

UNL begins involvement in teaching improvement project

By Pattyewel
Staff Reporter

UNL's participation has begun in a 12-university teaching program that would increase peer evaluation and combine scholarship and teaching.

Russell Edgerton, president of the American Association of Higher Education, met with UNL officials Friday to outline and get feedback on the project called "From Idea to Prototype: The Peer Review of Teaching."

UNL is one of the 12 universities across the nation that will participate in the project.

Three departments — mathematics, English and the school of music — are involved. Edgerton was at UNL Friday to work with these departments to start the project.

Edgerton said that while change

had been taking place in all other levels of education, higher education had been an "elephant sitting up on the hill not changing very much."

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln was invited to participate in the project, conducted by the Stanford University Institute, because UNL had been in the lead in dealing with changing issues in higher education.

Some of these issues are:

- change in faculty priorities.
- a more inclusive definition of teaching.
- a focus on the evaluation of teaching.
- departmental performance.

Edgerton said the project called for teachers to be evaluated by their peers in their own department in hopes of bringing scholarship, and in turn im-

provement, to the teaching process.

Edgerton said a minor reason for the project was to keep evaluation within a department rather than an outside bureaucratic agency.

However, a more important reason for peer reviews, he said, is to raise the status of teaching.

If teaching is not important enough for one's peers to care to review, teaching must not have a high status, he said.

Until teaching is given the same peer review as research, Edgerton said, it will not have the same status.

Another reason for peer evaluations, Edgerton said, is that peers often are the best qualified to evaluate the teaching.

Although student evaluations are important, Edgerton said, they usual-

ly only cover the simple mechanics of teaching, like clarity of the syllabus or properly working equipment.

There is a lot more to teaching, he said.

A result of peer teaching evaluations, Edgerton said, would be that scholarship would become part of the teaching process.

Edgerton compared the scholarship that should take place in teaching to the scholarship that takes place in research.

In research, he said, professors draw up plans and confer with their colleagues for input.

He said this process should be the same in teaching.

For example, he said, professors would draw up their syllabuses for their courses and then present argu-

ments to their colleagues, listing such things as why they chose their material and what they planned to get across to the students.

He said this "cross-talk" would not result in all new teaching methods but rather in uncovering and sharing the good things that were being done.

Edgerton said peer evaluations would bring about distinctions and rewards that were not possible before. He said this might interest more professors in teaching and help them see teaching as an "integrated part of their fields, not just something tacked on."

Robert Simerly, dean of the Division of Continuing Studies, said the project was "a very appealing notion."

"We sometimes forget why we are teaching: to help others learn."

E-Week open house takes 'fun' approach

By Brian Sharp
Staff Reporter

Engineering is more than just mathematics; it's fun.

Bruce Polnicky, a junior civil engineering major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said that was the message Engineering Week, or E-Week, tried to give visiting elementary, junior high and high school students.

An open house Friday ended the weeklong celebration at the UNL College of Engineering and Technology. It was estimated that more than 500 students took tours of the college and viewed presentations and research projects during the free event.

The students also competed in contests like the straw bridge contest, the egg drop contest and the mousetrap car contest.

Engineering classes were canceled for the day so students could lead the events.

Connie Husa, assistant to the dean and director of student activities at the college, said the unsinkable boat contest was the most popular.

At times, more than 40 kids crowded around oblong tables, making boats out of aluminum foil, duct tape, plastic wrap, paper and glue. Designs ranged from simple, cup-shaped vessels to more elaborate ones.

Boats were placed in a rectangular-able pond, with a role of pennies as cargo. A small weight hanging over a pulley and attached to the opposite side of the basin pulled the crafts through the water. That was if they floated.

A few sank immediately, and more went under before reaching the finish line.

Brian Boone, 14, said the boat contest was his favorite event. The eighth grader at Pound Middle School spent more than 20 minutes on his creation — a makeshift pontoon boat.

While younger students sometimes asked the college students for advice on building the best boat, Polnicky said the older students' purpose wasn't to lecture on buoyancy. Sometimes the younger ones knew best, he said.

"The main thing is to ... support interest in the field. I did it (made a boat) last year, and the little kids beat me."

Husa said getting the children excited about the projects and letting them create their own designs was what made the open house a success.

As one little girl's boat was placed in the water and moved toward the checkered flag, that excitement was obvious.

"It actually stayed up," the girl shouted. "It's amazing!"

"That's engineering," Husa said.



Michelle Paulman/DN

Sled dog

Abbie, a dachshund mix, tries to keep up with owner Jason Howe of Lincoln while he sleds at Pioneers Park Saturday. "She'd probably be upset if I didn't bring her with me," Howe said.

