

Students' ideas priority Academic freedom valued by professor

By Julie Skar
Staff Reporter



For Campbell McConnell, a retired UNL economics professor, freedom of academic research and debate always has been a top priority.

That priority hasn't gone unnoticed.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Academic Senate recently awarded McConnell with the James A. Lake Academic Freedom Award for his achievements in promoting freedom of academic research and debate.

"This award means a great deal to me. Of the many satisfying achievements in my 37 years at the university, this award ranks at the top," he said.

McConnell came to the university in 1953, specializing in labor economics, and taught principles of economics courses. He decided to take an early retirement, leaving the university in May 1990.

McConnell has a strong philosophy on social and economic issues: Give the facts and let the people decide.

"I think that on really important issues there are seldom clear-cut answers. I present the pros and cons of an issue objectively so that the reader can form his or her own opinion," said McConnell, who wrote an economics textbook used by UNL students.

"At times, I am criticized on the fact that my readers do not know where I stand. I don't look at it as a criticism but as a compliment. My textbook is not a place to present ideological viewpoints. Readers should make their own decisions based on the facts."

After students take a couple of economics courses, he said, he hopes they will be able to think through issues and use their critical thinking later in life.

Economics, according to McConnell, is an essential tool that carries into other subjects.

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ret. UNL economics professor

“It is an exciting field that can provide you with a background which can be applied in other areas, such as business. Economics is to business as mathematics is to engineers,” McConnell said.

Although many years of teaching have given him extensive knowledge in his field, McConnell said he doesn't pretend to have all the answers.

“Students need to understand both sides of an issue and make their own decisions. I did not walk into a room and say, ‘I'm the professor. I thought about this issue and here is the answer.’ I presented both sides of the issue fairly. It is not my job to look at the issue and make a judgement,” he said.

Despite retirement, McConnell still finds others seeking his knowledge.

His book, “Economics: Principles, Problems and Policies,” is in its 11th edition and has been translated into French, German, Portuguese and Spanish. It will have 100,000 copies translated and reprinted in Russian this spring.

“I envision myself as an economic journalist, which translates into a textbook writer,” he said.

McConnell still has a full schedule and does not plan to slow down in the future. He currently is working on revising two books he co-authored, while planning to begin work on the 12th edition of the “Principles” textbook.

And the pursuit of academic freedom still is important to him.

“Without academic freedom at a university there is no university,” he said.

UNL employees file retirement pay suit

By Kathy Wiemers
Staff Reporter

UNL cooperative extension employees filed a class-action lawsuit against the university after attempts to work with NU officials concerning discrepancies in retirement benefits failed, the employees' attorney said.

James Zalewski of Lincoln said Tuesday that although a lawsuit has been filed, the employees are willing to resolve the case before it goes to court.

The lawsuit is against the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the NU Board of Regents. The complaint was filed in U.S. District Court Feb. 13.

One class of employees represented in the lawsuit was hired in 1957 or later.

According to the lawsuit, those employees were required to be in the Civil Service Retirement System. The lawsuit states that the employees also could participate in the University of Nebraska's employee retirement system.

The class consists of about 136 employees. Plaintiffs Donald Miller, Paul Hay, James Novotny and David Wysong are named as belonging to this class.

The second class includes 181 employees hired between 1978 and 1983 who chose to participate in the Civil Service Retirement System but did not have to. The employees were entitled to participate in the state employees' retirement system and Social Security.

Plaintiff Andrew Christiansen belongs to this group.

Zalewski said all employees hired after 1983 are on the Social Security system and under the University Retirement System.

The plaintiffs alleged that the university has been paying 2.7 percent more in benefits to employees not in the Civil Service Retirement System.

All employees do the same job, Zalewski said, but don't get the same benefits.

Zalewski said he doesn't know of any basis for the different retirement plans.

All employees receive a reduced salary to finance the University Retirement System, but the plaintiffs receive fewer benefits from the system, the lawsuit states.

Richard Wood, NU vice president and general counsel, said the plaintiffs are claiming denial of equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment. The disagreement is whether the benefits are different, Wood said.

Zalewski said Penn State University and a university in Missouri have similar lawsuits pending. Both cases involve agriculture college employees and alleged benefits discrepancies, he said.

The suit asks for the plaintiffs to be given equal benefits for the entire time of their employment at UNL and to be compensated for lost income from funding the University Retirement System.



Robin Trimarchi/Daily Nebraskan

Campbell McConnell, retired UNL economics professor, spends his time writing and working at his Lincoln home.

THERE ARE THINGS
KNOWN AND
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JIM MORRISON

the
doors

COMING MARCH 1