

Study shows technology brings teacher shortage

By Robin Lynch

Today's society, with all its technology, is demanding more knowledge in math and science areas but is failing to provide needed teachers, according to a study by the Education Department of the National Science Foundation.

"There is a serious shortage," said Dorothy Stevens, assistant professor of secondary education at UNL. She said the basic problem is money because industry will pay math and science majors more money than education will.

"To train students in technology, we need teachers who are extremely capable,"

she said. "More knowledge is required to live in a technical world."

To prove it takes more math ability to live in today's world, Prof. David Skoug, chairman of the Mathematics Department, said, "In the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, student credit hours have increased 28 percent during the past six years.

"At the national level, student credit hours in the mathematical sciences have been increasing at about four percent a year for the past six years," he said.

But Skoug, who has been at UNL for 14 years, added, "The number of undergraduate students majoring in math has de-

creased about 40 percent during the past six years. A similar drop has occurred in the number of graduate students."

More sophisticated

Stevens said another problem that arises is those seeking employees can't go for the best person to fill positions, so they take what they can get whether or not that's what they need. She said there may not be enough teachers, but from what she has seen, the candidates are becoming more sophisticated.

To solve the teacher shortage problem, Stevens said she would like to get the national leaders in math education together on campus and brainstorm about the problem.

Stevens also said an interest in math must be developed at an early age, and students need to feel more comfortable with math.

Skoug said he was unhappy that high school counselors don't encourage students to take more math courses.

Stevens said the UNL Math Department is encouraging math majors to earn dual matriculation, or earning a math major and secondary education certification.

"With a math major and teaching degree, you have clout and versatility," Stevens said. She said that teacher training helps in public relations and other areas.

"People need to be prepared for as many fields as possible, and teaching is a good thing to fall back on. Math opens doors," Stevens said.

Award loans

Another step Stevens would like to see taken to solve the teacher shortage is for the government to award loans for teachers to go to school, then have them teach a certain number of years to pay back the loans.

Math isn't the only area lacking in instructors, said Prof. George Nagy, chairman of the Computer Science department at UNL.

Nagy said there are about 600 vacancies for teachers in computer science at the high school and college levels. What is startling though, he said, is about 200 Ph.D.s are given a year and half of those receiving them go to those in industry.

"There isn't too much incentive right now to go into graduate work when people

with bachelor's degrees get paid so much," Nagy said.

Nagy said some incentive might be higher salaries, new updated equipment and more research. Nagy added equipment becomes obsolete in two or three years and should be replaced and also more interim work is needed.

Because the United States is ahead of the world in computer usage, more than 50 percent of the Ph.D.s given in the United States are to foreign students who come over and work, Nagy said.

He said since he's been here, he has had three people earn their Ph.D.s and two of these were to foreign students.

A lot returning

Nagy also said he has a lot of people return to earn master's degrees after receiving a degree in other areas. He said they either like the job opportunity of a computer scientist or they are interested in computers.

Most freshmen get their bachelor's degree, then get a job because the money is good, Nagy said. He said he encourages good students to continue their education and pick up their master's or Ph.D. later on.

Nagy said some companies, like Bell Labs, requires all employees to earn the master's degree and will even pay for the additional education.

Among those students earning master's degrees in computer science are high school teachers. Cheryl Poostry, a past high school math teacher and current undergraduate working for a master's degree in computer science, is one such teacher.

Poostry said she taught math for nine years and, for the past four or five years, she has been taking some courses in computer science because she likes working with computers.

Poostry said Pennsylvania used to have a federal or state-funded loan for students who were interested in teaching.

She said they could pay back the loan if they taught in a poorer school district, but this really didn't work because the school cost wasn't what kept people from being teachers.

"The economics of feeding a family is what keeps people out of teaching," Poostry said.

Conference may help form state student association

By Betsy Miller

A trip to a United States Student Association national conference last weekend taken by five members of ASUN and the Government Liaison Committee should help start UNL to form a state student association, one participant said.

Rick Mockler, speaker of the ASUN Senate, attended the conference and said that Nebraska students got a chance to talk with representatives from other student associations in different states.

According to Mockler, Nebraska is one of the few states which does not have a state student association.

An SSA is an organization composed of representatives from different colleges in the state that work to gain favorable legislation for higher education from the government.

Mockler said that the exposure UNL representatives got to other state SSAs was beneficial.

He said members learned how SSAs are financed, how they gain influence with state legislatures and how they lobby.

Representatives from UNO, the NU Medical Center, Kearney State College and Peru State College attended the meeting, he said.

Chadron State College students also were interested in attending the conference, he added.

"The possibilities of forming an SSA look really good. The question is how to structure it," Mockler said.

Questions that need to be answered concerning the formation of an Nebraska SSA include how many representatives are needed from each school, how to finance the organization and how many activities it should be active in, he said.

Nette Nelson, chairperson of GLC, who attended the conference, said that her committee is playing an active role in trying to organize a Nebraska SSA.

To form an SSA, Nelson said that the committee will try to follow some procedures that are found in two manuals the USSA produced.

She also said that members in an SSA should follow the advice of USSA National Chairperson Doug Tutthill, who feels that "education is a right, not a privilege."

Besides Mockler and Nelson, ASUN President Renee Wessles, ASUN First Vice-President Mark Hirschfeld and GLC member Mari Blaylock attended the conference.

Mockler said that student fees were used to register UNL representatives at the conference and non-student fees paid for their transportation and lodging.

The conference was in Lawrence, Kan.



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