

# Issues and actions have changed—student leader

By Melinda Norris

The college students of the 1980s are no more apathetic to social and political issues than the students of the late '60s and early '70s, said Sen. Don Wesely of Lincoln and leaders of the UNL student government.

"Apathy is a common malady in our country," said Wesely. "This is shown by the lowest voter turnout in a democratic country in the world."

Wesely said students were apathetic during the mid-'70s when he attend UNL. At that time, the ecology and consumer movement captivated students' interests. As the founding father of the UNL chapter of the Nader's Raiders, Wesely said Nader was an inspiration to him.

"Students need somebody like that to inspire them and then direct them," Wesely said.

"(Edward) Kennedy doesn't have the appeal his brothers had," he said, "and Nader doesn't have the publicity."

Wesely was also a member of the Public Interest Research Group at UNL, which dealt with public interest issues. A platform for consumer issues, PIRG died a few year ago, Wesely said.

"There is no movement like (PIRG) now," Wesely said. "The state student association is a national movement but deals with academic rather than economic or consumer issues — more on campus than off campus like in the '60s and '70s."

The switch of interests from social issues to academic interests is the "pendulum swing of politics," Wesely said.

Business concerns dominate the interests today, he said, and "I can see the pendulum swing again when students become active again."

## Issues have changed

The issues of today are different from the late '60s said ASUN Senate President Rick Mockler. The nation is not fighting a war. From a sociological prospective, the same motivation for students to speak out does not exist, he said.

"Economic issues are facing the students today — how to pay for an education," Mockler said.

Students recognize a need for an education, but they are at a survival level with the reduction of the loan and grant programs, said Nette Nelson, ASUN Government Liaison Committee chair.

The number of students attending college has increased over the years, she said, and over 40 percent of them are working and attending school part time, changing the attitude on campus. Because students are working more, they "may be selective on the topics on which to speak out," she said.

Reflecting on the riots, sit-ins and protest marches of that earlier era, today's students approach problems in a more realistic fashion, Nelson said.

"Activism has taken a different form," Nelson said, from strikes, demonstrations and the destruction of property to litigations, grievances and "our biggest strength," lobbying.

"The thirst has shifted but in an intelligent way," Nelson said.

The types of tactics used by today's students have shifted from being visible in the short range to less visible but more active, she said.

"Students have learned to work more within the system," Mockler said, "like through the state lobbying commissions." Mockler predicted that the country will see more visible student lobbying in the 1980s.

## Students disillusioned

Like the change in protest tactics, the perspective of the student of the 1980s has changed. Students have become disillusioned about government after Watergate, Nelson said.

"It is easy for students to become jaded about the political process and jaded about their involvement," Nelson said.

The 18-through-20 age group has the lowest turnout among voters, Nelson said. However, the amount of college students voting is close to the same percentage of the general public, she said.

Because college students are included in the age group with the lowest voter turnout, they are identified as being apathetic.

"Personally, I don't feel students are apathetic," Nelson said. Non-involvement is a reflection of the time factor, she said.

"If you view non-involvement as opposition," she said, "this view assumes students don't have a mind of their own. But students become involved when the issue suits their needs and time schedule."



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A UNL student raises his fist in protest after an arrest in front of the Administration Building during the early 1970s.

# DeCoster calls current student attitude 'disenchantment'

By William Graf

The co-author of a recently published book, *Understanding Today's Students*, which is about student attitudes, values and lifestyles, says he doesn't see what is termed an apathetic movement. But rather, he said, that among other factors, there's a preoccupation with success that dictates priorities.

"I'm not ready to call it an apathetic movement. It's more one of disenchantment," said David DeCoster, UNL Dean of Students. The motivation that brings students to campus right now is a feeling that "I've just got to be here. There's just no alternative." And so if there is no alternative, that means there are a lot of people here that literally haven't chosen to be here.

