

Career 'tracks' directing communications majors

By Charles Flowerday

Editor's Note: The following story is the first of a weekly series that will explore job opportunities for graduates with different majors.

"No college freshman can project 25 years to decide what he needs to learn — subject matter is easily forgotten and in today's world, the knowledge explosion makes constant learning an inevitability. But all adults today need to be able to communicate with clarity, to articulate ideas, reason, to separate key facts from the barrage of ideas we all are exposed to every day."

— Helen Wise, former president, National Education Association, from a Speech Department brochure

The number of undergraduates majoring in speech communication at UNL has approximately doubled since the department began incorporating a series of career "tracks" designed to prepared students for general vocational goals, William Seiler, chief adviser for the department, said.

These eight tracks have general application to specific vocational areas, Seiler said. They evolved about two years ago as a response to student and faculty criticism. He said the department incorporated them to better help students develop communications skills while providing a good career direction upon graduation.

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—English professor Jim McShane

The areas featured involve mostly departmental courses, but add inter-disciplinary study to further enhance a student's job potential, Seiler said.

The tracks offered are business and organizational communication, public relations, pre-law, political communications, communications in the helping professions, communication in social change, communication in religion and teaching speech. In addition, Seiler said, the department offers a traditional liberal arts track and a pre-graduate study plan.

Teaching English

In contrast to the formalized preparation of speech communications, James McShane, former chief adviser for

the UNL English Department, said an English degree is not one that trains students for anything specific beyond teaching English.

"It's not a job-oriented degree," McShane said. He explained that the advantages of the major are that what a person learns stays with and grows with the person. He said this is true for most liberal arts majors.

McShane said he heard recently that the half-life of a technical degree is about eight years. This means that about one half of what a student learns is obsolete in that time, he said.

The English major will have to be trained for a specific job, he said, but the technical major eventually will have to re-train also.

"The nature of study in language and literature is that one is always confronting the new and different. It creates a body of people who ought to be at ease with change," McShane said.

This will be increasingly important in an ever-changing society, he said.

The major should ideally produce first-class problem solvers, administrators and people with good personal relations skill he said. Because of the great deal of work done in writing and rhetoric, English majors should know how to research, read critically, how to assess and re-assemble what they have learned for different purposes.

Critical skills

"You know how to look at an argument. For a society so dependent on communications those skills are critical," he said.

"No one goes into English for job-specific training. If you do so, you are ill-advised. You do it for the challenge," McShane said.

He said that the thinking about people, about character, about motivation and the sensitivity to individuals an English major develops should be first-rate training for any job.

The English Department does not offer the specific tracks program that speech communications does but it does have an excellent reputation as a pre-professional major, McShane said. He said students often pursue self-

initiated bridge programs while preparing for graduate training in business law or medicine.

Stanley Vandersall, chief adviser for the Department of Classics, said his comments would probably run similar to McShane's regarding job prospects for classics majors.

Vandersall said because of the training a classics major gets in studying a complex language, he develops skills that are broadly applicable.

"Learning the logic of language is an excellent background for dealing with other kinds of problems."

—Classics professor Stanley Vandersall

He said suggested fields for further study are business administration or administration in general because students in his department cultivate a feeling for language, accuracy of expression and a consciousness of logical thought.

Short supply

"These are in all-too-short supply in some fields," he said. By studying Latin or Greek, Vandersall explained, the student is forced to consider the appropriateness of the way one writes, speaks and thinks.

He cited teaching Greek or Latin as the most obvious career available to a classics major. But he said that departmental students pursue careers in archeology, linguistics, the ministry, government service, tourism or work as translators. He said the degree is also excellent training for law school as evidenced by the high percentage of departmental majors accepted by the College of Law.

"Management, as such, is not completely out of the grasp of classics people," he said. Citing the careful handling of detail combined with a broad mode of thinking that people in the humanities engage in, Vandersall said a classics background makes one very suitable for a number of different jobs.

"Learning the logic of language is an excellent background for dealing with other kinds of problems," he said.

Rec Department offers plans for skiing, canoeing

Trips offered by the UNL Recreation Department are filling up faster than ever before this semester, but students can still sign up for a fall or winter vacation, said Mark Ebel, recreation director.

The department is sponsoring a Dismal River canoe trip from Mullen to Thedford, Neb., Oct. 9 through 11. The weekend will cost \$35 and there are two openings left.

