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Erskine: coordinating NU's business side

By Gina Hills

Throughout his life, William C. Erskine always lived where he could see mountains or the ocean, but in 1974, he came to Lincoln where the only oceans were in paintings and the only mountains were in his imagination.

And he said he "kind of misses" those sights too. But Erskine came here to become NU executive vice president for administration, and he said he likes it.

Before he came to Lincoln though, he was vice president for business affairs at the University of Colorado-Boulder. Prior to that, he was comptroller at the University of Washington for six years.

Erskine said he was visited in 1973 by NU President D. B. Varner who asked him to consider accepting the position.

"Varner seemed to know pretty well what kind of an organization he had here. He knew where he was going and that really impressed me," Erskine said.

Business coordinator

"This position represented an elevation for me. . . It provided a promotion, it provided increased pay and I liked President Varner because he has a great deal of appeal," he said.

So Erskine accepted the position and said he's never regretted it. As executive vice president for administration, Erskine coordinates the business functions of the university system.

"I am the chief financial officer and it's my responsibility to make sure we're financially sound and that we report properly to the regents and the state," he said.



William C. Erskine, NU vice president for administration

Erskine said he meets every few weeks with the system's three vice chancellors for business and finance in order to "make sure everything is on the same wave length."

Budgeting function

He said he also meets with other administrators when Varner calls a meeting of the 'Big 6'. Actually, there are seven included in the meeting; the president, three chancellors and the three vice presidents, he said.

In addition, Erskine keeps in close contact with his two assistant vice presidents, Glen Smith and Winn Sanderson.

Smith "monitors business policies rather closely and is principally responsible for the unified accounting system of the university," Erskine said.

Sanderson on the other hand, "coordinates the promulgation of the university's request budget," he said. Sanderson also oversees the development and summation of the operation budget, he added.

Although Erskine doesn't draw up the budget for the individual campuses, he said he is responsible for helping develop budget guidelines that must be followed.

Computer care

"In this office, we monitor the thing to see that the guidelines have been followed and that we're all together and know what each other is doing," he said. "This way, when we go to the regents we know that what we're telling them is correct."

In addition, if the budget is lump-sum appropriated, Erskine said he would act as a control function.

"In that position, the chancellors would have to work closely with the president and regents in deciding how money would be allocated among the campuses," he said.

The university's computer network, which handles research, instruction and administrative data processing, is another of Erskine's responsibilities.

Work sometimes frustrating

But public speaking is usually left for the president, and Erskine said he doesn't mind because he's "not really comfortable in the public eye."

When the university presented its budget to the Legislature's Appropriation Committee for example, Varner did most of the talking, but Erskine and his assistants were there in case the president needed information.

And although Erskine spends most of his time working on university matters, he said he likes to snow ski, swim and ride horses in his spare time.

But at times, he said he finds his work frustrating because "often you can spend a day or two days or a week, working with people, trying to get something done, and you never see anything really evolve."