"I think the economy is part of the cause. Students seem to be perceiving that things are not likely to get a whole lot better. With costs continually going up they see that they're going to have to be that much more competitive. So there has been a tremendous amount of pressure that has been internalized that probably wasn't during the '60s and '70s," he said.

"Folks in the '60s, for example, found

it relatively easy to find a job once they got their college education."

Also, DeCoster said, the Vietnam War helped unite students with a cause.

"There are no dramatic issues like that (Vietnam War). And also the types of the issues that there are — students are in a sense denying them as real issues.

"They are essentially saying that if the issue doesn't have a direct impact on what they're pursuing at that time then they aren't going to be troubled with it. And what has a direct impact is whether they get a C minus or B plus.

"And a third variable is a sense of powerlessness. They're in a way saying 'what I need to do is somehow establish myself. And once I achieve a position of prestige and stature then I'll have an impact on these issues. But as a college student I'm relatively powerless.'"

He said the increased competitiveness of today's job market, the enormity of the campus and the feeling that so much is messed up in the world is contributing to the feeling of powerlessness.

"These students barely remember the Vietnam War and the kind of impact the college students had on that issue. They

barely remember the civil rights movement of the late '50s and '60s where the college students played an important part. But what they do remember is Watergate and Abscam and other indications of a lot of corruption and a lot of what's not so good in the world," DeCoster said.

Although there are fewer students involved in outside issues, he said, the reason that those who are involved are less visible is that they are working more within the system through groups such as the State Student Association.

"Today's students are a product of another generation in the sense that the country has moved to the right, which

means, perhaps, that a lot of their attitudes and values are a reflection of what they've grown up with. So they are using different mechanisms (to deal with issues)," DeCoster said.

Although he said he doesn't fully understand why, today's students aren't rebelling against their parents as much as in the past.

"They talk very warmly and fondly of the relationship they have with their parents," he said.

"They (parents) were the students of the '60s who felt alienated from their parents. Maybe they've done a better job in terms of the communication process through child bearing."

# Woodstock participant calls '70s age of self-improvement

By Melinda Norris

As a participant at Woodstock and the November Moratorium in 1969 and the National Student Strike in 1970, Chuck Jagoda found that the enemies were not the bad guys who tried to continue the war, but the anger and fear within himself that he would make the same decisions under the circumstances.

"The 1970s were called the age of narcissism," said Jagoda, "but it was an age of searching for a proper way to improve ourselves."

Jagoda, a member of the non-traditional student club at UNL, was a student at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y., from 1965 to 1969. He taught in the behavioral science department at the New York Institute of Technology in Old Westbury, N.Y. from 1967 to 1970.

Jagoda describes the feeling of students during the Vietnam era as having doubts about their actions and frustration with the U.S. government.

"People did make an effort to work through the system, but when it doesn't work, they become frustrated and protest," he said.

In 1969, more than half a million protesters converged on Washington, D.C. to protest Vietnam. Jagoda recalls the wall of buses President Nixon parked in front of

the White House to insulate himself from the protesters.

The protesters were told that Nixon was not "the least bit concerned" and that he was going to watch television while they protested, Jagoda said.

Although it seemed no one was listening, he said, "it was exhilarating to get it off our chests."

Jagoda was "very involved" in the National Student Strike over the invasion of Cambodia. There was much activity and consciousness, he said.

But since then it became frustrating to "protest so much and accomplish so little," Jagoda said.

"It was like knocking your head against a stone wall — no one was listening," he said.

The late '60s was a cultural and political revolution, Jagoda said. Today, students don't protest because there are no big issues and the protesters of the '60s are "burned out."

The "me" generation of the '70s isn't just narcissistic, Jagoda said. The generation adopted the philosophy of "go and change yourself. Teach by being an example instead of telling people how to live."

Jogging and meditation is part of the self-improvement attitude, he said.

"It is harder to improve yourself than to try to get new leaders," he said.



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Students march in protest against the Ku Klux Klan during the late 1970s.