

views of and by
the board of regents

Regents don't reflect student views—campus leaders

By Brenda Moscovits

Leaders of student groups may not agree on some things, but they tend to agree that the NU Board of Regents does not adequately reflect student opinion in decision making.

"They are very responsive to their constituency or what they perceive to be their constituency, the people of their home districts," says ASUN President Ken Marienau.

"They are very open to the needs of the university, especially if it's presented by the central administration and by the professional planners," Marienau said, adding that "there should be very direct input from the students and the faculty in addition to the administration."

Don Macke, director of the Nebraska University Public Interest Research Group was more critical of the regents.

"Frankly, I don't think the regents are responsive at all to the state or the students," Macke said, calling the board "completely insensitive" when it comes to student sentiment.

"They (the regents) have not accepted the fact that 19-year-olds have the same rights as 30-year-olds . . . the regents feel obligated to represent the constituency and not the university," Macke said.

Jeff Chizek, president of the UNL chapter of Young Americans for Freedom, said the regents are correctly fulfilling their duties in not representing student views.

The regents, as elected representatives of the people of Nebraska, should "choose the taxpayer over students" when making decisions for the university, Chizek said.

Bob Gleason, co-chairman of ASUN's Government-Liaison Committee, said "I personally don't think the regents consider themselves as representative of any constituency."

"They seem to have strong personal convictions," Gleason said. Serving as regent "is a good way to vent their con-

victions," he added.

"Their overriding concern is something that goes beyond their constituency, a philosophy to uphold," he said, terming the regent positions as "self-gratifying" for the officeholders.

"I think they should be responsible to the needs of the students of the state," said Nate Eckloff, chairman of the UNL Fees Allocation Board.

"Some of them are very responsive and some of them aren't. I'm not going to name names," Eckloff said.

"It's just my feeling that the regents are not responsible to the students," said Ron Dahlke, president of Union Program Council.

"They're trying to be responsive to their constituency," Dahlke said, when they should be responsive to both their districts and the students.

Responsibility to both would "provide the best system of higher education that they possibly can," Dahlke said.

Marienau said he is in favor of getting a voting student regent on the board.

"I've been shot down from all quarters for that but I still strongly believe that," he said.

Marienau said right now "power is in lobbying people. If you can convince the administration, you're halfway there. If you can convince the people in the district you're three-quarters there."

Marienau said although a system in which the governor would appoint regents might assure quality representatives, he was still "a little skeptical" about such a system which could possibly turn the regents into "political favors" office.

Macke said presently regents are elected based on name recognition alone. Regents appointed by the Legislature or the governor would be "an alternative that we really should look at," Macke said.

An appoint regent would "moderate the distance" between the regents and the people, Macke said, making the regent directly responsible to the governor who is in turn responsible to the people of the state.

Chizek said he was satisfied with the

present practices in electing the board.

Gleason said he would "prefer a system where they (the regents) are elected and paid. It would give you a political regent as opposed to a personal conviction regent," Gleason said.

A paid regent would be "much more accessible and responsive," he said.

Gleason said he also supports a shorter term for regents (they presently serve six years), and adding a provision for recall. Regents now can only be removed from office through an impeachment proceeding by the board itself.

Eckloff said he liked the idea of voting student regents, adding "I don't know if it's viable or not. I don't think so."

He also said "I wish some of them (regents) would get on campus more and talk to student groups. It would at least give them a better understanding of our thoughts."

Dahlke said making the regents "hired officials to make the university work," should be considered.



Daily Nebraskan Photo

Board of Regents works closely with administration

By Kathy McAuliffe

The group that probably works closest with the NU Board of Regents is the UNL administration.

UNL Chancellor Roy Young said he deals with the regents primarily through NU President Ronald Roskens. Although this is the standard administrative channel, he said, he does communicate directly with the regents on particular issues.

Richard Armstrong, vice chancellor for student affairs, described his working relationship with the regents as an "informal" one.

Working with the board is a "challenge," Armstrong said because each regent views problems differently. However, differing opinions among the regents are important so all of Nebraska is represented, he said.

"The larger group we're trying to relate to is the people of the state, and certainly they're not all of one mind," Armstrong said. "Even among our students there are different points of view all across the scale."

