

Careers in economics varied

By Charles Flowerday

Students tend to put too much emphasis on a major, said Roger Riefler, chief adviser of the UNL Department of Economics.

"The fact of the matter is, 90 percent of U.S. corporations hire people and they go right into a training program," Riefler said.

Riefler explained that he is in an awkward position with regard to his advisees, economics majors in the College of Arts and Sciences. He said economics majors face a relatively good job market in relation to other arts and sciences majors, but that it also is the least career-oriented major in the business school.

He contrasted it the more theoretical nature of the discipline with accounting, which he said provided good job opportunities upon graduation.

Economics provides a more general business background, Riefler said. Students graduating with an economics degree would face the same period of training as a history or English major, Riefler said.

He said students often face their senior year with the question "What am I being trained for?" They frequently have visions of being hired, put behind a desk and told to perform, he said.

Nice selection

History majors, for example, who put a nice selection of courses together—a good intellectual package, he said—are people corporations will train.

Riefler said the economics department is the only department in the College of Business Administration building requiring students to take an arts and sciences curriculum. This serves to create a well-rounded student, Riefler explained. He said students today are getting career-oriented too early.

"I like the arts and sciences approach of distribution requirements early. It worries me what students come into

introductory courses expecting: 'Does it make me money?'" he said.

Riefler said that if the only reason for studying economics was to be able to amass great wealth, there would be no economics professors. He said he encouraged students interested in the discipline to take a selection of introductory courses so they know what the field is about, then begin thinking about a major.

According to a departmental brochure, economics majors are prepared to pursue careers in local, state or federal government, to work for regulatory agencies such as the Interstate Commerce Commission, or the Federal Reserve System, or to take the more traditional business routes of banking, insurance, retailing or transportation.

Societal issues

Department majors gain training in data collection, forecasting, public and governmental relations, business and governmental consulting, policy analysis and negotiations, the brochure said.

It also said the strength of the discipline is that it provides a logical, ordered way of looking at problems and issues. Economics draws upon history, philosophy and mathematics to confront topics ranging from individual and business economics to societal issues such as inflation, unemployment and pollution, the leaflet said.

"Career orientation is a progressive narrowing of interests," Riefler said. "I hate to see a student as a freshman say 'I want to be an economist.' I hate to see a senior come in and say, 'What am I going to do with my life?'"

Riefler said the first step was to get into the right college. "If you want to go into engineering, learn that first, then study economics."

He encourages students to visit the career placement office and go through some interviews.

He said many students may be surprised to find that they learn as much as their interviewers in the process.

Long lasting disabilities linked to noisy settings

An airplane taking off, the sound of a jackhammer tearing up the street, a car with no muffler — surrounding noise abuses ears.

But more than hearing is at stake.

Recent research with children has revealed broad consequences of environmental noise. University of Oregon psychologist, Sheldon Cohen, and his colleagues studied children whose schools were in the air corridor of the Los Angeles International Airport and compared them to matched children whose schools were in a quiet zone.

They found that children from noisy schools:

- have higher blood pressure
- do not develop the ability to ignore noise and to concentrate on their work

- are more likely to fail on a task requiring thought

- are more likely to give up before completing their work

- show relatively long-lasting effects from noise: Noise abatement procedures in the classroom, such as sound insulation, do not immediately reverse the consequences of continuing exposure to environmental noise.

Cohen said, "Over 70 million Americans live in neighborhoods with surrounding noise levels sufficient to interfere with communication and cause annoyance and dissatisfaction."

He proposes that it may take more to solve the effects of noise on children than just insulating only certain places in the environment, such as schools. The problem for society, says Cohen, may be to decrease noise levels in general.

Dr. Cohen summarized his findings recently in the *Journal of Personality and Psychology* and the *American Psychologist*.

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