

More SUN-shine predicted this year

By Kathy Slepicka

The State University of Nebraska (SUN) shone brightly last semester, and the forecast for this year is "more of the same."

New courses will begin in early March, according to Milan Wall, SUN public affairs director. He said announcement of what courses will be offered should be made toward the end of the week (Jan. 20).

He said the courses first must be approved by the National Research Advisory Council, advisory group to SUN's main financier, the National Institute of Education (NIE).

Wall said next session's courses will follow about the same format as the first session's. Half-hour instructional programs are shown twice weekly on the Nebraska Educational Television Network and a weekly supplement listing the programs is run in the entertainment section of the Sunday Omaha World-Herald. Each course has a text study guide, he added.

Toll-free number

SUN students can contact their teachers by calling a special toll-free number, Wall said. The special line not

only helps the student, but makes the course more personal, according to Wall.

Learning centers are also available to students, Wall said. At the centers, students may review tapes of TV broadcasts or seek advice on upcoming SUN and other University of Nebraska courses, he said. SUN learning centers are in the Nebraska Center, UNL east campus; Kearney State College library, Kearney; J.G. Elliott Building, Scottsbluff, and in Omaha.

Reaction to the first SUN courses has been positive, Wall said, although he said some students criticized the TV broadcasts as "too entertaining." He estimated 400 students enrolled in Accounting I and 270 students in Introductory Psychology last semester.

Students are women, homemakers

Wall said SUN students' average age is 41, most are women, and 75 per cent of those are homemakers. About half the students have taken some college courses before, he said. Geographical distribution of students resembles the state's population, he added, with about 50 per cent from the Lincoln and Omaha areas.

Wall said the number of students taking courses for credit hours (and a

grade) is surprising. He said 75 to 80% of the students are registered for credit, about 15% more than SUN officials anticipated.

Noncredit rates could increase

This statistic may bring about one change in SUN, he added. The current SUN fee is \$18 per credit hour, he noted, with students paying half of that total. Wall said he thought noncredit students may be charged the same rate as credit students next session because "they receive all advantages credit students do."

Wall said week-long breaks may also be added to next session's courses, since many students said it was difficult for them to keep up with their homework.

Increased prices will probably raise course materials' cost from their present \$16, he added.

He noted SUN didn't reapply for a grant from the Clark Foundation last summer because the foundation's assets went down with the stock market. The foundation did extend use of the \$200,000 one-year grant awarded SUN in October 1973.

The lack of a new grant from the Clark Foundation will have no serious effect on the SUN project, he said.

Mental Services head:

Patient care deficient?

If the U.S. Supreme Court rules that persons committed to mental institutions must receive treatment or be released, Nebraska will have difficulty providing that treatment, according to a state Public Institutions Dept. official.

Dr. Franklin Master, acting director of Mental Services, said there are too few psychiatrists serving the state's three mental hospitals to provide the treatment the court might demand for civilly committed patients.

The "right-to-treatment" issue probably will be before the high court by June, according to an article in the Dec. 29, 1974 issue of the Omaha World-Herald.

\$38,000 in damages

Florida is appealing a case from the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. The circuit court held that Kenneth Donaldson, a Florida mental hospital patient for 14 years, is entitled to \$38,000 in damages from two hospital psychiatrists.

According to the World-Herald, Donaldson testified that he saw a psychiatrist a total of three hours during the first ten years of his confinement. He said receiving inadequate treatment and not being released from the mental hospital violated his constitutional rights.

700 patients

Master said Nebraska's three mental hospitals, at Lincoln, Hastings and Norfolk, have a total of 700 patients. He said the Donaldson case could force the Institutions Dept. to hire more than the current eight psychiatrists for the hospitals or release many of the patients, many of whom "really need to be there."

"The lawsuit says the court would not accept milieu therapy as a substitute for direct doctor-patient visits," he said. In milieu therapy, a doctor supervises a nursing staff, and the nurses treat the patient. Master said this is done because of the high patient-doctor ratio.

Masters said Nebraska's state hospital system will be "especially vulnerable" in Lincoln, because there is one staff psychiatrist for every 85 to 120 patients.

He said Nebraska has trouble attracting psychiatrists, because of a low pay scale and the state's rural nature. Psychiatrists, he said, usually prefer an urban area.

He said the state psychiatrists receive a starting annual wage of \$27,000 to \$34,000. The amount depends on experience. He said some state pay \$10,000 to \$15,000 more per year than Nebraska.

Personal liability

"The unfortunate thing with this lawsuit is the personal liability of the psychiatrists," Master said. "The amount the doctors were sued is more than a Nebraska psychiatrist makes in a year."

He said doctors working in Nebraska's lower pay scale might be driven out of mental hospital work, knowing they could be financially responsible for a patient's treatment. That treatment, Master said, depends on how much money the Legislature provides.

"We're competing with all other service areas of the government for the same tax dollar, and that tax dollar is shrinking," he said.

Some Lincoln complaints

Barbara Gaither, executive director of the Nebraska Civil Liberties Union (NCLU), said the NCLU already has handled some complaints by patients at the Lincoln Regional Center.

She said the most complaints came from sexual sociopaths who "say they've been told outright that there is really no cure (for them)."

Gaither said the mental institutions seem to think their only role toward the mental patient is one of confinement. That would change, she predicted, if the Donaldson case is decided in favor of the mental patient.

Gaither said that if the Donaldson decision is affirmed by the Supreme Court, alternatives to mental hospitals might be more fully utilized.

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