

Conference probes blacks' problems

By Ward W. Triplett III

As the 1983 Big Eight Conference on Black Student Government starts today and continues through Saturday at the Nebraska Union, chairwoman Cynthia Gooch will be watching the culmination of a year's effort, one filled with both success and failure.

"I have a very positive attitude for this conference," Gooch, a senior speech communications major, said. "We're keeping some of the same workshops and ideas that have always been a part of the conference, but we're adding some new things as well."

"I just hope that it's a learning experience for everybody involved and that everybody can take something home from our conference and implement it."

The first conference was in 1978. Two hundred students attended that first conference at the University of Missouri. The board voted to have the conference's location change each year, and Nebraska won the bid for this year's conference.

Last February, African People's Union President Eugene Tolston named Gooch chairwoman of the conference. From there, the planning began.

Before school let out for the summer, keynote speakers Arnette Hubbard and Tony Brown were selected. Fund-raisers such as car washes, splash parties and bake sales were held and letters to foundations for grants were drafted and mailed.

Conference organizers met twice a month during the summer, but much of the final product was still in question when the new school term began.

"I think our biggest problem was attitudes," Gooch said. "But I guess it's always going to be that way."

"A lot of people here didn't have positive attitudes about the conference," she said.

Despite the doubts on the part of the black student body, and what Gooch called 'burning out' and lack of communication among the conference organizers, the product presented to about 300 black students today is what Gooch had wanted.

"If I had to do it all over again, I would conduct myself better," Gooch said. "I know I made a lot of mistakes. I would know what kind of attitude to take with certain people, and be a lot more assertive," she said.

"But we are still putting on what I think is a very good conference. The only changes I would make within the

conference itself would be to make sure we help other schools get this kind of thing started."

The conference, carrying a \$24,000 price tag, is meant to bring together black students on predominately white campuses to discuss common problems and possible solutions, Gooch said. It gives a chance for black students at smaller schools such as Emporia State in Kansas to spend at least one weekend in a place where there are a great number of black college students, she said.

"I don't think the students here realize the importance of this conference as much as students from a smaller school do," Gooch said. "They (UNL students) do face everyday problems of just being black on a campus like this. If they come to this, maybe they can talk to somebody and get an idea of how to make the problems a little less."

Non-black students who attend the conference can learn something also, she said.

"I think they can learn to understand how black people feel, and what we are going through here," Gooch said. "I think if the roles were reversed, and they had to walk into a class full of black people, they'd freak out. We've been conditioned to accept being the only one there, but sometimes it's hard to do."

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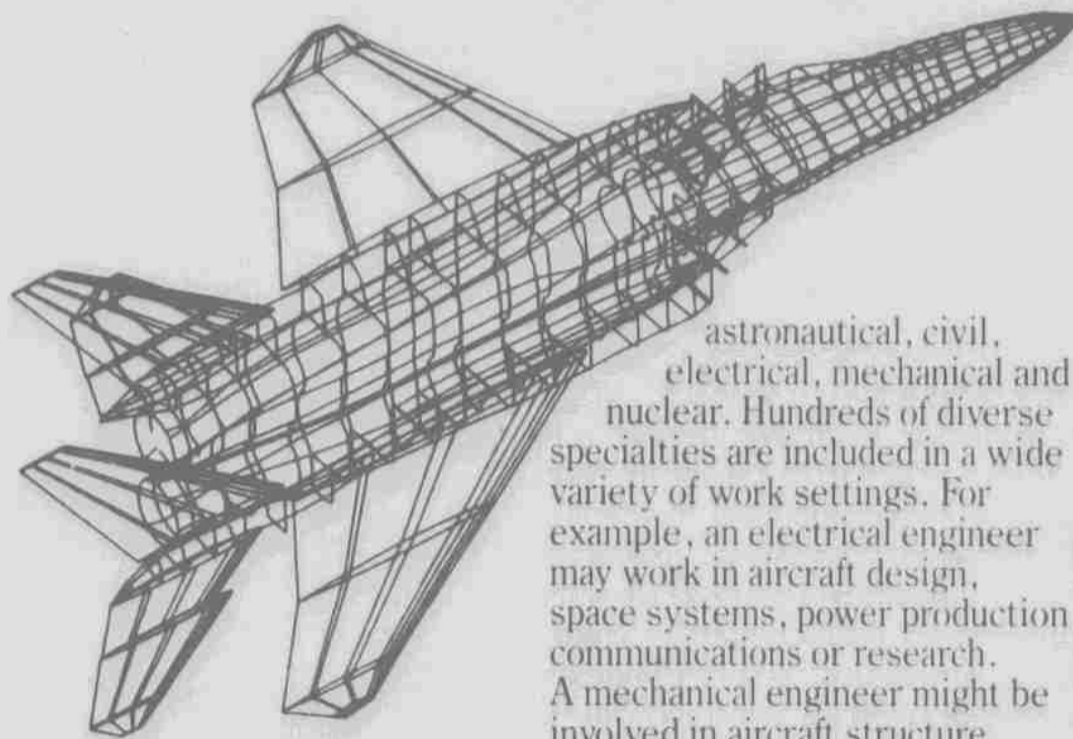
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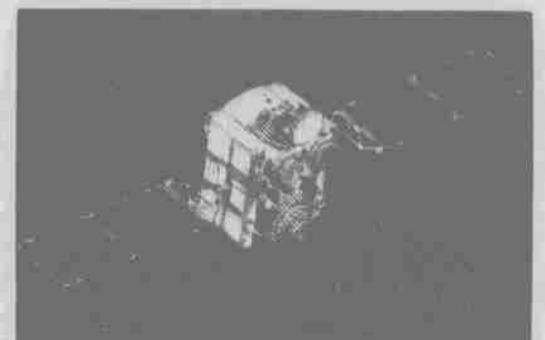
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