

# Campus leaders: Regents ignore student voices

By Betsy Miller

There's an old saying that it's hard to get politicians to agree on anything. But at UNL, some past and present student government leaders seem to agree on one very important issue.

Current ASUN President Rick Mockler and First Vice President Dan Wedekind, as well as former ASUN President Renee Wessels and former First Vice President Mark Hirschfeld all said that student leaders do not carry a lot of weight with the NU Board of Regents.

"We usually can get attention, but getting any action from them is nearly impossible," Wessels said.

In March Wessels completed her term as ASUN president and as student regent. Her experience as a regent has left her with a pessimistic outlook about the influence student regents have on the regents.

"I'm not very optimistic at all for the board's policies changing until the members change," she said. "I think after a year of serving on the board that some members don't want to have one (student regent) who disagrees publicly with them.

"They want one that either agrees or disagrees silently," Wessels said.

During her term, Wessels was vocal in expressing her dissatisfaction with the regents and she said that angered them. She said they weren't used to being criticized publicly and responded with some personal strikes against her.

### Student voice ignored

She termed the abolition of the student regent's salary "appalling" and said that this was prompted because the regents disliked her.

Wessels said the regents refuse to take the student regents very seriously.

"The board will listen, although at meetings they've yelled at me and have been patronizing," she said. "I believe the student regent should be treated as an equal. The students are like consumers, they pay to run the university, yet their input is ignored."

It's important that student regents be heard because at times the district regents have different ideas from the students on what's important, she said.

She said the regents favored some unimportant subjects, such as student scalping of football tickets, rather than more pertinent problems.

After just two meetings with the board, Mockler said that he and the regents are "just testing" their relationship.

He said he is encouraged so far because at Friday's meeting a motion he introduced calling for continued government aid to the financially needy passed unanimously.

### Communication is the key

Mockler said the voice of the student regent can make

a difference if it is used effectively.

"I don't think the position is totally useless," he said. "That resolution (for continued government student loans) got front page coverage in the Lincoln Journal.

"The regents aren't always real receptive," he said, adding, "But most are willing to consider the student perspective."

Mockler said the way to get regent response is to appeal to people on an important issue that the students and regents are at odds on. He recalled the student letter writing campaign a few years ago to various media outlets in the state to protest the regents' plans to expand Memorial Stadium. The resulting public backlash against the idea caused the board to drop the idea.

Mockler said this will be his style of dealing with matters he thinks are important.

He said he plans to be the type of student regent who will formulate his resolutions while keeping the student interests first but also putting the regents' feelings in mind. Students may have more success with the board if they try to enhance their communication with it, he said.

"It's up to the personalities involved to establish good communication," Mockler said. "I believe that's being done right now. I'm doing all that can be done to establish good communication."

But according to Wessels, that approach may not work because she tried it also.

"At the beginning I was the conventional student regent," she said. "I went through all the right channels."

However, she said that after a tussle with the board over UNL's affirmative action policy, in which the compromising style was unsuccessful, she decided the board should be held publicly responsible for their decisions. She then began commenting on some of the regents' actions in the press and sometimes her opinions didn't show the board in a good light.

"I felt that I was elected to represent students," she said. "I think I was successful in doing that and the direct result was the regents' exposure."

### United we stand

Wedekind said student leaders can make headway with the regents if a large group of students work together on issues.

"We influence them most when we align ourselves with groups of other people," he said.

Wedekind characterized the relationship between students and regents as "distant," but said progress can be made. The students should work toward influencing major issues at UNL, he said. One way to do this is to gather strong facts to support student logic, Wedekind said.

"I hope the board of regents comes to realize that stu-

dents can be a valuable source of information for them in forming policies and making decisions," he said.

Students aren't considered a strong source now, he said.

Wedekind also praised the methods Mockler is using to confront the regents. He said there is a good balance between Mockler's ability to present student needs to regents and to listen to the board as well.

"We are proving ourselves as credible and responsible," he said.

Hirschfeld said he agrees with Wedekind that the student regent is a "necessary source of input," but the degree of importance the regents accord student government is small, he said.

The State Student Association, according to Hirschfeld, is one program that may bring students in closer contact with regents. Hirschfeld said if student leaders of several campuses in Nebraska join together to present unified views to the board, then the students will become very helpful to the regents.

Hirschfeld said he has been critical of the regents at times, but that he can see board members really do work hard at their job.

"When you've been on this side of the fence, you see how dedicated and hard-working they are," he said. "Their perspectives are different."

