

**Huge campus dating pool  
may overwhelm small-town freshmen**

# Off the farm and into the fire

By Alan Phelps  
Senior Reporter

*It might be hard to keep some small-town freshmen down on the farm once they've seen the Lincoln dating scene. But for most, the change can be a bit disconcerting.*

The droves of small-town freshmen repopulating the University of Nebraska-Lincoln each semester find themselves suddenly immersed in a dating pool far larger than they've ever imagined. Although it can be a bit frightening, many freshmen say they cherish their new-found freedom.

"It's cool," said Stephanie Brink, of Hooper, population 932. "When you're from a small town, you know all the same people. Here, you just walk out your door and you're meeting all of these prospects."

Other freshmen agreed that the opportunities at college are exhilarating.

"There's lots of new choices," said Sarah Boll, also of Hooper. "Here you don't know anything about anybody. It gives you a chance to start anew."

Along with the new start come new challenges that are just part of growing up. Vern Williams, coordinator of career counseling at UNL, said becoming a little fish in a big pond brought huge changes.

"If the person goes hog wild in meeting people and takes to it like a duck takes to water," he said, "they may in fact neglect other things."

However, Williams said, some freshmen go to the opposite extreme and have difficulty meeting anyone. In fact, he said, there are as many problems and solutions as

there are freshman.

"You name it, there's just about any kind of problem you can imagine," he said. "Being uncomfortable, being embarrassed, afraid you're going to make a fool of yourself, that you're not going to fit in — just name any fear you can think of."

James McShane, a UNL English professor, has worked with University Foundations, a class that teaches freshmen how to get the most out of college, for eight years. The father of seven children himself, McShane said the only generalization true about freshmen social lives was that there are no generalizations.

"I would be loath to generalize," he said. "Virtually everyone who comes up here finds the experience not what they expected, that's clear."

McShane said many freshmen hear stories about the university and come to put what they've imagined into practice.

"When it works, it's glorious," he said. "When it doesn't, it's disappointing."

"Some hear you can come up and drink a lot and make a lot of friends. Sometimes that works, sometimes it is very deceptive altogether. Some hear it's a place of sexual freedom. They find the sexual freedom and find out it's not wonderful."

McShane said that while it was all exciting, most found disappointments along the way.

"That's no surprise, of course."

McShane said all of the problems freshmen might experience in relationships were within the range of the normal, but they may have seemed unusual to those going through them.

"It's difficult to people going through the stress of their particular experience to realize that this is not unusual, that this is a variation of a series of crises that everybody has growing up," he said. "That's a maturation process. It has to do with self-knowledge as well as the accessibility of others."

McShane said learning to deal with these new relationships was a major life task, one freshmen would have encountered even if they had stayed home.

"Depending on who you are,

it's exciting or daunting. And it's daunting for everybody sometimes."

Dan Sievers, a residence hall student assistant, has heard freshmen on his floor talk about both the exciting and the daunting, but it's usually in relation to physical aspects of relationships.

"The talk I hear on the floor is so casual about sex," he said. "To me, what I hear is really degrading toward women, seeing women as objects."

Sievers said he saw a casual view toward relationships among the men on his floor in Abel Hall.

"It's a new environment," he said. "It's the freedom, I suppose, being away from their parents for the first time."

Sievers said that many freshmen in the residence halls talked about having a serious relationship in the future, but for now, everyone was looking for someone new.

Sievers said one problem he encounters was strain on relationships that began in hometowns and followed freshmen to Lincoln. An old relationship in a new place can lead to insecurities, he said, about whether the other person is seeing someone else.

Boll was one of those freshmen. She came to college from her hometown of Hooper with a boyfriend. However, the couple broke up.

"Here, everything changed," she said.

Now Boll is set on meeting new people. She said she and her friends usually found new guys at parties — especially fraternity parties.

"We go to them because they're available," she said. "There's tons of guys there, so it's a key thing to go to. It's really easier to meet people. You're drinking, you're having a good time, you're a lot more relaxed."

Boll said she and her friends were not looking for anything very serious at parties.

"I'm just looking for fun, just somebody to be around," she said.

Greg Bates, a freshman from Elk Creek, population 144, is one person who didn't break up with his hometown girlfriend.

"I take mine pretty seriously," he said. "My roommate takes his pretty seriously."

Since Brink, a freshman advertising major from Hooper, has been in college, she said three old boyfriends have asked her out again.

"I'm saying forget it. There are too many other options."

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