Differences of opinion among the regents occur partly because the regents live in different districts throughout the state, he said.

"There are some who live in an area that is remote from campus, so their exposure to the campus is not quite as much," he explained. "Because they perceive their responsibilities somewhat differently and because there is a wide range of experience and philosophy among them, they therefore have varying degrees of contact with students."

"There may not be an understanding among all of us about what is the proper role of the board of regents," he said.

Some believe the board should be totally responsible to its constituents, while others think the board should respond primarily to the university population, Armstrong said. In between these two

extremes is a wide range of opinion.

Young said, "I think they give attention to both the people who elect them and the administration, faculty and students. I think they have to listen to both to serve effectively. It might just depend on the issue as to whom they would be most responsive."

"Since they are the governing body of the university, it is essential that they understand the ideas of university representatives," he said. "As a group, they make an effort to conscientiously represent the university."

The roles and responsibilities of the regents "are pretty well laid out in the statutes and bylaws governing the institution," Young said. "But I doubt many people have read them."

Armstrong said there is no easy solution to the problem of defining regents' roles and responsibilities. However, more communication in the form of informal meetings between the board of regents and university employees would benefit both the regents and the university, he said.

In the past, rap sessions between students and regents were held periodically, as well as informal discussions on nights before meetings, he said.

"I enjoyed that," Armstrong said, "and I regret through time constraints it has not been possible to have that."

He said these informal, open meetings were replaced by subcommittee meetings when the agenda became gradually longer and more time-consuming.

Young also supported having informal meetings between regents and students.

"It would probably aid communication and understanding if such meetings could be held periodically," Young said. "There is a limit to the amount of time the regents can devote to such meetings because they have their own professions which are quite demanding."

Armstrong had other suggestions for

improving the relationship between the regents and the university.

"If the regents were available to experience a cross section of the activities (on campus), that might help them," he said. For example, attending a lecture funded by the speakers' program might have given the regents "a feel" for the activity, he said.

"That would provide an additional ingredient to the regents' decision-making process. It would affect their decisions."

Persons at the university also would benefit from direct interaction with the regents, Armstrong explained. "These very competent people" could provide feedback from their participation.

However, all these suggestions are "unrealistic to a certain extent," Armstrong said because the time regents have available for University-related activities is limited.

"The board of regents is made up of gentlemen with responsible positions and a minimum amount of time to devote to being regents," he said. It would be "unreasonable" to ask them to give more time, he said.

"I have a good deal of admiration for the members who give of their time. They've taken on responsibilities because of loyalty and a desire to be of support," he said.

"If I were one of them and pursuing my profession full-time, too. It would be difficult to take away time on (my) profession and spend it on the University. I commend them for the time they spend," Armstrong said.

The regents frequently are involved in university-related activities outside their immediate board work, such as meeting with constituents and educators throughout the state. This "hidden" work also is time-consuming, Armstrong said.

Because of the regents' time limits, "we're kind of at a stalemate," Armstrong said. He added that this was not all bad and that the board has accomplished much.

"The limitation of time is the opponent of increased efficiency and effectiveness," he said. "Not to say what we have is ineffective. I'm sure they (board members) wish to be the very best regents possible."

Armstrong acknowledged that current student opinion seems to indicate a desire for some improvements in the board of regents.

The board's decision to eliminate mandatory support of the speakers' program seems to be a cause of student dissatisfaction, he said.

"I would say the decision about student fees appears to be the most difficult one for students to accept in the five years since I've been here," he said.

"I think students feel they did their level best to make the regents aware of their views and somehow were unable to persuade them. The regents are really between a rock and a hard place on that issue (student fees)."

On the other hand, the decision was a difficult one for the regents, he said. Armstrong reported that one regent said he received more correspondence on the student fees issue than on any previous issue. Most of it was against mandatory support of the speakers' program, he said.

Despite fees problems, Armstrong said there is "no real conflict of interests" between the board and the university.

"I think the board is sufficiently in touch with the campuses to generally know the needs and to support those needs," he said. But the regents may not always be in touch with the "specifics" on each campus, he added.

Armstrong said the board "tried to judge objectively."

"I don't feel the board occupies an adversarial relationship to the campuses, and neither do I feel the board perceives it is encumbered to always support every recommendation made by the campuses," he said.