

# NU administrators: uncomfortable spot

## Why do they stay—or leave?

**Editors' note:** In the past year-and-one-half, several NU administrators have resigned—most recently UNL Chancellor James Zumberge, who will leave Oct. 1 to become president of Southern Methodist University.

This is the first in a series of articles examining the NU system in the light of Zumberge's and others' resignations.

The persons interviewed were administrators from the NU Systems Office, which governs the entire University of Nebraska (NU). NU comprises UNL, the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) and the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC).

Also included are administrators and college deans at UNL.

Sources were guaranteed anonymity to encourage them to speak as frankly as possible.

The next part of this series will report on the Legislature's and governor's thoughts on and relationship to the NU system.

By Ann Owens

The University of Nebraska in the mid-1970s has not been the most comfortable administrative spot in the country. That's just one UNL dean's opinion of the university.

But a Daily Nebraskan straw poll of 34 NU administrators and college deans last week indicated that others share his thoughts. The poll showed that of the 34:

—Nine now are being considered for employment elsewhere. Seven of them are NU employes and UNL administrators.

—32 have been approached during their employment at NU by search committees or individuals to take jobs at other learning institutions. Of these 32 persons, 24 said they have seriously considered or explored leaving.

—29 said that depending on the contract details, they would consider leaving if an opportunity arose.

### Salary, advance cited

A chance for professional advancement, a salary increase and a greater challenge were three main considerations of NU administrators and deans.

The majority named family concerns, location and the university's organizational structure as prime factors, followed in importance by salary.

NU President D.B. Varner said that he now is being considered for another job.

"But it wasn't instigated by me and I'm not interested in the job," he said. Varner added that "giving details about the job would not be appropriate."

He said that he is happy at NU and has no desire to leave.

One administrator said, "of course if one were offered several thousand dollars instead of this he would be foolish to say, 'No, I will not take the job under any circumstances. But my family is the main reason I haven't left before.'"

Another administrator said before resigning, he would first consider organizational structure and the opportunity for professional development.

"But naturally, it's just ducky if you double your salary too," he said.

Higher salary, quality education and opportunity for a new adventure are key factors, according to one dean.

### Want to stay

"My preference is to stay at UNL, but things are very uncertain here," one dean said. "Many people are considering leaving even though they really don't want to leave."

According to one administrator, many factors are involved in deciding whether or not to leave.

"Pay is only part of it. There is no question that salaries at UNL are poor, but pay is not my primary concern," he said.

He said he believes a job must be fun, challenging and productive, or it is not worth doing.

"There are some competent people at UNL, but there comes a time when it's time to move on," he said.

According to another administrator, what he called the major concern already has been expressed by UNL Chancellor James Zumberge who is leaving UNL Oct. 1 to become president of Southern Methodist University (SMU).

"That is, 'Who is running UNL?' As an administrator, I think the UNL administrators should control UNL," he said.

### Too much bureaucracy

He said he believes there are too many levels of bureaucracy at NU to have decisions made efficiently and that the line of authority is not clear-cut.

"There is an inability for UNL administrators to actually be administrators, as witnessed by the Legislature," he said.

An example of this, he said, is determination of UNL salaries by the Legislature on a basis other than merit.

He said NU's central administration and the Legislature are taking decision-making power away from administrators.

"Administrators are hired to make decisions," he said.

Another administrator voiced the so-called problem in a similar way, saying that there is a certain amount of confusion among UNL second-level administrators (those below the chancellor and vice chancellors) as to how much influence a central administrative body should have.

He said he believes that administrators' key decisions should not be controlled by the NU Board of Regents or the NU Systems Office.

### Who controls?

Along with administrators, some UNL deans expressed concern about administrative authority at NU. One dean said he believes campus administrators have little impact on policy-making decisions within NU and that most decisions are made by the systems office or the Legislature.

"We're pretty much shut out of it," he said.

A second dean said there is uncertainty of administrators and faculty at UNL as to what the university's future is.

He said he worries about financing—"the support we're not getting, which could cause a loss of faculty and make it very hard on deans."

TO LEAVE  
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It is necessary to talk about the issues, according to another dean. Second-level administrators are under direct pressure from faculty and indirect pressure from the financing system, he said.

"I'm not seriously complaining, but this makes it less comfortable than when I came to UNL," he said. "Let me put it this way, it makes other opportunities look a lot less unattractive."

### Opportunities

And, according to administrators and deans, there are other opportunities.

As one administrator put it, "those opportunities drift through here weekly."

While some of those polled said they would leave the university, a majority of NU administrators expressed satisfaction with their situations and listed several reasons for staying.

University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) Chancellor Robert Sparks said the NU administration, the NU Board of Regents and the Legislature have supported programs carried out at UNMC.

Four NU administrators said they enjoy the challenge of their jobs.

"Organized structures are rarely ideal,"

one said. "They are manifestations of the people who make them work. People of good will can make any kind of a situation work."

Hans Brisch, assistant vice president for academic affairs, said he came to NU last year and is "still in the honeymoon situation."

### Future here

"I project my future to be here and like to look forward to the role I can play and how I can be of service to NU," he said.

"My ego and being are wrapped up in NU."

Brisch said issues such as salaries and the faculty and administrative turnover rate present a challenge but "priority should be placed in the interest of NU. I consider myself a public servant."

He added that it is frustrating at times but there isn't a job without frustrations.

Although Brisch named personnel turnover as a challenge he said that when

people leave, others show a willingness to come to NU.

"I look at a university and feel that faculty and administrators are natural resources," he said. "Turnover among them should be considered a natural occurrence."

Brisch said he believes people like to move on, not necessarily because they are discontented with their current situation, but because they enjoy having a different life mission.

### Floating commodities

"Faculty and administrators should be considered free floating commodities," he said.

Brisch said the NU salary issue is real, but as a "comprehensive university," NU should be able to do something about it.

"It's an issue staring in our faces daily. I only hope we have the understanding to address the question positively."

"A UNL dean said "if one accepts the fact that NU is a complex organization, one must also accept as fact that there cannot be such organizations as universities without some problems being involved."

As well as expressing problems at NU, some UNL administrators and deans listed what they said were positive aspects which prevent them from actively seeking employment elsewhere.

A majority said they enjoy their jobs and colleagues, UNL students and Lincoln as a community in which to raise a family.

### The good life

According to one UNL dean, Nebraska is one of the nicest places in the country to live.

"That's why we get a lot of good people," he said. "It's hard to lure them here, but once they arrive they like it."

One dean said he wouldn't leave NU because it was his alma mater and he is loyal to it.

Another NU administrator said that because NU was his alma mater he is actively seeking a new job, because others expect it of him.

However, another said, "I'm sorry to say, at this time I'm not being considered anywhere for a new job."