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Grad school benefits weighed

By Lori Clepper

Grad school—is it worth the extra one to seven years of school it takes to get a higher degree?

"It all depends on what field a student is going in to," James Drew, dean of the graduate college, said. "Here in the office we try to be honest with the students. If the job market doesn't look good in that field, we tell them what their chances are."

The total enrollment of 3,135 for graduate school this year is slightly above last year's enrollment, but there is a definite shift away from academic-oriented classes to practitioner courses, according to the graduate office.

"There are two main reasons a student goes to grad school," Drew said. "One is to receive an education, and the other to prepare for a vocation. The market is up for practitioner jobs: doctors, lawyers, dentists, things like that. And that's what students want to get into."

"If I was just in it for the money, I wouldn't go to grad school," said Ken Evans, UNL grad student. "But I want a good job, and I know that going to grad school can guarantee a better job than my four year degree."

Evans is a student in the clinical psychology department. Only ten new students out of 500 applicants were accepted into the school this year, according to Dr. James Cole, director of clinical psychology.

He said clinical psychology receives more applications than the law and medical departments combined.

"I always preface any application form I hand out with a warning about the job market," said Lawrence Poston, chairman of the English graduate school committee. "The market for any academic job in the English department looks bad now. I tell the students that it is their own decision, but that they had better be sure this further education will best suit their needs out there in the world."

The English department has an average of about 100 students who apply for grad school. The accept 9-12, Poston said.

"The work is not hard for these grad students," he remarked. "It's just a different type of studying and more of it. We're really trying to get away from the 'slave labor' type of situation, where students are just loaded down with work."

The history department is another that faces a bad job market.

"We've got a dismal situation here," said Edward Homze, director of graduate training in history. "To be honest, the job market for academic history

students is practically nil. A student can spend six or seven years and face the prospect of no job when he gets out."

The history department usually accepts about 15 students out of the 60 or 70 who apply for a position.

"The bulk of people who major in history want to go into teaching," Homze said. "But with the job market the way it is, they're using their degrees to go into something like law or business management."

"Some fields do look bad now," Drew agreed. "But nobody can ever predict what the market will be. Four years ago, the market for engineers looked terrible. Now, with the energy crisis, the job market has never been better."

Cole said grad school is worth it simply because undergraduate study doesn't really prepare people for work.

"Students go to school for four years and they've got a good liberal arts education, but they haven't got any specialized training," he said. "The good jobs are going to people that have gone to grad school."

The Law College is booming, according to Donald Shaneyfelt, assistant dean of admissions for the law department.

"We haven't had any trouble placing our graduate students in good positions."

The law department receives between 1,000 and 1,100 applicants a year. The school accepts 160-175.

"The good thing about doing graduate work in law," said Shaneyfelt, "is that it is an excellent background for whatever field you do decide to go into. Students use a law background to go into business, corporate executive work or even to go into business for themselves."

"Most of the jobs today are aimed toward someone with a master's degree," Cole said. "You can get jobs with a four year degree, but you'll probably end up settling for less."

Poston said there may still be a problem of students being overqualified for the jobs they may get once out of graduate school.

"I think it is true that some employers tend to think that people who have Ph. D's have been in school too long," he said. "Employers think that these people will never be content till they are running the business and will run off the minute they see a chance at a better job. That isn't always the case."

"We tend to be blamed for the national economy," Drew said.

"Schools are blamed because we are over-teaching our students. We aren't teaching them any more than we were ten years ago. But now the economy says we don't need it anymore."

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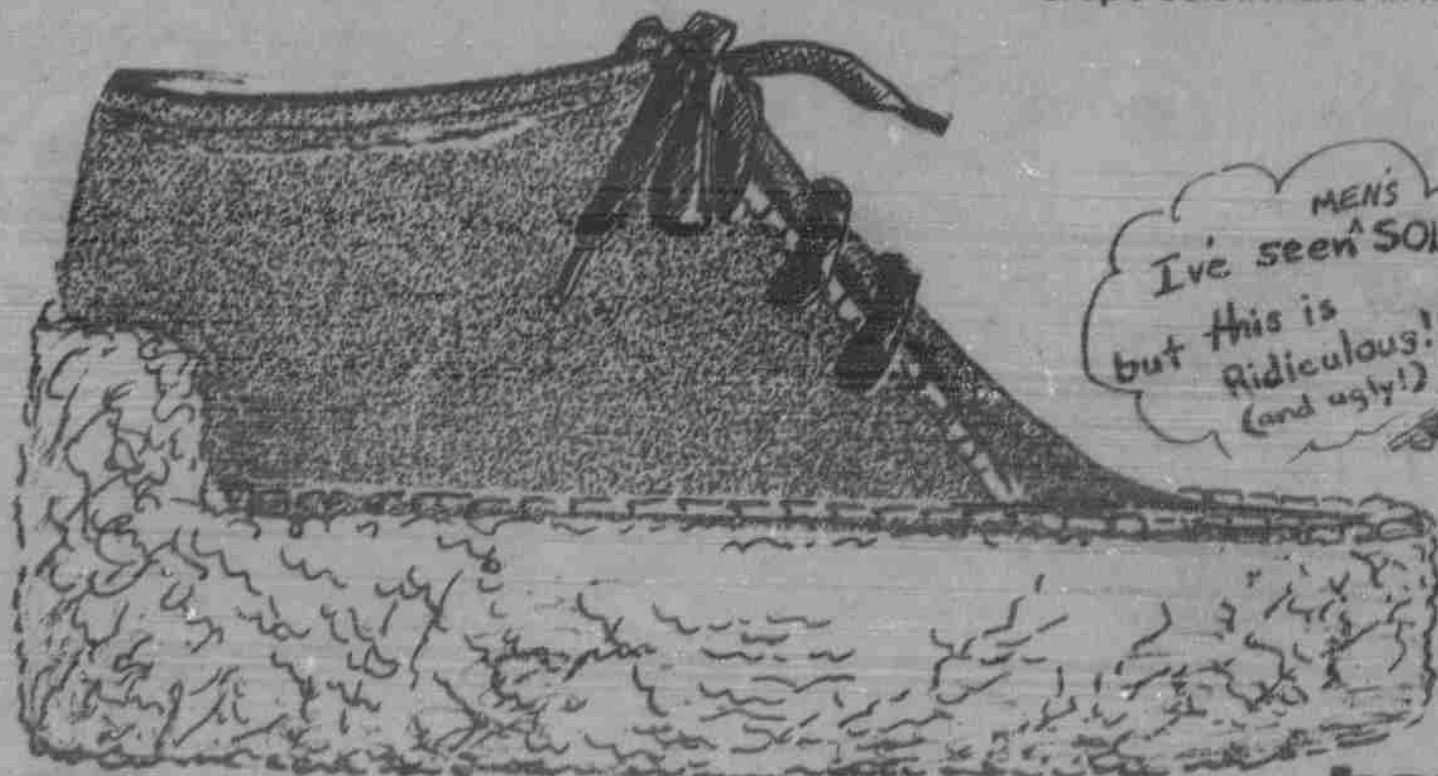
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