Conference

Continued from Page 1

and the Southwest Conference in an even more vulnerable position," he said. "With the four teams we've included, we will derive some benefits."

"We at least doubled our market. We have become a major player nationally."

Nothing is final yet except for the four SWC teams joining the Big Eight in 1996.

Items to be discussed include a television contract, bowl alliances and a national playoff in football.

Byrne said no discussions on conference structure had been discussed yet.

Spanier said there was a possibility the league might go to more than 12 schools, but it was not likely.

"I wouldn't want to say anything's final," he said. "We've been thinking for some time that 12 was an ideal number."

"With 12, we get an awful lot of benefits."

Ethnicity issues addressed

Author stresses cultural identity

By Julie Sobczyk
Staff Reporter

Becoming educated about one's culture and tradition is the key to maintaining a cultural identity, said Pat Mora, a Mexican-American author, on Friday.

Mora said cultural conservation preserved ethnic traditions and dealt with ethnic prejudice.

"We need to remember we are all ethnics and we all have different cultural backgrounds. Who gets to define what's American and what isn't?" Mora said in her speech "Cultural Heritage: A Right, Not a Trend," in the Nebraska Union.

Mora said it was important to know who you were and from where you came.

"We can know and learn more from various cultures because every culture is still evolving. By knowing your own cultural traditions, you can decide which ones to take with you," she said.

The United States could move in two possible directions in the future with regard to ethnic prejudice, she said.

"Either increased ethnic tensions will result, or people will begin to accept that all cultures are equal," Mora said.

In order to accept all cultures as equal, education is required, she said.

Mora criticized the education system as she described her own experience of growing up along the U.S.-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas.

"Educators need to explore who writes our history. I am concerned about the fact that my history was never part of my educational experience," she said. "No one ever mentioned that El Paso was originally part of Mexico."

"It's also ironic to say Spanish is a foreign language when it isn't to the Southwest," Mora said.

Because cultural education is lacking, prejudices can form, Mora said. Confronting racism is something everyone must do, she said.

"Bravely confronting racism in our past and present requires courage," Mora said. "Schools need to give children a better sense of who they are."

Mora said one way to alleviate ethnic racism was to get to know others of a different race.

"Once you form a personal relationship with someone who is different, prejudices can be overcome."

Mora also mentioned linguistic barriers. She said those with Spanish accents might be looked down upon in society.

Mora said many people feared that focusing on other cultures would separate the nation as a whole.

"Interest in different cultures doesn't mean being separatist," she said. "Fears about cultural conservation and heritage can lead to the desire to maintain one tradition as the dominant tradition."

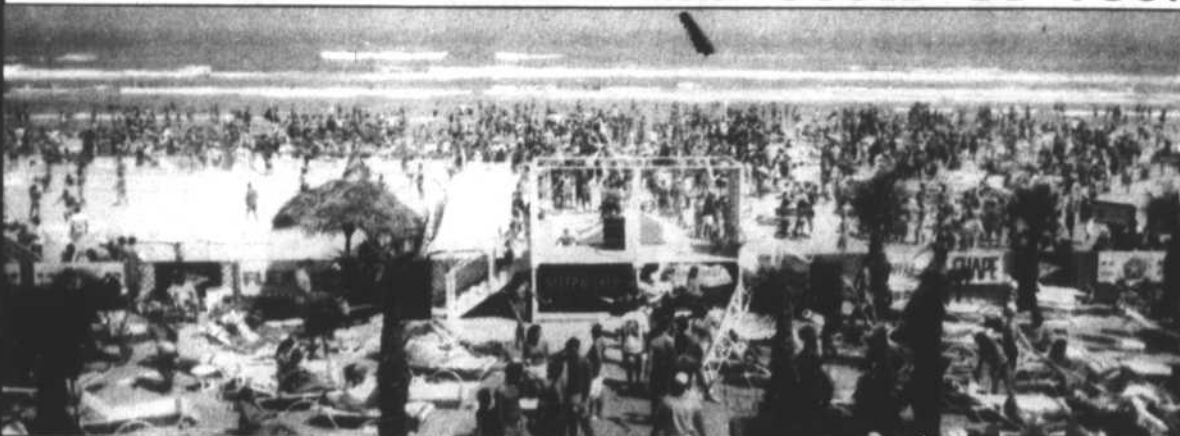
Free Computer Classes!

The Computing Resource Center is offering free microcomputer classes to UNL students. The classes will feature an introduction to Microsoft Word for the Macintosh and WordPerfect for IBM machines. No reservations are required.

Introduction to Microsoft Word for Macintosh

Thursday, March 3 3:00 - 4:00 Andrews Hall lab

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