

Three-year-old SUN program not meeting goals

By Larry Lutz

The original hopes for the State University of Nebraska's (SUN) enrollment and financing have not been realized, according to the school's dean, Dr. Milton Hassel.

SUN was designed to be a supplement to higher education, he said, delivering its courses through a variety of media, including television, tapes and newspapers.

After two years of planning and nearly \$3.2 million in federal aid for research and course development, SUN's first two classes were delivered in 1974. The initial enrollment was 610 students studying psychology and accounting.

Original projections, based on a SUN interest survey, said up to 30,000 students might enroll in SUN within the first five years. Plans also called for up to 50 course offerings by that time.

During SUN's short history, semester registrations have been sporadic, according to Hassel. After what he called an "encouraging" start with 610 in the autumn of 1974, enrollment dropped to 375 the next spring then increased to 1,100 in the fall of '75 and back to 375 that autumn.

Courses specialized

Hassel attributed the dramatic increase to two special interest courses offered during that term. A disability learning course drew more than 400 teacher registrants and a frehand sketching course added more than 300 persons, he said.

The SUN program was designed to deliver education to people who would not otherwise have the opportunity to enroll in college courses, he said. It was supposed to be offered at a lower cost than existing college courses to broaden its appeal, he said, and would be financed by grants and tuition money.

After three years of operation, those goals are not being met and the program is falling behind schedule.

Enrollment from September 1974 until July 1976 has totaled 2,840, with 325 students currently enrolled in the autumn schedule of 10 courses.

Sources cited

SUN is in its second year of state financing, receiving \$129,352 for the fiscal year which began in June. Most of the money finances the school's learning centers, administrative costs and faculty salaries. The school's budget also relies on a cash fund of \$209,998, mostly from tuition and \$107,325 from a revolving cash fund.

SUN also relies on grants from the Ford Foundation and the National Institute of Education (NIE). NIE's annual \$1.5 million financing will be discontinued in 1978 at the end of a five-year agreement.

D. B. Varner, NU president and president of the University of Mid-America (UMA), which is the research and development arm of SUN, said NIE funds, though "helpful," were not as much as SUN had counted on originally.

He said at one time SUN planned on getting \$2.5 million from NIE, but a federal reduction in money to the NIE was passed on as a reduction for SUN. The cutback in funds means SUN is not able to continue the extensive research and development it had hoped to originally, he said.

Not less

Another plan, which was dropped, was to offer SUN courses at a cost lower than on-campus college courses. SUN tuition currently is \$20 a credit hour, the same as UNL's.

In addition to tuition costs, each student pays for a kit containing course outlines, lessons, instructions and other information. Costs of the kits vary with the course.

Varner and Hassel both denied that the increased costs to students and cutbacks in program financing were direct causes for the less than expected enrollment in SUN.

"We don't know how to interpret these enrollment figures," Varner said. "It could be a lack of interest on the part of the students."

"It could be ineffective marketing. Students may not be well enough informed about what the program offers," Varner continued.

"It may be a financial problem, he said. "Many people do not qualify for student loans and are not able to pay the tuition. This discourages some potential students."

Hassel attributed the "less than expected" enrollment to the newness of the program. He said SUN has not found the ideal time to start classes for each term and is continuing to experiment. He said they thought the first week in September was not the best time to start a delivery and that the first week in October would be better.

Next year, SUN will offer a summer session in June besides the regular spring and fall terms.

That flexibility is another advantage SUN has, according to Hassel. SUN's courses are delivered through a variety of methods, all designed to be convenient for the students.

As an example of that flexibility, Hassel cited a program Northwest Bell Telephone Co., of Omaha participated in. Beginning in March 1976, 19 employees of the company had a SUN course delivered directly to them at work. They received the course through video tapes.

Plans designed

Hassel said plans are underway to start similar programs with other companies, but would not give any specifics until plans were made formal.