### Be vocal

The monthly meetings of the board also can be a problem for good communication between students and the board because some times it's hard to keep in touch between meetings.

The SSA project will be in the hands of Nette Nelson, Government Liaison Committee director.

She said she expects no major problems working with the board and that she has had no inquiries by regents about the SSA.

"I would assume if they had any questions they would seek us (GLC) out," she said.

Nelson said she has found regents to be very open and candid, but that they do have a different perspective of the campus.

The coming year will show whether the policies of the new student leaders will be effective in dealing with the NU Board of Regents. Mockler said he hopes the board will have a final opinion of him as "a reasonable student advocate" who can be open-minded in his work.

Wessels said that after two or three meetings with the board, Mockler will be able to tell how he is being received. She still defends her style of handling the regents.

"Be vocal, be as vocal as possible," Wessels said. "If you feel you know what the students want, speak up—or you're not doing your job."

# Poll shows regents' image not good to students

By Kim Hachiya



Amy Peck



Margaret Atwater

It would appear that the NU Board of Regents doesn't have the best image among UNL students, according to an informal poll taken Tuesday afternoon on campus.

A majority of the 10 students questioned seemed to think that the relationship between the regents and the students isn't very good.

Jon Walker, a sophomore finance major from Columbus, said, "The relationship is minimal. It would take a great deal of student participation to change their minds on most issues."

Walker said he thought student government was ineffective.

Roger Nimps, a junior philosophy major from Omaha, said the relationship between the board and the students is "one of total dominance, with the regents over the students—mixed in with a little indifference on the regents' part."

Nimps said the regents aren't concerned with student issues, but with such things as "getting the budget in under estimate or things like the stadium expansion. They waste time on ridiculous ideas like that."

Gordon Weihner, a junior general agriculture major from Stanton, also said the relationship was not good. "They (regents) don't seem to care about the student that much. For example, they gave head football coach Tom Osborne a raise the same day they cut things from the budget."

Renee Sayler, a junior natural resources education major from Lincoln, said some of the problems between the board and the students stem from the students, too. "I don't think the regents do (listen to the students) but it as much the students' problem in not being as well organized as they could be in getting feelings across to them."

Sayler said the problem was two-fold—that students aren't interested in student government and that regents weren't responsive to begin with.

"Things like putting down our president (former ASUN president Renee Wessels) was real bad. It seemed like they were slapping students in the face, saying 'your opinion doesn't mean anything because we're only going to listen to the taxpayers.' As if students aren't taxpayers too."

Sayler said students must take the responsibility of getting their views across.

Margaret Atwater, a junior art major from Lincoln, said the bad relationship between the board and the

students stems from lack of communication.

"The board would rather do everything themselves and not listen to the students as a whole. Perhaps they'll listen to an individual complaint, they can't just backhand an individual who complains, but organized complaints seem to be ignored."

Amy Peck, a freshman pre-med major from Tekamah, said the regents need to look at the students' level rather than staying above them.

"They need to listen more," Peck said. "It seems like they listen but they don't react. They listen to say they listened but don't respond to us."

Peck suggested that students become more involved. "The regents think they can get away with things because no one's involved."

Mark Jackson, a sophomore geography major from Ralston, said, "It seems to me, they (regents) really don't understand our problems and they haven't really tried to understand them. At least that's the impression I got in the two years I've been here."

Jackson said the regents should attempt to get in touch with the student more.

"I hardly know who any of them are. Right now they're just names in the paper to me."

John Emerson, a graduate student in counseling psychology from Lincoln, said that "the only real friction I've seen was last year in the grad school when they (students) circulated a petition and letter campaign to snuff the grad tuition increase, which didn't do any good anyway. They (regents) weren't responsive to that."

Emerson said he didn't feel knowledgeable enough about other issues to answer questions.

Two students said they felt the regents were responsive to most student issues.

Sandy Horky, a senior elementary education major from Burwell, said, "The role of the student plays a big part in their (the regents') decisions. They base a lot of things on student feelings—they build from there. Their rapport is good. I think they listen the best they can. If they think it's reasonable, they try, but they can't listen to everybody."

Sue Huston, a junior speech communications major from Grand Island, said, "I do think the regents listen to students. They are a wise group of men who care, otherwise they wouldn't be in that position."

She said the regents' response to student concerns depends on the issue at hand.

"I'm not sure how they've operated in the past, but they have to listen to us," Huston said.



Roger Nimps



Sue Huston