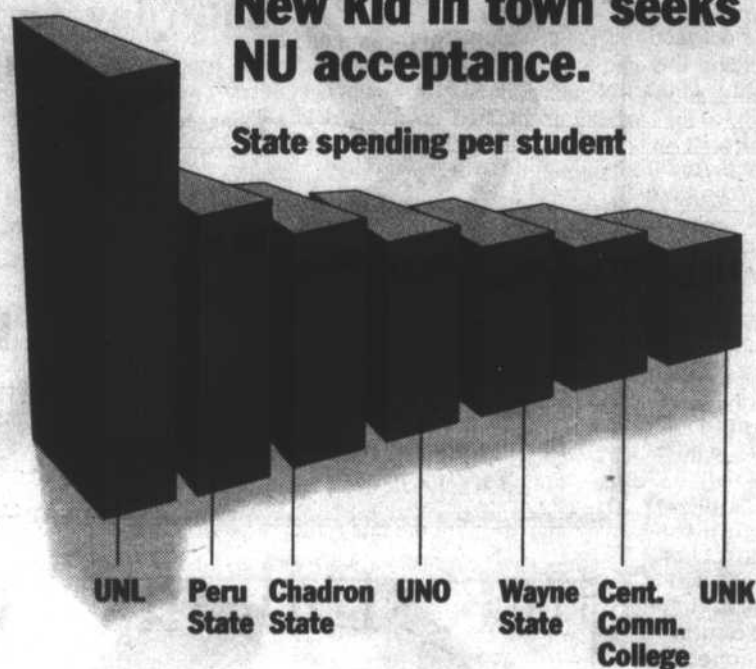


UNK

New kid in town seeks NU acceptance.

State spending per student



Source: UNK Faculty Senate

figures for 1989-90 budget

Brian Shellito/DN



A historical marker commemorating the founding of Kearney State College stands on the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Professor: Budget cuts nuts

Education is future of Nebraska, faculty says

By Jeff Zeleny
Senior Reporter

KEARNEY — Picture a gunman walking onto a college campus and opening fire on hundreds of faculty and staff.

That would be a sure-fire way to save money and eliminate positions, Roger Davis, president of the UNK Faculty Senate, said, but it would be a crazy thing to do.

Cutting \$13.98 million from the University of Nebraska budget is equally crazy, said Davis, a history professor.

"Going at the university with that kind of cut is insane," Davis said. "We understand they're not doing this right. They've chosen the most destructive way to solve this."

"If there was ever a case of killing the goose with the golden egg, this is it."

Davis, referring to the Legislature's Appropriations Committee recommended cut from the university budget, said the reduction would nearly destroy the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

"We've just finished taking a hit," he said. "One more hit would take some fundamentals out."

Of the proposed \$13.98 million cut, UNK would bear a \$1 million burden.

Davis said the Legislature was going about the cutting process all wrong.

"They think there is only one mind-set," he said. "I think they say everyone must be cut. We need to have the option to say, 'That's not acceptable.'"

Education is the most important entity in Nebraska, he said, and it is the future of the state.

"Our Legislature wants to treat education as a commodity," he said. "Education is not a commodity."

"You can't cut the arms and legs of the university," he said.

Nebraska has one of the healthiest state economies business-wise, Davis said, but education isn't in the same situation.

"Business is downsizing," he said, "and they think, 'Why not educa-

tion?' but they miss the point."

People always think there is something to cut, Davis said, but there isn't anything to cut at UNK.

"There is not an ounce of fat on this campus," he said. "It just isn't there. We've been taking a razor blade and paring away at it for a decade."

Davis predicted summer class reductions would be the beginning of the budget-cutting process at UNK. Once programs begin to get eliminated, the university declines in quality, he said.

"This campus will look like one of those children in Somalia," Davis said. "It will be alive, but not pretty."

"If there was ever a case of killing the goose with the golden egg, this is it."

—Roger Davis
president of UNK Faculty Senate

Funding is not a new problem for UNK. Before it was admitted into the NU system in July 1991, Davis said, it had funding problems through the state college system. Now UNK is about 44 percent underfunded compared to its peer institutions.

