

Multi-Cultural Affairs office does not cater only to the needs of minorities

Director says racial tension reduced, but still evident

By Virginia Newton
Staff Reporter

When you walk into the Multi-Cultural Affairs office you are walking into the future, according to Jimmi Smith, department director.

"You see people of many different colors and races when you walk into the MCA office," he said. "The old look where everything was white will no longer be true."

Back in 1975, we in my office had the insight to begin the concept of multi-cultural affairs."

Smith said the Multi-Cultural Affairs office saw the need to increase UNL's enrollment of ethnic

and racial minorities. But, Smith added, the MCA office does not cater only to the needs of minority students—first-generation students attending the university, and low-income students also receive assistance—regardless of their color.

"We've grown far beyond the issue of being just race to include those other dimensions that revolve around a larger inclusive number of people," Smith said.

Although the racial tension on campus is still evident, and there is a racial strain on the student body, Smith said the strain has decreased considerably over the years—and he remains optimistic.

"We have a racial climate that

has improved over that of the 1970s, in part, because of the persistence of students of color... taking their rightful places on this campus," Smith said.

"I still think right now the environment could be characterized as very chilly, to hostile," he said.

Terry Goods, Educational Specialist in the MCA office, said he believed in the philosophy of equal opportunities through services.

"It's important that a racially minority student on a predominately white campus can be equally as successful as anyone else," Goods said. "What we do is try to provide the services needed for success.

Goods said anytime a student makes up only one or two percent of their ethnic population, and you're a captured audience of that population, "it makes things difficult."

"Considering that you live and go to school in that same environment... you're trapped in that environment," he said.

Goods said if a community did not provide spiritual or cultural needs for students, they are going to have a problem staying there.

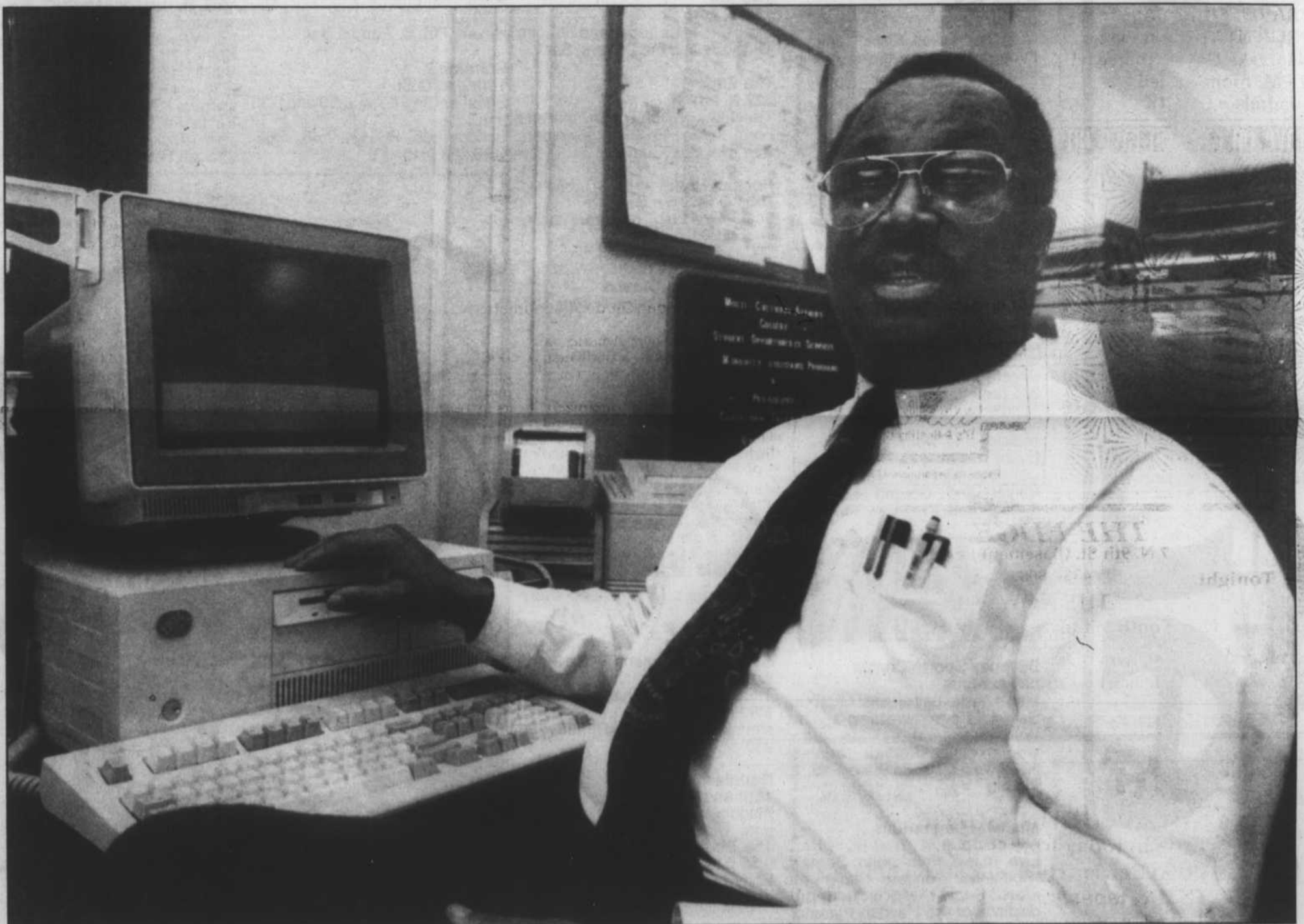
"If you are calling this a university, then you have to have culture that represents everyone, because that's a university," Goods said. "(Students) are here to learn how to

deal with other people."

Goods said students come to a university to learn how to work with the system and through the system, and how to deal with the real world.

Smith said learning other cultures should not make people feel uncomfortable or threatened, instead they should enjoy the knowledge and understanding they receive from learning other traditions and beliefs.

"Those of us who take the time to get beyond our own racial views—get beyond our own race—generally speaking, people who are self-confident about themselves, don't fear other people's culture."



Travis Heying/DN

Jimmi Smith, director of Multi-Cultural Affairs, takes time out of busy schedule to discuss issues of race at UNL.