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## Extension offices get computer updates

By Randy Christy

Nebraska's county extension offices recently have made some major changes in the structure of their computer systems to take advantage of the new computer technologies.

Since last summer, 56 of the 85 county extension offices in the state have purchased microcomputers, said Jim Emal, extension microcomputer specialist for the UNL Cooperative Extension Service.

Emal said the microcomputers allow each office to compute budgets, manage inventories and do word processing without tying up the computer phone lines.

The microcomputers are replacing the "dumb" terminal computers used in the offices since the mid-1970s, he said. These terminals had no computing capabilities of their own and had to be hooked up by telephone to the main frame computers and the AGNET system in the State Capitol Building in Lincoln.

The AGNET system is a university-based information network that supplies agricultural data, by computer, to subscribers across the United States.

The new microcomputers were paid for with money from a matching fund set up by the university, Emal said. The NU Foundation and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources contributed money to the fund. County offices supplied 50 percent of the cost of the computers and the university fund matched those amounts, he said.

Leo Lucas, Dean and Director of the Nebraska Extension Service, said communication, word processing, data storage, office management and decision aiding for clientele are the five functions of the computers in the extension offices.

"The AGNET system is as available as ever," Lucas said. "This just makes it more usable."

"The new technology allows us to make decisions closer to the point where the decisions should be made... and at a lower cost," Lucas said.

## Students live, learn abroad

By Sara Thomassen

Graduate work overseas is risky business, but a UNL professor and two students who have done research in other parts of the world said they think the headaches were all worthwhile.

"You are taking a chance in doing your graduate-student research overseas," said Joanne Logan, who did graduate research on grain sorghum in the Dominican Republic. "No irrigation, insects and local animals can severely damage a seed plot."

Logan explained that although these mishaps also occur in the United States they are more apt to happen in less-developed countries.

Logan spoke at a seminar Wednesday titled "A Year Abroad for the Graduate Student: A Living and Learning Experience." UNL students and professors offer a panel discussion presentation on overseas research and study every few weeks in the East Union. The meetings are open to the public. Wednesday's seminar featured graduate students Logan and Susan Kaup, and Charles Francis, a UNL agronomy professor.

Kaup studied protein quality in food products in Tunisia. She said although natives of the country were understanding and cooperative toward the research, they did not completely trust students.

"In Tunisia, it's who you know," she said. "Everytime I wanted to see some-

one or something I had to go through my Tunisian professor because he had connections. He knew people."


Francis studied in Columbia and the Philippines, with funding through the Rockefeller and Ford foundations. Francis cited several advantages to doing research in a different country.

He said research is very relevant because the work involves solutions to real problems. The work is beneficial to the individual and to the country where the work is being done. Also, personal benefits like travel opportunities and new cultural experiences make overseas study worthwhile, he said.

However, there are disadvantages to overseas study, too. Francis said it can cost between \$15,000 and \$20,000 to send a graduate student to study in a foreign country for a year. To send a staff member to another country, the cost can run anywhere from \$45,000 to \$80,000 per year.

Francis said it may take longer to make it through graduate school because of the difficulties in relocating. Sometimes the student misses intense contact with the graduate committee and peers. Depending on where the work is being done, libraries and computing facilities also might be scarce.

"If you want to put those on a balance," Francis said, "I think that the positive side far outweighs the negative side. I would not do it any other way if I had to do it over again."




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