

Professor dedicated to math skills

By Mary Fastenau

A lifetime of study, plus dedication and concern, adds up to Milton Beckmann, UNL math professor.

Beckmann, who specializes in math competency problems, said teachers complain about competency, but it is not a new problem, nor is there a sure formula for its solution.

"My whole life has been dedicated to competencies," he explained.

Beckmann joined the UNL staff 28 years ago. He since has developed his own test for mathematical literacy.

His results of 25 years of testing recently were published in *The Mathematics Teacher*, a magazine for math educators.

The tests were given to ninth graders at the beginning of the year and again at the year's end. The tests were administered in 1950-1951, 1965-1966 and 1975-1976 in Nebraska schools.

Results show the lowest scores in 1950-1951 with a definite increase in 1965-1966. Beckmann said students at the beginning of ninth grade in 1965 did better than those at the end of ninth grade in 1951.

There was a decrease from 1965-1966 to 1975-1976, but Beckmann said test scores still were higher than those from 1950.

Beckmann said the decrease stems from "A general cultural shift," more permissiveness in schools, less family unity, more resistance to authority and less fascination by sciences and technology.

He cited increased social problems and athletic activities for both boys and girls as possible reasons for the decline.

He said problems in math competency go back to 1906 when the Chicago Board of Education complained of students doing poorly in mathematics.

Beckmann explained that the math competency problem becomes apparent before or during every war when there is a great push toward math and science.

He pointed out an article in the October 1943 issue of *The Mathematics Teacher* which showed that in tests given to men in the Army, one in four correctly answered the question "5 is 20 percent of what number?"

Beckmann said a commission was created after the war that developed a 29-point check list of basic math competencies. From this list Beckmann devised the problems for his mathematical literacy test.

From the results of his testing and that done by several graduate students, Beckmann said he thinks the high school math programs have a dual responsibility. First, to



Photo by Mark Billingsley

UNL Professor Milton Beckmann specializes in math competency problems.

provide training for leaders in science and math and second, to insure competence for ordinary citizens.

He said he thinks teachers should do a better job and that more time should be dedicated to math studies.

Math deserves the same amount of time as athletics or music, Beckmann said.

"Not that athletics and physical education are not important," he said. "I would just like to see that they spend as much time on that as on math."

Athletics have been very important in Beckmann's life. He lettered in baseball at UNL and was an all-university boxing champ.

He said that "someone is doing something right" because "practically all" UNL students take calculus as their first math course. Beckmann explained that when he attended UNL, he had to have 16 hours of math credit before he could take calculus.

Beckmann's test results are backed up by 15 years in Nebraska public schools and four children of his own. He spent five years teaching junior high math in Kearney, four and one-half years as superintendent in Gibbon and two years in a similar position in Scribner.

He came back to UNL after a request from the former Dean of Teachers College, Beckmann commented.

getting ahead

Arthur Kraft, acting associate dean of the College of Business Administration, was named one of four of Lincoln's outstanding young individuals by the Lincoln Jaycees.

The award honors persons 19 through 35 who are active in the community. ***

UNL geology students selected Samuel B. Treves for the Outstanding Faculty Member award and Sue Brillhart for the Outstanding Teaching Assistant award in an election sponsored by the UNL Geology Club. The club may have the election annually. ***

James Foertsch, a UNL graduate student, has received the \$500 J.C. Seacrest Fellowship for 1978. The fellowship is awarded annually to top UNL students doing post-graduate journalism work. ***

Timothy W. Burroughs, a UNL journalism graduate student, has been awarded the \$5,000 Gilbert M. and Martha H. Hitchcock Fellowship for 1978. The award was established in 1975 by the Hitchcock Foundation to encourage working journalists to return to the university for full-time graduate work. ***

Dr. Carmen H. Grant, a University Health Center clinical psychologist, is recipient of the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP) diploma in clinical psychology. It is the highest distinction given by the ABPP. Grant is one of 10 recipients in Nebraska and currently is the only woman recipient in the state. ***

A book by UNL economics Professor George E. Rejda has been nominated for one of two Wright-Kulp awards. The awards, presented by the American Risk and Insurance Association, are given for outstanding books about risk and insurance. ***

UNL physics Professor Robert Fuller was elected vice president of the American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT). The 10,000-member association promotes teaching physics and physics' role in our culture.

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