

# Counseling program to aid communication skills

By Gah Huey

Students from small towns come to a university expecting to make new friends and find new experiences. Instead, they can encounter an environment of impersonal professors and unsocial peers. Students can get depressed and become unable to cope.

Counseling Center staff members at UNL said they hope they can help alleviate this and similar problems.

According to Luis Diaz-Perdomo, a sociological counselor at the center, a new program starting March 11 is designed to help students communicate better. The program should assist students in making friends, feeling relaxed in social situations and meeting people of different nationalities, he said.

"Some students feel a little out of place or uneasy with people from different ethnic groups," Diaz-Perdomo said. "Not only students from small towns but also students from different countries have a hard time communicating with others."

Diaz-Perdomo said many international students may find the program beneficial too.

"Students from another country will find that things are much different from his native land; he won't know how to communicate," he said.

The program is supposed to teach international students skills to meet and develop relationships with people.

"When some students come to a big university like UNL, they have a hard time forming a new social support network — a feeling of belonging," he said. "The program will attempt to attack these concerns."

The program will involve a group of about 12 students

meeting every Thursday from 2:30 to 4 p.m. for six weeks.

Diaz-Perdomo and Kathy Brzezinski-Stein, another counselor, will teach students communication and assertion skills. They also will provide information about the value systems of different cultures.

"Although people are different, they react in the same way in similar situations," Diaz-Perdomo said. "It is a common concern that many people need to feel more secure in various situations."

During the meetings, counselors will use videotapes to provide constructive criticism about mannerisms and actions.

"A videotape will help some students who aren't aware of how they are coming across," Diaz-Perdomo said.

In addition, the counselors will ask students what characteristics about themselves they would like to change.

Diaz-Perdomo said students aren't limited to the suggestions the counselors make. It's up to each individual's style, he said.

At least six people are needed to begin the program, Diaz-Perdomo said, and four people have expressed interest. No more than 12 would be ideal, according to Diaz-Perdomo, so he and Stein could coach six each. In a smaller group, students will feel more at ease too, he said.

If enough people aren't interested, counselors can still counsel students individually.

The counselors will try to coordinate convenient meeting times with students.

"We are open to changes," Diaz-Perdomo said.

"Many students drop out because they can't cope with their needs not being fulfilled," he said.

The first meeting of the new program will be in Seaton Hall, third floor. There is no charge.

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