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Centennial quieter but not declining

By Susie Reitz

Though he admits that Centennial College is a "lot quieter than a few years ago," the senior fellow for the Centennial Education Program (CEP) said that does not mean the program "has gone downhill." Nelson Potter also said there is less political activism and "maybe we aren't as famous as a few years ago, but I think the program is still effective as a learning tool."

Potter said he thinks publicity for the program has declined.

"Students are more cautious these days, too. They want to be sure that something is going to work before they get into it. Student living-learning programs, like Centennial, are declining in enrollment all over the country," Potter said.

Began in 1969

Centennial started in 1969 as a flexible program allowing students to pursue interests that are not available in other parts of the University.

The Centennial student decides on a project or area of study to pursue individually or with a group. He then gets a "fellow," one of the CEP professors, to sponsor the project. The student is responsible for goals and methods in the project. Groups working on projects do not meet at specific times, but whenever those involved arrange meetings.

"The past two years, I don't think it has been as good as before, as far as excitement, but I think this year Centennial has really improved," said Jim Schmidt, a fourth-year Centennial student.

Freshman Tam Lee said, "I really think Centennial is great, but I don't have anything to compare it to, since I wasn't here last year and can't say whether it was good then or not."

Less experimenting

"When I first got into Centennial three years ago, there was more emphasis on experimenting with new ways of learning. Now the emphasis is not on 'learning how to learn.' Students are wanting to study specific subjects, they don't necessarily want to use new ways of learning," Centennial resident Ray Walden said.

"Some aspects of Centennial have changed over the last few years," Senior Gayle Waggoner said. "I think there have always been things people complained about, but that is part of the program—seeing something that is not working and changing it."

"There isn't as much total community activity as the first couple years, I don't think. There is a distinction between dorm people and commuters," Waggoner added. "But that is maybe just the way

students have changed."

"Since the second year of Centennial there have been oldtimers and newcomers," Potter said. "That is probably the biggest continuing conflict in Centennial, but it is necessary. The oldtimers are accustomed to Centennial. They are constantly conflicting with newcomers who don't know the ropes and are not used to the self-discipline expected here. But they make the newcomers' adjustment easier."

"These conflicts make some people unhappy with the program and give them the idea it is going 'downhill.' But if they really look at it, it isn't failing, it is just changing or maybe not fulfilling their personal expectations," said Potter.

He noted the number of applications has declined over the years but believes that is due to the lack of publicity and recruiting.

Less community-oriented

At one time Centennial was a separate community within the University, CEP Assistant Karen Hardy said. But the program has become less community-oriented in the past couple years, she believes.

"It's different, but I don't think it is right to say it is declining," said Hardy. "It hasn't really had any significant changes lately, but I think that is because people want to work on topics they are studying. They are not thinking about their method of learning as Centennial students did the first couple years."

"I think you have to ask the question, 'Is Centennial fulfilling the needs of its students?' When it was started in the late '60s students had certain needs. They took the program and became personally involved with its success. The students now have different needs and don't identify with the community idea so much."

"What some may call indication of a decline is actually just more stability and less experimentation in the program," Hardy said. She has been with the program for five years.

Other programs

"A lot of the difference with Centennial is that the outside University has started programs like University Studies which do some of the things Centennial once did," said Carl Cooper, who has been in Centennial four years.

"The people in the program have changed and it has changed with them. It is still exciting but the excitement is being expressed in different ways," Cooper said.

The most frequent complaint by students who say they are not satisfied with Centennial and claim it is going

"downhill" is that "too many people get into Centennial because they don't want to work. They think the program is a chance to mess around and still get credit."

"Some people don't work during the semester and then at the end, when it comes time to determine grades or pass/fail, they write a paper to show what they supposedly accomplished," one Centennial student commented. "It isn't right when they just get in to mess around."

Some incompletes

"Several students got incompletes last semester," Potter acknowledged. But he added, "The problem with grades and saying whether a student learned anything in Centennial is a real hang-up. One student may not look like he is doing much, but if he is learning to discipline himself and do work on his own, that is important."

"One of the central ideas in Centennial is that a person can work individually. He has to have a lot of motivation to learn when the courses are not structured and specific work is not assigned by a teacher."

"Centennial will always have people who are not happy, but mostly that is a personal conflict and not due to the program," Potter stated. "There is still a need for Centennial, because there so many activities that are done through Centennial which are not related to any specific department in the University proper."



Photo by Steve Boerner
Nelson Potter, senior fellow,
Centennial Education Program.

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Hubble: Outreach helps students cope with 'normal problems'

If you're worried about uncertain goals, static friendships or lack of independence, chances are you're not alone. Almost every college student experiences these worries according to Ken Hubble, acting director of the University Health Center.

Many students are worrying about these "normal problems," Hubble said, but they fail to discuss their concerns with others.

"We get them after they have wallowed around in their problems," he said, "and then we only see the end result."

Gaps exist

Although the health center is able to reach and help many students, Hubble said, gaps still exist in their coverage of the entire university population.

Health aids, students specially trained to counsel other students, reach much of the campus population. But two-thirds of the students live off-campus, Hubble pointed out, and they are not always contacted.

The Outreach Center located in the University Health Center, handles six to eight telephone calls and two personal visits a night, Hubble said.

Many students do not even try to contact anyone for help, Hubble said, so they just let their problems grow.

"I'd like students to realize these problems happen to everyone," Hubble stressed, "and these are normal experiences."

Multiplicity of factors

Students from rural areas are most vulnerable to problems at a large university, Hubble continued, because so many factors are working

at once.

"Immediately they are asked for their social security number and their identities are taken away," he said. If they haven't determined a major, many students experience guilt feelings over the lack of goals or directions, Hubble said.

This problem is compounded by the fact that the years from 17 to 24 are one of the most stressful periods in personality development, Hubble said. During the college years most people learn how to interact in personal relationships.

Some students who come to UNL have never had a date before, he explained, and others have very few friends from their high school.

"It's tough to make the adjustment," Hubble said, "when a student is offered cigarettes, pot or alcohol for the first time."

Two roles

An additional problem students must deal with, he said, is the job of filling two conflicting roles at the same time. A student is usually dependent on parents for providing or paying for clothes, food and shelter.

Students are also learning to become emancipated, Hubble said, and they must deal with everyday problems themselves.

"This independence does not come suddenly; it must come over a gradual integration period," he said.

Hubble advised students to recognize these problems for what they are—"normal processes." He pointed out that 97 per cent of the student population will eventually resolve their worries on their own.

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