

Personal Planning: students adjusting to academic environment

By Susie Reitz

P.P.S. means more than an extra post script on a letter to 12 UNL students who are participating in the Personal Planning Semester (P.P.S.) this spring.

The students are taking a semester out of a regular academic course to "put everything together and find themselves and their own direction in the university or life in general," said P.P.S. coordinator Prof. Gene Harding, director of the Teaching and Learning Center.

Under the 12-credit-hour plan, students take four courses taught by different professors in the university. The aim of the program is to "help students learn more about their current situation then work toward decisions about what to do about those situations according to Harding.

Six hours of the course are for Centennial Education Program credits and are divided into two projects, "Social Psychology of Relationships" and "Social Practicum."

The Centennial sections are taught by Prof. Jacque Voss and Harding. Prof. Martin Peterson teaches the non-verbal communication class and Prof. Al Dittmer teaches the English course.

The other six hours are an anthropology course and an English course, "Non-verbal Communication in Relationships" and the "Exploring Self, through Biographical Literature."

"Each class is taught differently, but we try to get the students to tie together the ideas they learn in a program which will help them deal with problems they may have and help them learn to like themselves better," Harding said.



Gene Harding, PPS coordinator

Students are free to take additional hours if they wish, Harding said, adding that "most are just taking the 12 hours until they can find what they are most interested in studying."

The program idea developed late last semester and students were contacted through counseling centers, faculty, and letters to students planning to drop out.

"All these students were either dropping out or frustrated with their education," stated Harding. "Several had problems outside of academics and it was affecting their performance."

"We hope that by giving the students a chance to explore their own lives and compare them to problems others have faced and solved, they will be able to find a direction in life," he explained.

Reactions from students in the program were almost totally positive based on mid-term evaluations.

"In the evaluation we asked them to tell us what they felt they had gotten out of the program, asked what was the most important thing they had gained and asked for their suggestions on how to improve," Harding said.

Every student said they thought the program was a good idea and should be continued and expanded, although they all felt the groups should be kept small, Harding noted.

Students commented that skills gained in the program were useful in facing problems. One student said, "You learn so much about yourself, and sometimes you don't even realize how much it helps."

Several students rated the experience a "superior semester" and felt they were able to communicate with others better.

Harding said all students in the program "may not return next semester, but at least eight probably will." Others, he said, have found interests in other areas and realize now that the university was "not for them."

The intent of the program, Harding emphasized, is to "help participants realize their potentials and adjust in whatever situation they find themselves."

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