UNK receives \$2,749 per full-time student through state appropriations. Among other universities in its peer group, UNK falls \$1,212 below the \$3,961 average. The University of Northern Iowa leads the peer group with \$5,263.

Davis said despite the funding short falls, UNK still was moving forward academically.

"(That) says a hell of a lot for this institution, for getting things done with bare-bone budgets," he said.

The lack of funding has cut professors' travel stipends down, but most instructors try to continue their re-

search trips.

"It happens because people pay for a lot of things out of their own pocket," Davis said. "They pay for their own airfare."

All the cuts eventually reach the students, Davis said, which hampers their education.

"Students are already paying too much of this burden," he said. "They shouldn't be punished by this."

Peter Longo, chairman of the UNK political science department, said students were the primary people affected by the budget cuts.

With the continued cuts, sections inevitably will be combined, Longo said, and some classes already have grown to about 60 students.

"It takes away from what Kearney campus is all about," he said. "It's the students that suffer."

Many UNK facilities are in need of repair, Longo said, including the political science department lecture hall, which is housed in an old campus swimming pool.

If a choice had to be made between building improvement and merging class sections, students would keep the covered swimming pool classroom, he said.

If the proposed cuts become a reality, Longo said, he would rather see programs eliminated than cuts across the board.

Both professors said the final budget cuts wouldn't be as large as the proposed \$13.98 million.

"I'm going to be optimistic," Davis said. "I hope the public understands that fundamental relationship with their kids and the future."

"I don't know if that will translate to the Legislature, but I think they'll sit down and take another look," he said. "I have a little glimmer of hope that they might rethink the whole thing."

But Davis said the university must have a plan, regardless of what the predicted outcome might be.

"As much as you'd like to dodge the bullet, as much as you'd like to win, there are times if you are correct you don't win," Davis said. "You've got to be ready and have a plan."



Andy Stock, UNK student regent, says the students he represents are "along for the ride" in the NU system.

Regent

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Nebraska.

"In another state, who's going to know where Kearney State College is?" he said. "The University of Nebraska at Kearney, though — that pretty much tells it like it is."

McCully, a senior political science major from Mullen, agreed the name recognition was a definite advantage.

"I don't think it's going to be drastically different as UNK rather than KSC, but right now, everybody is second-guessing everything about the NU system," McCully said. "But the inclusion in the NU system was obviously a move in the right direction. I think everybody agrees on that."

However, with the longer name came a shorter rein on school decision-making. As part of the NU system, Stock said, UNK receives more instructions from the UNL-based administration and can make fewer decisions on its own.

For example, Stock cited strictly controlled spending for government and student organizations, which no longer enjoy the freedom of frequent trips to out-of-town conventions or workshops.

"That has to be OK'd from the top now," he said. "Before, we just got in the van and went."

Also, he said, a perception of lack of respect from other NU campuses for UNK has emerged among students, faculty and staff members.

Most of that perception, Stock said, came from the way Kearney State College was incorporated into the NU system in 1991.

The Legislature voted that it would be more economically feasible to merge Kearney State with NU rather than allowing it to seek accreditation as a Nebraska State University. The decision was controversial and drew protests from some administrators, faculty and staff members within the NU system.

Stock said few people had forgotten about that reluctant acceptance.

"Students sometimes feel like UNK is being shut out or ignored..."

—Stock
UNK Student Regent

"I think some people kind of look at us as an illegitimate fourth child," he said. "A couple years ago, they took us into the system, but it was like they didn't really want us. People remember that, and I know other students here share the concern that we aren't really that important."

"Just more 'feasible.'"

With that perception, Stock said, concern emerges that long-anticipated budget cuts in the NU system will hit UNK harder than other campuses.

In February, the Legislature's Appropriations Committee, which writes the state budget, targeted almost \$14 million in cuts for the NU system.

"We're a learning institution, which means that we don't have much — if any — research going on here," Stock said. "Other campuses, like