



Reshell Ray, coordinator of ethnic minority programs for the office of student involvement at UNL, is a mentor to many students.

Kiley Timperley/DN

Coordinator helps increase campus diversity

By Anne Steyer
Staff Reporter

Reshell Ray is as multifaceted as the multicultural programming she coordinates.

Ray, 30, has been the coordinator of ethnic minority programs for the Office of Student Involvement at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln since November 1988, but her job encompasses much more than that.

In addition to coordinating ethnic minority programs, Ray manages the Culture Center, develops leadership training programs, promotes diversity in education, advises the University Program Council and acts as a mentor for multitudes of minority students.

"When I'm working I give my job my all, and I give the students my all—I want them to feel they have my full attention."

But when Ray goes home, she said her family has her full attention.

"When you talk about uncon-

ditional love and all that, you can really see that in children," Ray said, laughing. "The fact that I have so many makes it all the more fun and interesting."

Interesting is an appropriate description of how Ray spends her working hours. Her office is constantly busy, her phone is often ringing, and her calendar is usually full.

Many of those appointments surround making the Culture Center a place where all students can feel comfortable meeting and interacting with people that are from their same cultural background, but who may have different ethnic backgrounds.

Ray said she hoped the Culture Center was the same kind of home base for UNL students as it was for her when she was a student here.

Ray completed her master's degree in community and regional planning at UNL in 1986. Although she enjoyed her time here as a student, she said that when she left Nebraska in 1986,

she left "vowing never to return."

But she returned just two years later, enthusiastic and ready to change the world.

"One of the things that brought me back as I looked at the career I was in, and looking at doing something different," Ray explained, "was that I wanted something I would love doing and that I could give my all."

Ray said she decided that was to work with college students.

"Because in that way I have the ability to influence our future, our future leaders and the shape of where our country is going," Ray said.

Besides managing the Culture Center, Ray said she spent a great deal of time just talking with students, helping each according to his or her needs, not basing her assistance on any theories or tried programs. Instead, she said, she used instinct.

"I spend time with them," Ray said, "finding out who they are, what they want, and what they hope to accomplish."

"Then I try to help them actualize those dreams."

Ray said she did not solve problems for students. Instead, she listens to them and only gives them advice when asked.

Otherwise she listens, gets to know them and helps them find within themselves the strength to work out their problems.

"Everything I do is geared to what they need."

Ray said she loved working with people and seeing them grow. The enthusiasm of the people who drop by her office—where her door is almost always open, even during her appointments—makes this obvious.

This week had been a particularly rewarding week for her, she said, since she'd been in contact with a number of former students—all relaying various successes and thanks.

And Ray said that gave her a strong sense of satisfaction.

"They left ready to stand on their own two feet, ready to challenge things."

Ray said she hoped to continue helping students tap into their strong suits, and one way she hoped to accomplish this is through diversity education. Through education, Ray said she hoped to make people realize opportunities should be equal for everyone.

In order to facilitate this learning, Ray has participated in the creation of SCOPE: Students Creating Opportunities in Pursuit of Equity. Through this program, students teach students about cultural diversity in a non-threatening, safe and fun environment.

Ray said SCOPE would grow through what the students envision it to be, and what they want it to be. It is a way to "till the ground so that the students begin thinking about diversity," she said.

Ray's vision for the future is simple.

"People will begin to learn to work together, respect each other," Ray said.