

# UNL study tests effect of job stress on workers

By Jim Anderson

The electronic blood pressure machine in UNL's stress lab had my left arm in a fairly effective velcro-airbag torture hold while a wire relayed my heart rate to gauge and speaker. A thermometer was taped to my thumb.

Wes Sime, director of UNL's stress physiology lab, noted readings from the small bank of machines and asked me to add three to itself until I passed 100 and then subtract three repeatedly until I reached zero again. A stressful situation, not just an ugly dream.

This is the last part of a test being given to Lincoln firefighters to determine how occupational stress affects behavior and health in individuals.

Sime said I was Normal.

Funded by a grant from the National Institutes of Health, the UNL study is in its second year and should last one more, Sime said.

Between 700 and 1,000 people, including police officers, firefighters, white-and blue-collar workers as well as union and non-union workers will be tested.

The stress test is given in three parts, Sime said.

First, an extensive questionnaire is filled out by a workers, which helps testers determine his personality and working conditions.

Next, urine is tested for catecholamines. Catecholamines are hormones the body secretes when it is forced to deal with various situations, like being pinned against the wall by wild beasts. Sime said the hormones are good indicators of stress.

Finally, a face-to-face interview is conducted with a workers. Testers find out what is happening inside his body, with the help of the machinery mentioned above, under situations that simulate work conditions.

Sime said a person whose personality doesn't fit into his job, whose needs cannot be gratified, is a prime candidate for stress management. He said a study conducted on white-collar government workers in Lincoln more than a year ago showed that stress management techniques resulting from studies like Sime's work will in practice.

The test can determine what conditions a subject can and cannot work under, Sime said.

"It's a desirable test for those who want to know what a person may or may not be able to handle," he said,



Staff Photo by Kent Morgan Olsen

Pam Brown, a graduate student in health and educational wellness, is given a stress test by Wes Sime in UNL's stress physiology lab.

though he added he doesn't believe the test will ever become mandatory for employees.

Sime said one Lincoln construction company has been particularly cooperative in allowing its employees to be used as subjects for the study. The company, which wants to remain anonymous, is allowing Sime and fellow researchers Tom Mayes and Dan Ganster, both UNL management professors, to test its employees in Indiana, South Carolina and Colorado.

Since the study isn't completed yet, Sime said the results have not been made available yet. He did say that one thing he's found is that people who are hard-driving, demanding types — those who supply stressful conditions for others — are usually no more successful in life and the work place than those who are relaxed and easygoing.

Sime said he has no plans to test UNL faculty or staff members as part of his study.

## CAREER PLANNING and PLACEMENT

### Fall Semester Orientation

For students who plan to utilize career planning services this semester, a series of meetings will be held in the Rostrum of the Nebraska Union on:

**Tues., Aug. 31 at 3:30 pm**

**Wed., Sept. 1 at 3:30 pm**

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