cut back more and more by the government until the program no longer could continue.

"It was nobody's fault, really," Coe said. "The collective interest of the students wasn't all that great, and there just wasn't enough money."

"We could have extended it—vice chancellor (Virginia) Trotter was pushing for one more year, but we decided there was no use trying to keep the program going if we all knew it was all over anyway," she said.

Eight students (an average number of participants at any one time, said Coe) are scheduled to complete their volunteer work in the program in May.

Don Bauermeister, one of the students, said "I don't feel good about the program ending. As an education experience, it's the best thing I've seen on this campus, and I've been here five years."

"Basically, the program deserved a lot of support, but there was not enough publicity. People didn't know what it was about. Since the University never went out of its way to support the program, no one knew about it," said Bauermeister.

Jodene Schwindt, who got a job with Lincoln's YWCA through NOVA, is "disappointed to see it phasing out."

"It was a real learning and growing experience," she said. "Imagine being able to work full-time and applying your classwork to what you're doing. It's been very rewarding."

Gene Harding, current director of Centennial Educational Program, was in charge of NOVA when it started here in 1971. He is writing a history of the program for "personal use around here," he said.

"When we started, it was an experiment," he said. "Now I want to write exactly what we did, trace how we started and record how we attempted things for future reference."



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