

# Professors lament closing of Centennial in May

By Kirsten Nielsen

The Centennial Education Program, unique in that it was founded by students in 1969, ends this May. Started as an alternative to regularly structured UNL classes, Centennial offers a variety of integrated courses in a small and communal atmosphere.

"It was started by the students originally," said Dr. Betty Carpenter, a fellow in the program. They wanted something different than the regularly offered courses, she said.

"It was kind of an attempt to get back to the original idea of a university—the idea of following the master."

Centennial started as a residential program. All the students involved lived in Neihardt Residence Center.

"You had the same group of people eating, living and learning together. It was

really a community experience," said Dr. Robert Bergstrom, a Centennial fellow on leave from the English department.

He said that at the time the program started, students had more voice in choosing the curriculum. In recent years, the curriculum has been decided mainly by the faculty.

"Of course, there's always the danger in an unstructured situation of getting trivial," Bergstrom said, "but I think it's well worth the risk. There have been some very original and creative ideas come out of the program."

He added that Centennial has frequently been reviewed by the university, and has never had any problem in justifying its existence in the time that Bergstrom has been affiliated with the program.

#### Strong integration

Bergstrom said the integration of studies

is one of Centennial's strong points. "If, for instance, a class is offered by the English department of the university, it has to approach the subject from that particular point of view. Here, we can look at the sociological and scientific sides of the subject as well."

No longer strictly residential, the Centennial program involves about 300 students, most of whom take one or two classes in the program per semester.

"At one time, there were only about 80 students in Centennial," Bergstrom commented. It gained a reputation in the mid-1970s as a shelter for kooks, both faculty and students."

He said residue of this attitude is partially responsible for Centennial's closing.

#### Political problem

Dr. Robert Fuller, senior fellow of Cen-

tennial, said he sees the problem as a political one.

"When the regents threaten cuts, the weakest programs—politically—will go first. That means undergraduate programs," he said.

The decision to discontinue Centennial was made during the summer, he said, when most of the students were gone.

"It was easy to eliminate it. We have no research or graduate program, no tenured faculty. Centennial has no political clout."

Mike Roegner, a physics major and Centennial student, laments the ending of the program.

"The university is interested in building up things like the Business College, or the football team, and that's fine. That's the body of the university. But when they let Centennial go, they lost a little of the heart and mind of the university. That's kind of sad."

# UNL officials: hiring unqualified is not likely

By Sue Jepsen

While it is unlikely UNL would hire a faculty member or administrator who was not qualified, it is possible.

Recently, UNO administrators discovered a teacher had been hired who allegedly falsified his academic credentials.

Larry Andrews, UNL assistant vice chancellor of academic affairs, said to his knowledge there has not been a similar incident at UNL during the 12 years he has been here.

Andrews is the author of an affirmative action plan specifying procedures for filling academic and administrative positions. The plan, adopted by the NU Board of Regents in 1980, is "roughly the same thing" as what was used before, but it is now formalized.

"One of the most important decisions we make around here is to hire a faculty member," he said. While there are

emergency exceptions, he said the plan for the most part is followed.

The procedure calls for official authorization to fill a position, a 30-day advertising period, the formation of search committees for each department, candidate interviews and finally the hiring or rejecting of applicants.

Andrews said the screening committee has the responsibility to analyze materials submitted with the application. He said it was not unusual for someone on the screening committee to personally know the applicant or one of his references.

These committees depend a great deal on the integrity of the applicants or their references, he said.

#### Safeguards

To guard against hiring an unqualified person, a committee may check references, contact the dean of graduate studies at the university or college the applicant graduated

from, or obtain an official copy of the applicant's transcript, bearing the registrar's seal.

"I'm not going to say it's impossible (hiring an unqualified candidate), but it is not unlikely," Andrews said.

Norman Hostetter, associate professor of English and chairman of the department's recruitment committee, said he agreed that while he could imagine it happening, it was not a likely possibility.

He said his job begins when he is notified by the department head that a position may be filled.

Next, the opening is advertised in at least two national professional publications, other more specialized publications that might attract applicants, and at about 200 placement offices at other universities.

A committee then is formed to screen the applications. He said committee size varies, but a standard committee has seven members, five professors, a graduate student and an undergraduate student.

The committee eliminates "obviously unsuitable" candidates on the basis of their applications, resumes and other materials submitted.

From those candidates who appear qualified, the committee requests a dossier with letters of recommendation. From these the committee selects six to 10 candidates for preliminary interviews.

"Virtually all of the dossiers come from placement offices and are not seen or handled by the candidate," he said.

After the preliminary interviews, the committee selects its first choice, who is then brought to the campus for interviews with the dean, the faculty and the vice chancellor or his staff.

"It is very rare that we don't get (hire) our number one choice," Hostetter said.

#### Rely on integrity

The screening committee gets most information from sources other than the applicant, he said, and therefore must rely on their integrity.

"We trust the reliability of the placement office to send us reliable credentials," he said.

Hostetter said that in the two years he has chaired the committee, he has never asked an applicant to produce a diploma, although occasionally a transcript has been requested. Other precautions, including more thorough checking of the applicant's letters of recommendation may also be taken.

Hostetter said each opening has attracted anywhere from 43 to 153 applicants. Out of the 1,000 applications he has seen, none has given him reason to doubt its validity.

He said that while he had heard of cases of falsified credentials, they involved plagiarized publications, and were very rare.

"It would be utterly stupid to tell out-and-out lies in an application," Hostetter said, adding that it could "ruin their career."

Max Larsen, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, is also involved in the hiring process, said the university is very careful to "hire the very best people" possible, he said.

Larsen interviews the candidates along with department representatives during the applicants' visits to campus.

"We get to know them as well as we can," he said.

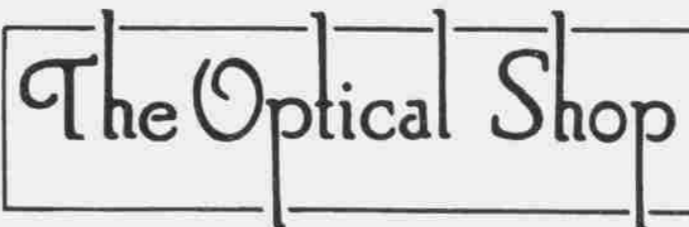
Larsen called the UNO situation "an isolated incident" and said it was hard to explain why it happened.



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