SUN can offer a supplement to higher education not available to in the past, Hassel said. However, he stressed it is not intended to be an alternative to college. Course offerings are determined from survey responses by former students and developed by UMA.

Nebraska's statewide television, used to present some courses, allows SUN to offer courses on a statewide basis. Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and South Dakota, the other states in the UMA system, do not have statewide TV systems, he said.

Besides television, SUN uses printed lessons in the weekend supplement of six Nebraska daily newspapers, audio cassettes, video tapes of the TV broadcasts, textbooks and study guides.

Centers help

Five learning centers also are located in the state. These

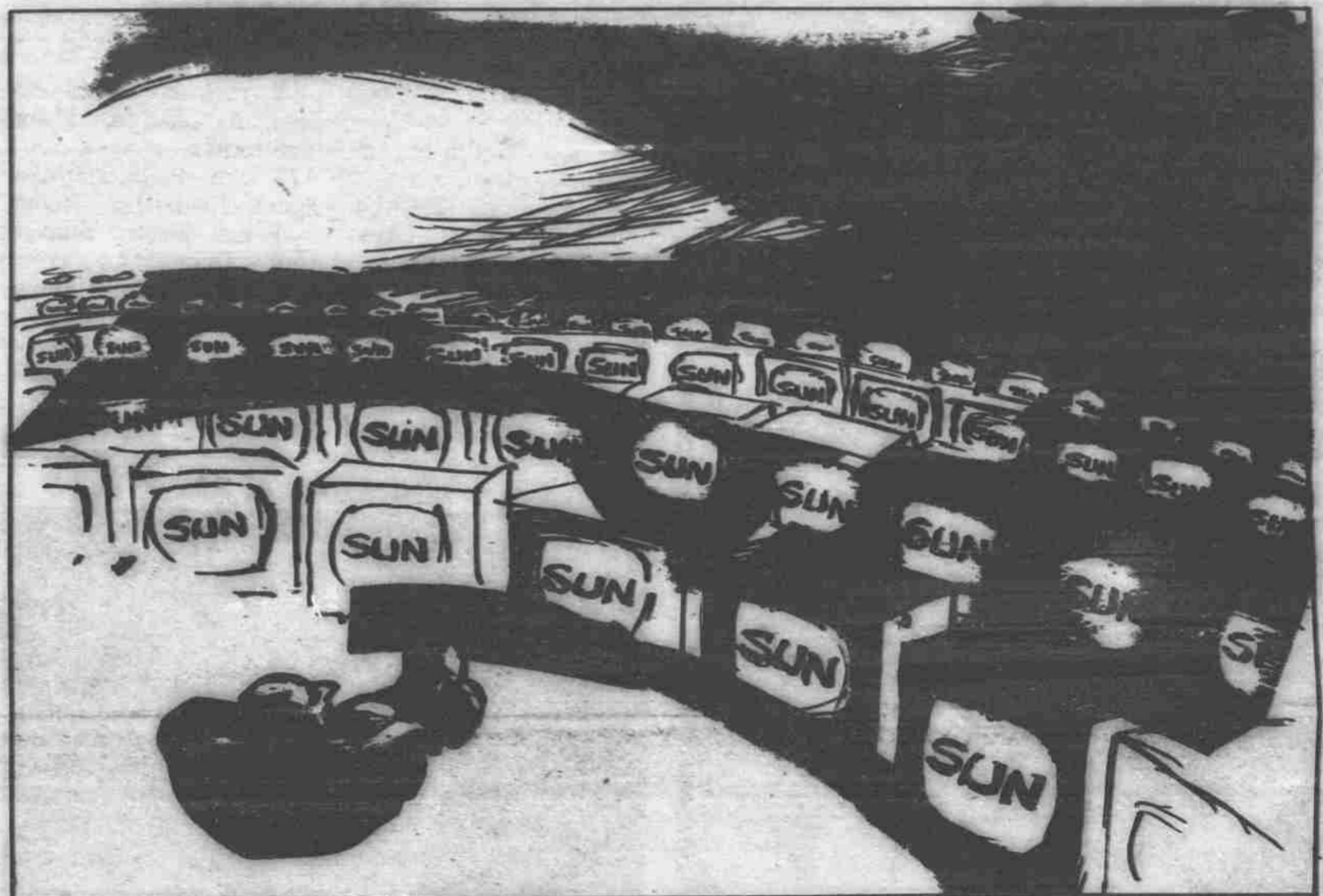
centers have resources and part-time faculty available to students.