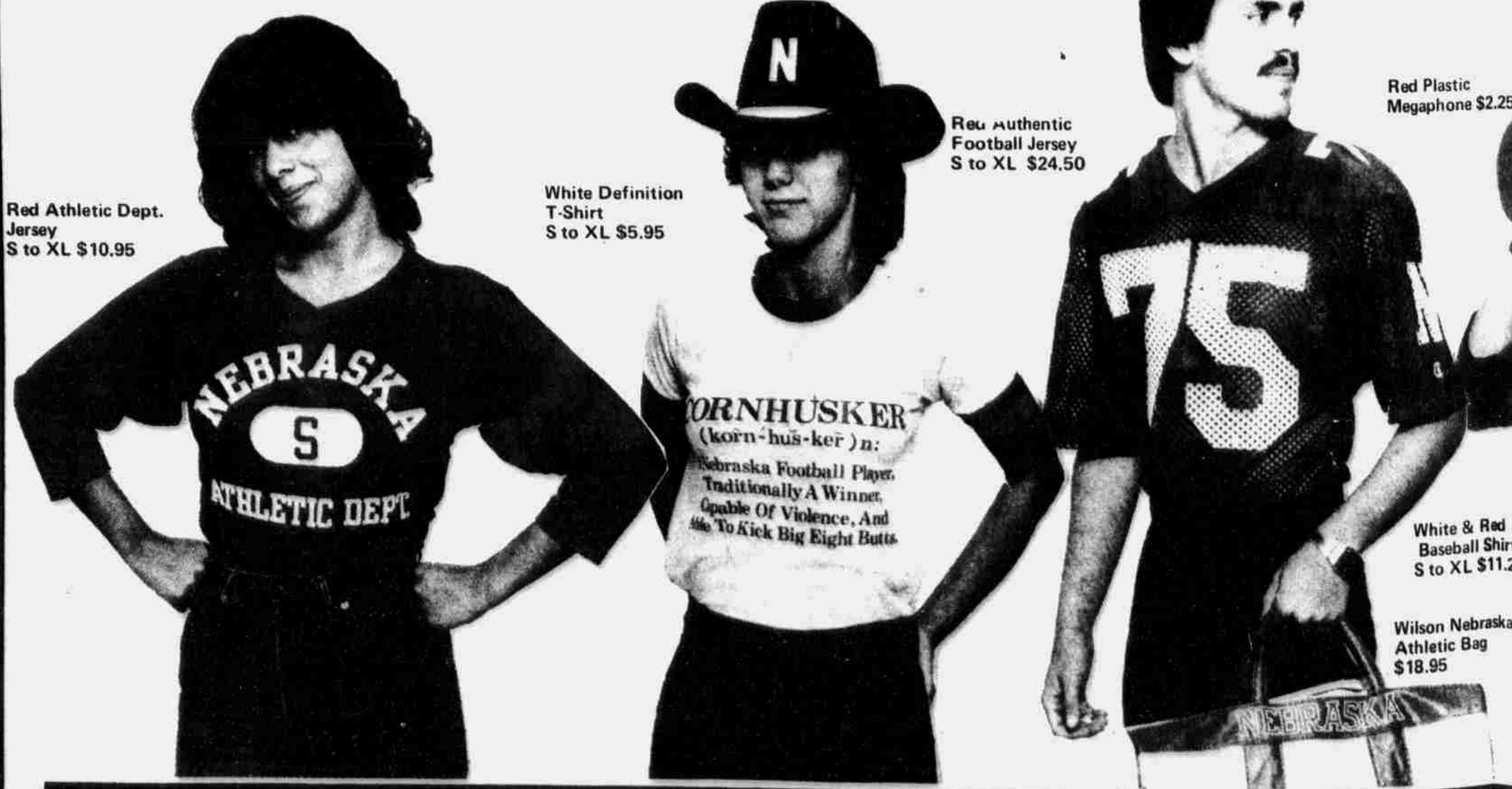
Two trips are offered Jan. 2 through 10. Six openings remain for a canoeing trip on the Rio Grande River in Big Bend National Park, Texas. The trip will cost \$125.

At the same time, a cross-country ski trip in Yellowstone National Park is planned. There are 11 openings, and the trip will cost \$250.

Another cross-country ski trip is planned Feb. 24 through 28. There are seven openings and the cost is \$135, Ebel said.

Ebel said the price of each trip includes transportation, lodging and most meals. Persons must pay 30 percent of the cost of the trip upon registration, and the remaining balance one week before the trip.

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