

Pilfering the poor:

By Jonathan Taylor

**"What's interesting is that many of these people that are leaving have tenure. These people wanted to leave. They were not pushed out."
—Wheeler**

Over the past three years, the number of UNL professors leaving the university for higher paying jobs at other schools has tripled, say UNL faculty representatives.

The problem lies in Nebraska's reluctance to properly fund the university and make faculty salaries competitive with wealthier schools, said Desmond Wheeler, Faculty Senate president.

Salary increases, ranking UNL in the bottom eight percent of all state universities, and stagnant operation budgets lead to a faculty "brain drain," and threatens to severely damage the quality of UNL, he said.

Over the past four years, Gov. Bob Kerrey, the legislature and the university have wrestled with the problem of maintaining the quality of higher education in the state — many think unsuccessfully.

Of the five front-running gubernatorial candidates, the three that could be reached during a weekend of heavy campaigning acknowledged that there is no simple solution to eliminating the brain drain.

Although the candidates agreed higher education should be a priority of the state, all said they would not attempt to fund the university through a tax increase.

"The people (of Nebraska) will not be supportive of higher education as much as they would like to be until we broaden the economic base, and they can be supportive without being personally financially penalized," said Kermit Brashear, Republican candidate for governor.

Saying "there are no quick fixes," Brashear maintained that to adequately fund the university, the state needs more people paying sales, income and property taxes. Higher taxes only force people and business out of Nebraska which impedes its economic growth.

Democratic candidate Chris Beutler said that until the economic base of the state grows to where more revenue can be collected for the university; it is the NU Board of Regents' responsibility to reallocate money to give faculty raises and keep them in Nebraska.

"It is the job of the governor and the Legislature to provide as much money as it can to the university and to prioritize education," Beutler said. "But once the money is allocated to the university, it is up to the board of regents to decide how to spend it."

Democratic candidate Helen Bosalis said the university cannot rely on tax increases and should increase its efforts to attract corporate endowments, foundation money and federal aid if it is to retain its faculty and quality.

"... a tax increase is unrealistic," she said. We need to look at all

other avenues first."

Nebraska, however, is not the only school with brain drain problems. Cases of the rich stealing from the poor are occurring across the country.

In the higher-paying, more competitive fields such as engineering, computer science and law, there simply aren't enough professors to go around. Faculty members in these fields find their skills are in such great demand that they are able to "sell themselves to the highest bidder," according to George Tuck, Faculty Senate secretary and journalism professor.

And the bids are increasingly high enough that associate and even full professors are being lured from their tenured positions at the prospect of higher salaries and greater research support offered by wealthier schools.

This exodus of professors is occurring with such alarming frequency and in such large numbers that universities nationwide have implemented efforts to stop faculty members' flight to other institutions.

At Indiana and Washington universities, pay raises were given only to faculty in departments in danger of losing staff to richer schools, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education.

These policies were met with much protest from faculty that did not receive raises, but, according to an Indiana administrator, the differential-raises are part of a plan to make faculty salaries there competitive enough to stop the professors from leaving.

Efforts to stop the brain drain at UNL have yet to be taken, however, and the number of professors leaving the university is more than ever before, Wheeler said.

In the calendar year 1983, three associate and six full professors "separated" or left the university by their own decision. In 1984, 12 associate and 12 full professors left UNL and in 1985, 12 associate and 18 full professors went elsewhere. Professors who retired are not included with these figures.

"What's interesting," Wheeler said, "is that many of these people that are leaving have tenure. These people wanted to leave. They were not pushed out."

Reasons for the "separations" can vary, but Wheeler said he is convinced that most of those who left were lured away from UNL by institutions not only offering better salaries, but also more attractive research facilities and funding.

The competition for faculty is stiff, Wheeler said. In some cases, UNL professors got jobs at other universities where pay was 30 to 40 percent higher.

In the 1984-85 school year, UNL

faculty members made about \$4,000 less than faculty members at peer institutions, said Harry Allen, director of institutional research. In 1985-86, UNL faculty salaries fell an average of \$5,500 below the salaries of the peers at comparable land-grant universities, Allen said.

"The rich are basically raiding the poor," Wheeler said.

But according to the vice chancellor of the academic affairs office, the increasing number of exiting faculty members is not causing a crisis. The 69 permanent position vacancies are only a little higher than normal, but the number is not unusual, said Marijane England, academic systems coordinator for the academic affairs office.

Wheeler said, however, the reason the number of vacancies has not risen with the increasing number of professors who are leaving, is because positions are being eliminated rather than refilled. He estimated that about 20 positions have been eliminated over the past few years.

Wheeler said that besides the problems retaining faculty at UNL, competition by those institutions better funded by their state governments is making it difficult to refill the positions left open by exiting professors.

For example, the organic chemistry department has two openings it has been trying to fill since last year. Wheeler said offers were made to the two top candidates, but both turned down the jobs. A position was offered to a third candidate who, by that time, had already accepted a job at another school, Wheeler said.

In all three cases, Wheeler said, the money offered to start the faculty member's research or "set up" funds was not attractive enough to bring them to Nebraska. He said UNL usually offers a little more than \$100,000 to set up research while other universities in Florida and Arkansas offer anywhere from \$175,000 to \$225,000.

Other schools can offer so much more "simply because other states make a bigger effort to put money into their universities," Wheeler said. That commitment by the state to higher education is something potential faculty base their decisions on when considering job offers, Tuck said. And when they see low salaries, he added, it paints a bleak picture of how the state plans to treat higher education.

If recent budget cuts and battles with the legislature to restore money for the university are any indication, Wheeler said, the brain drain is likely to continue and further effect the quality of the university.

"This is going to get worse until the state starts funding us properly," he said.