

Spanier criticizes budget tactic

'Assigned minuses' called poor practice

By Jeremy Fitzpatrick
Senior Reporter

SCOTTSBLUFF — UNL Chancellor Graham Spanier wants all university colleges to remove deficits known as "assigned minuses" from their budgets as soon as possible.

Discussing the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's current 3 percent budget cut Thursday, Spanier said he thought the assigned minus was a poor budgeting practice that should be eliminated.

An assigned minus is a budgetary device through which colleges use funds from vacant faculty positions or from anticipated retirements or denials of tenure to cover shortfalls in other areas of their budgets.

"Any system that has based the expectation that a certain number of people are going to die or leave or not get tenure is not a good system," Spanier said. "I would like the concept changed next year, and I would like (the colleges) to work their way out of it as soon as possible."

Spanier predicted that the removal of the assigned minuses could require some colleges to trim their budgets beyond the cuts now underway as

part of UNL's 3 percent budget cut.

Tom Becker, UNL's budget officer, said the complicated assigned minus was a budget financing concept that had its origins in the 1950s.

At first, the concept used portions of faculty salary increases to finance other areas of the budget, he said.

Becker said UNL faculty are on nine-month appointments, from September to May, but are paid year-round. Faculty salary increases begin in July as part of UNL's budget, but the faculty do not receive the increases until the beginning of their appointments in September.

The salary increase paid out in July and August then is used to finance other parts of the budget, Becker said.

He said that policy had evolved into the assigned minus, which had come into existence when some colleges faced budget shortfalls in the 1970s. To cover deficits, Becker said, colleges began to use portions of their approved budgets, such as vacant faculty positions or faculty anticipated to leave, to finance other areas of the budget — hence, the assigned minus.

The cumulative effect of the assigned minus is a deficit that grows

larger every year, Becker said.

Currently, the architecture, arts and sciences, business administration and engineering colleges have assigned minuses.

John Peters, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, said his college's assigned minus amounted to \$650,000.

The problem originated, Peters said, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when UNL expanded at a rate of 2,000 students per year without any new funding from the Nebraska Legislature.

"We took students in without the resources, and we've never been able to catch up," he said.

Peters said he agreed with Spanier that the assigned minus should be eliminated.

"I applaud him for that," Peters said. "When I took over as dean (in July 1988), I had two goals: to hire the best people I could and to solve the assigned minus."

Peters said he was developing a plan to eliminate the deficit, although the current 3 percent budget reduction has complicated his plans. He said he did not yet want to comment on the details of the plan.

"Still, I'm looking forward to paying it off."

in providing the classes he would like to see required.

However, increasing quality must go beyond raising admissions standards, he said. There also is a need to "get back to basics" at UNL by stressing human and social issues and improving the curriculum.

A student's ability to speak a foreign language, identify a country in Africa or understand Japanese culture will become increasingly important in the future, Spanier said, and UNL's curriculum needs to reflect that need.

"We need to prepare students to live in society, not just to work in society."

"Students need to understand other cultures, understand cultural diversity within our society and understand how to relate to other human beings."

Spanier said UNL needed to im-

prove its general education curriculum, which he said has declined in recent years. He said writing, internationalization and science and technology should be stressed now.

UNL must focus on "what our graduates of 2000 and beyond need to know to be productive citizens," he said.

Spanier also said that he wanted UNL's accountability improved. The university has been in a transition period for the last two years, he said, and he wants it to move forward.

He said he would build a leadership team that would be more accountable to the state and Legislature.

Spanier said he thought he had a responsibility to be a leader in improving the university.

"It's an academic institution so the chancellor should be an academic leader."

UNL to extend office hours for students

From Staff Reports

Beginning next semester, UNL students will be able to take advantage of additional office hours on both City and East campuses.

Peg Blake, assistant to the vice chancellor for student affairs, said current office hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. will be extended.

The offices of admissions, registration and records, general studies advising, multi-cultural affairs, scholarships and financial aid, vice chancellor for student affairs, high

school and college relations and student judicial affairs will be open Tuesdays, 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Also, Campus Activities and Programs on both City and East campuses, the University Health Center and the centers for career planning and placement, counseling and student employment and internship will be open Tuesdays until 7:30 p.m.

The Counseling Center also will be open Wednesdays until 7:30 p.m.

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Spanier

Continued from Page 1

SAT score of 850. However, students who do not meet these requirements can be conditionally admitted.

But Spanier's desire for higher admissions standards is not aimed at excluding anyone, he said.

"The idea isn't to screen anyone out who is capable, but to make sure everyone we do admit is capable of graduating," he said.

Spanier said he recognized the "delicate balance between admissions and access" at an institution that received 70 percent of its money from public funds. But he said admitting students to UNL who weren't prepared to graduate from UNL was a waste of taxpayers' money.

He also said that UNL would work with high schools that had difficulty

NEWS BRIEFS

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Columnist Joan Rossiter Burney will be featured in the John H. Ames Reading Series Thursday at 7:30 p.m. in the Heritage Room of the Bennett Martin Public Library.

Burney, an author and motivational humorist, writes columns for Nebraska Farmer, The Catholic Voice and several regional newspapers. She was named the Nebraska Mother of the Year and 1991 National Mother of the Year.

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