An innovation of SUN is a toll free telephone service for students. If students have problems with their lessons, they can use the phone during specified hours to talk to advisers in the course.

Although Hassel and Varner agreed these methods were serving the students now, financing cutbacks have meant a few program cuts.

"Like any other higher education institution, we've had to make some cuts in personnel, services etc.," Hassel said. "But overall, it's been quite a successful program."

"The NIE cutbacks mean we're not on our original schedule," Varner said. "We've had to operate at 60 per cent of our expected budget, which has meant that our course development has fallen behind schedule."



Students should protest bad profs

By Tobin Beck

Students are sitting back and allowing themselves to be ripped off by bad teaching, an NU administrator told ASUN Wednesday night.

"Students are here at UNL to study, said Dr. Eugene Trani, assistant vice president for academic affairs, "and if they have a lousy professor, they should say something about it."

Trani said a new freshman course to be offered next year will acquaint students with different methods of teaching and enable them to see which method allows them to learn more effectively.

The course was developed through a \$260,000 federal grant by K. Patricia Cross, a visiting professor at NU last year, as one way of improving university undergraduate teaching.

The course, after being rejected for the spring semester by UNL, will be taught here next fall, Trani said. He added the course will be taught at UNO this spring.

The Cross study, completed in May, 1975, surveyed NU faculty members on their attitudes about teaching and learning and made specific recommendations for improving undergraduate teaching.

The survey results indicated that most faculty members think the quality of undergraduate teaching at the university is good, and also pointed out that there is little faculty interest in improving teaching by learning more about how students learn.

The report said most faculty members think that teaching should rank at least as high as research in priority at NU.

But, the report continued, despite what administrators say or do, most faculty members think the University does not recognize teaching at the same level as research, and is not committed to rewarding good teaching.

For these and other reasons, the report said, improving undergraduate instruction at NU would be difficult, although the report said the faculty cannot be expected to bear the total commitment for improved instruction.

"One reason they (the faculty) don't see the reward system as working is because students don't say enough about teaching," Trani said.

He added that if students were better Nader-type consumers of teaching, poor professors would probably change to better teaching methods.

Scott Cook, a member of the Intercollegiate Athletic Committee, told ASUN that the committee voted Monday night to continue the present football ticket eligibility policy.

Cook also said there would probably be no summer pro football game in Memorial Stadium because the games don't make enough money.

The main reason for having the games, Cook said, was to provide money to ease the financial crunch in the athletic department.

Cook said several big name teams, which might draw more people to a summer game, wanted guarantees for more money than the game would bring in.

The committee reaffirmed that no student fees will be used for the intercollegiate sports at UNL, Cook said. He added that the athletic department included in this year's university budget a request for money which is needed for fieldhouse operations and new AstroTurf for Memorial Stadium.

Cook said the committee also decided against making student tickets transferable.

"Football and athletics exist at UNL first for the students and second for consumers," Cook said. "But there is also a concern and need for money."

Cook said students who buy a student ticket in order to sell it take money that would otherwise go to the athletic department.

Informal classes offered in Free U

Registration for Nebraska Free University (Free U) continues today and Friday in the Nebraska Union.

Free U is an informal collection of 46 classes suited to people's interests, according to committee co-chairman Denise Muff.

Students are charged a \$1 registration fee to cover the costs of printing programs and posters, Muff said.

The fee allows students to register for any number of courses. Free U also is open to non-students.

Classes begin Monday and subsequent meetings are scheduled by individual instructors and students.