

Proposed dean compares UNL to Ole Miss, sees similarities

By Cindy Wostrel
Staff Reporter

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Or so it seems with the proposed dean of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Journalism.

"I think that we here (at the University of Mississippi at Oxford) share similar values," said Will Norton, Jr., whom Martin Massengale, UNL chancellor, recommended Wednesday for the position. The NU Board of Regents will decide in July on his appointment.

Norton, who has been at what he calls "Ole Miss" since 1973, said that at both universities, the faculty wants to see students improve.

"So we care about how they do," he said.

"What we try to do is to help them as people."

When Ole Miss merged its media and television programs into a print program, Neale Copple, retiring dean of UNL's College of Journalism, helped.

Copple said he and Norton have known each other for about 10 to 12 years.

The selection of Norton is a "great gain" for UNL, Copple said. Norton understands the college's approach,

its principles and its strengths, he said.

"He's smart enough to let the faculty do what it should do," he said.

Norton said he plans to allow the UNL faculty the freedom that Copple has allowed.

"If it's not broken, you're not going to want to fix it," he said.

Some other schools allow their faculty freedom, but do so unsuccessfully because the faculty members lack the drive to continually ask themselves if they are doing their best, he said.

"The faculty (at UNL) have this drive to excel in quality," Norton said.

The UNL journalism college's strong ties to the media also are important to a quality program, he said. Ole Miss, where Norton is the chairman of the journalism department, also has strong ties to the media, but UNL's ties are even stronger, he said.

Norton said Ole Miss modelled its program after UNL's, with five classes in journalism skills and three classes in theory.

"Our goal has been to be as good as Nebraska," he said.

"We (the journalism faculty of Ole Miss) gave our heart and soul to this place we'll (the journalism fac-

ulty of UNL) do the same there," he said.

Norton's interest in journalism began young.

"When I was a child, one of the things my father talked about was the terrific role that the media plays in affecting people's life."

His father, who was a minister, said that like medicine, law and the ministry, journalism affected people's lives.

His father's encouragement led Norton and his two brothers to consider journalism. But Norton was the oldest and tried it first, he said. One of his brothers later became a doctor and the other became an economist.

Norton worked for three years at the Chicago Tribune as a copy reader and for two years as a managing editor of the Christian Life Publications. He was a publisher of The Daily Iowan and sports editor of the Wheaton, Ill., Daily Journal.

He is now a part-owner of The South Reporter, Inc., a weekly newspaper in Holly Springs, Miss. He said he plans to continue as a partner in the paper after moving to Nebraska, because it will allow him to "feel the ups and downs" of the newspaper business.

Norton said the transition from Mississippi to Nebraska will be both easy and difficult for him.

Leaving Oxford, Miss., the hometown of novelist William Faulkner, won't be easy for Norton, or for his wife and seven- and four-year-old children.

"You're tearing up roots," he said. But, he said, "it is a lot easier for me to leave than it is for her (his wife)," because Oxford is his wife's hometown.

Although Norton has spent 16 years there, longer than in any other place, he said it will be easier for him to move because he has moved frequently in the past.

He said he has found in his two visits to Lincoln this year that the city has small, "down-home" places and "the feeling that, hey, there's real people here," which may ease the transition.

And the university itself has "that awesome, Germanic sense of maintenance." University buildings are well-maintained, he said, and the pride with which it is done is evident.

Norton was born in Africa while his father was a missionary there, he said. He lived there until he was about 8 years-old, when he moved to South Carolina for one year. Then he moved to Chicago.

At Ole Miss, he said "people understand that I'm a Yankee."

Ranking

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Faculty salaries also must be brought up to at least the midpoint of Nebraska's peer institutions, he said.

The Legislature has made some steps toward raising teacher salaries, but, Warner said, the job hasn't been accomplished yet.

With lower percentage increases ahead, the university administration will need to use care in what it approves for expenditures and in how money is spent, he said.

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