

Recruiter blames chemist shortage on attitudes

By Leslie Kendrick

An anti-science and anti-technology bias in the American culture is the main reason for a shortage of chemists, a UNL chemistry professor said.

Craig Eckhardt, graduate student recruiter for the chemistry department, said such incidents as the Three Mile Island accident have created an anti-science attitude in the United States. Because of this attitude, fewer students are majoring in science fields, Eckhardt said.

Government and industry have shown an anti-science bias by hiring fewer scientists, Eckhardt said. Because the opportunities for a science major are becoming fewer, persons interested in science may not choose a science career, he said.

"The academically gifted undergraduates say to themselves 'Why should I put my talent into something that has no future?'" he said. "It doesn't take the undergrads long to figure out where their opportunities lie."

Because fewer students are interested in science, the chemistry department has stepped up recruitment efforts, Eckhardt said. The increase in national recognition for UNL's chemistry department is helping recruitment efforts, he said.

"We are very fortunate to have a strong reputation in research and in teaching," Eckhardt said.

A chemistry career is often not considered in a state such as Nebraska, he said.

"A career in chemistry is often overlooked by students in an agricultural state. When they think of chemistry, they think of East Coast industries. They tend to forget how vital chemistry is to agriculture. Things such as plant hormones and pesticides are all a result of chemistry."

Despite the anti-science bias in America, there is still a great need for chemists, said Harry Foxwell of the American Chemists Society.

Foxwell said according to a study done by G.G. Meisels, UNL's chemistry department chairman, there is a need for about 5,000 to 6,000 chemistry graduates. Meisels found that only 4,000 bachelor degrees in chemistry are being given each year, Foxwell said.

The demand for chemistry Ph.D.s is about 2,000 to 2,500 a year, according to Meisels figures. Foxwell said the American Chemists Society estimates only 1,540 Ph.D.s will be produced in 1982.

Exact figures are unavailable because Meisels' office refused to release any study findings.

The shortage of chemists will end up hurting the U.S. economy, Eckhardt said. Post-industrial societies can no longer support their economies through the manufacturing of steel and coal, he said. Instead, countries must sell technology that depends on updated science, Eckhardt said.

"The Japanese have realized this and may well take away the computer market from the United States," he said.

Eckhardt said that out of 10,000 people in Japan, about 100 will become lawyers, 400 will become accountants and about 450 will become scientists and engineers.

Eckhardt said the Japanese figures contrast sharply with U.S. figures. Out of every 10,000 people in the United States, about 700 will become lawyers, 700 will become accountants and 80 will become scientists and engineers.

If the United States plans to maintain its current economic status, it must compete more technologically with post-industrial nations, Eckhardt said.

"We have to turn people's attitudes around towards science as being for their own well-being," he said.

"In order for the citizens to be protected they must not run away from science but understand it, or, if you think science is evil then change it by getting into it."

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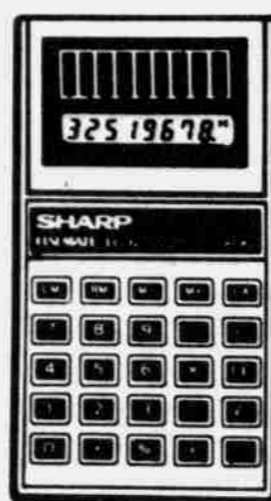
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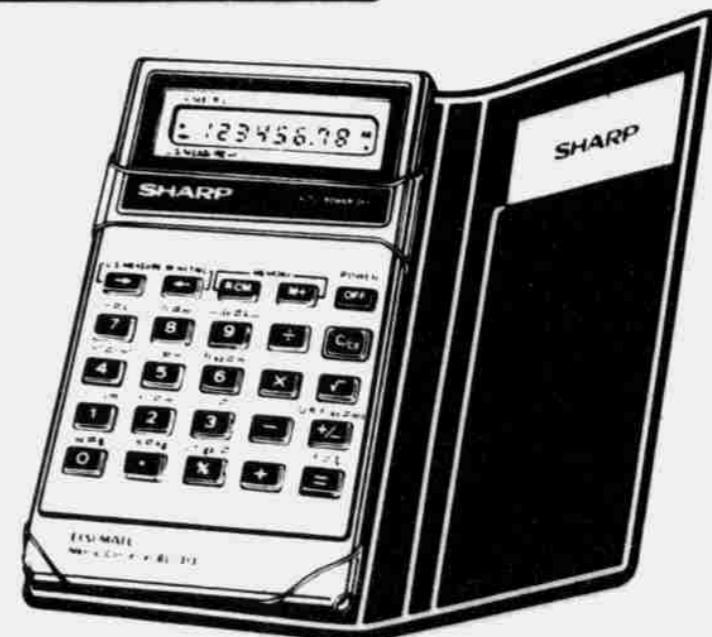
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