



Photo by Mark Billingsley

Patrice Berger, UNL assistant professor of history.

History beyond the facts is professor's class goal

By Mary Fastenau

His office window does not overlook the Eiffel Tower. He does not spend his Sunday afternoons driving along the Riviera.

He does not speak with a noticeable accent, but France is really home for Patrice Berger, UNL assistant professor of history.

Berger (pronounced Bourjay) was born in France, but the United States and New York City became his home at age five.

His speech does not have a midwestern twang, but there is a richness and sophistication which accompanies his speech and mannerisms.

Though he has spent the majority of his life in the U.S., Berger remains a French citizen. He said it is easier to keep that alliance since he returns to France at least every two years.

He said it is nice to have relatives in France, but adds that his trips usually are "four-fifths work and one-fifth enjoyment."

Berger explained that his specialized research into early modern French history of the 17th and 18th centuries is based on authentic documents found only in France.

He said it is often difficult for history professors because their specialized areas tend to be narrow, but then they are expected to get in front of a classroom and make "cosmic observations."

Berger's students in upper level classes, which includes a course in French history, however, receive the advantages from his specialization.

Essay exams are given, the exams are returned with a grade and Berger's typed comments.

Berger said his reason for doing this is that students have the tendency to think essays are unfair because they are subjectively graded. He said they think tests which deal only with facts are more objective and a better test of knowledge.

"That, of course, is pure bunk," Berger said. He thinks his form of evaluation helps

to remove some of the hostility students have toward essay examinations, he said.

"It is as easy to communicate in writing as orally," he said.

Many students are ill-prepared for essay exams, according to Berger, and he said he hopes to help students with writing skills. Most people have some need for effective written communication, he said.

He admitted that another reason for the typewritten comments is for better communication with the students and because his handwriting was illegible.

Through his teaching, he said he attempts to confront students with a different type of man, and social and political organization. He said he wants students not only to learn what other men did not but compare their actions to those of the present.

"History has been regarded as a string of facts, and I am trying to get beyond the string of facts to examine the actions of men," Berger said.

He said the person who becomes "educated in the most complete sense" is the person who is open to experience.

Berger received his undergraduate degree at Columbia University and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Chicago.

He moved to Lincoln in 1970. He said there is a slower pace of life in Lincoln, but added that he and his wife, a Chicago native, have come to enjoy it.

However, he said, everyone should have the opportunity to travel and to one in contact with a variety of cultural groups.

"I think it is important for Nebraskans to experience urban life and for people from an urban environment to experience the midwest," he said.

Berger advocates trips to Europe to help broaden one's experience, but he says he realizes that is impossible for most students. However, he said, shorter trips which fit student finances better are also of value.

Library hours lengthened

Love Library, C.Y. Thompson Library and Nebraska Hall have extended their hours for dead week and finals week. Hours at Law Library will remain 7:30 to 2 a.m. weekdays, 8 to 2 a.m. Saturdays and 10 to 2 a.m. Sundays.

Love and C.Y. Thompson libraries will be open Monday through Thursday of dead week and finals week from 7:30 a.m. to

midnight. Friday's hours are 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The libraries will be open May 6 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and May 7 from 1:30 p.m. to midnight.

The Nebraska Hall study area will be open 24 hours a day. The library will be open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and 6:30 to 10:30 p.m.

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