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Future of university depends on commitment

By Brian Sharp
Staff Reporter

Nebraskans have a choice to make, University of Nebraska President Dennis Smith said. They have to decide what kind of

higher education program they want, he said, and then be willing to stand behind that decision.

It's a choice that will demand either an increased financial commitment to the University of Nebraska, or acceptance of a deteriorating

institution.

"You can't have it both ways," Smith said in an interview.

"(Without funding), quality starts going down, and maybe for a couple three years you don't notice any changes. Then one day you wake up and there are whole programs that are gone."

Next month, the NU Board of Regents will be asked to approve the 1995-97 budget request. The proposal includes an estimated 6.3 percent increase.

Last weekend, regents approved the 1994-95 budget, which increased 3.4 percent, or \$33 million, from the previous year.

Any future increase in state funds may prove difficult, however. By most estimates, the state will be facing a \$60- to \$100 million deficit this year.

Joe Rowson, Director of Public Affairs, said the legislature has made a significant commitment to the university in the past. On average, NU has received 20 percent of the state's budget, he said.

But Smith said it's getting tougher to maintain that funding.

"We never used to be in the competition," Smith said. "We used to be seen as so highly worthy that we didn't need to compete. We're now competing with prisons."

Smith said it's imperative that NU officials convince Nebraskans to support the university.

If the state chooses not to invest in the university, the implications would be profound, Smith said. And Smith should know.

In 1987, when he started at the University of California, the state provided \$2.3 billion to the university in tax revenues, he said.

When he left last year, that amount had fallen to \$1.7 billion, he said. From 1990-to 1994, state support de-

creased by 25 percent.

In order to cope, student fees doubled, Smith said. A series of early retirement programs were developed, which have resulted in a loss of 2,000 faculty (20 percent), and entire programs were eliminated, he said.

Smith said that in 1990, the University of California would have been considered one of the best institutions in the world. It no longer receives that recognition.

"Is it possible to destroy a university that is so excellent in a relatively short amount of time? The answer is positively yes," Smith said.

"The University of California is in serious danger of disintegrating."

For the University of Nebraska, things may not be so bleak, but there's still room for improvement.

For example, in a recent ranking of U.S. research libraries, NU was 74th, and Smith said the libraries were slipping.

At Saturday's regents meeting, Provost Lee Jones said the cost of library items had been increasing by 15 percent for several years. Budgeting during those years had only granted 1-to 2 percent increases, he said.

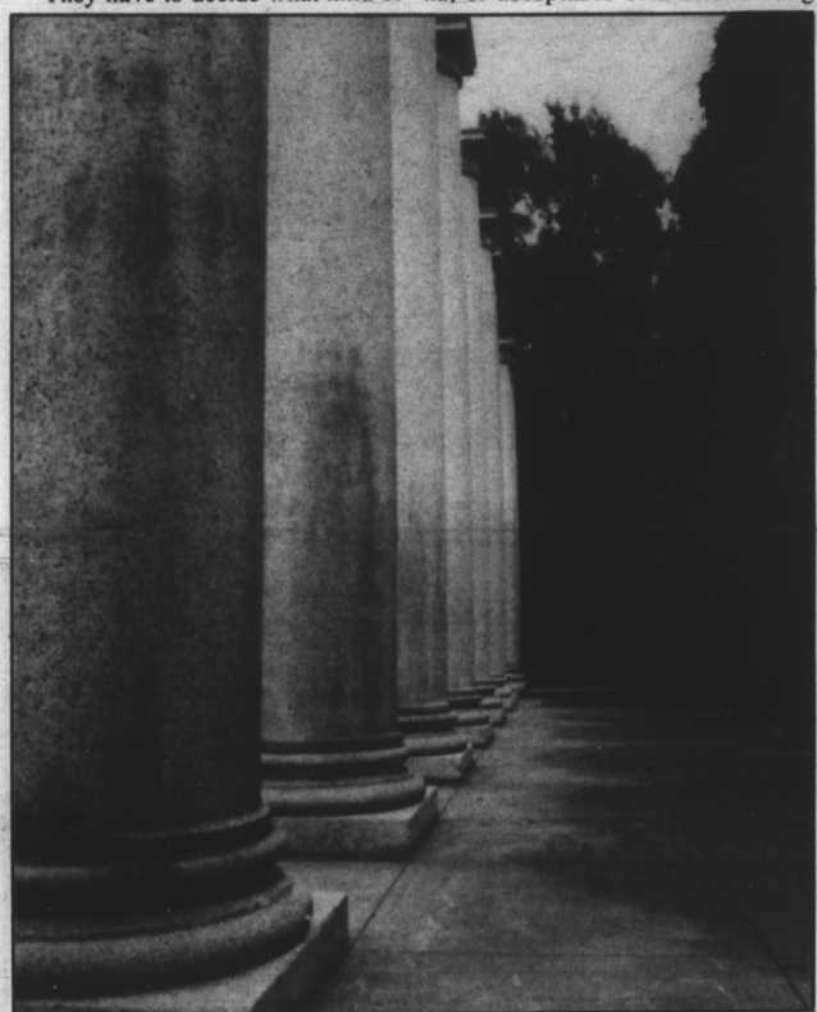
A 15 percent increase in 1994-95 library funding will only prevent the university from sliding down further, Jones said.

Another area where NU has been slipping is in building maintenance. To stabilize the deterioration, \$455,000 has been budgeted for next year. Smith said this money would only "stop the bleeding." To fix the problem, he estimated \$100 million was needed.

At Saturday's regents meeting,

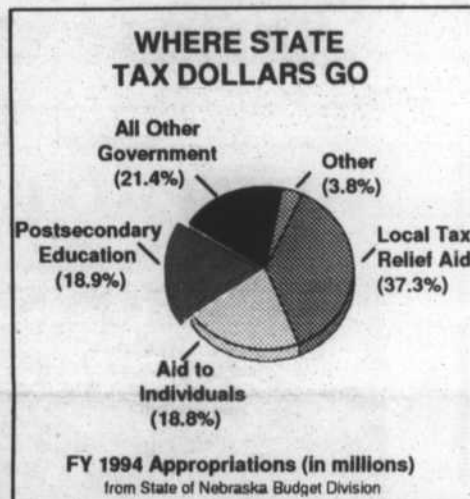
Regent Robert Allan said many of NU's classrooms are already out of date. There is no choice for NU, Smith said, it must eventually pay for the repairs. The only alternative is starting over, he said, and NU can't begin to afford that bill.

NU will also be playing catch-up in the area of faculty hires. Next year, officials hope to hire 75 new faculty, just to reach to median of their peers. Since 1988, enrollment has in-



Jason Levkulich/DN

Acquired from the Omaha Train Station at the end of the 19th century, the columns by Memorial Stadium are some of the oldest structures on the university grounds.



creased by 2,500, a recent report stated, meaning that NU should have added more than 120 faculty. It has added fewer than 50.

But the challenges NU is facing with its budget and state funding is nothing unique, Smith said.

The problem exists nationwide, he said, and the results of tightening budgets will mean a changing landscape in higher education.

"U.S. universities, particularly research universities, can no longer grow unchecked and continue to be all things to all people," Smith said.

See SMITH on 9

Regents approve tuition increase

By Brian Sharp
Staff Reporter

They don't like it, it's not fair, but it's coming — again. And there's nothing they can do but accept it.

ASUN President Andrew Loudon said that was the attitude UNL students had toward the upcoming 6 percent tuition increase.

But, Loudon said, if the increases kept coming, he's not sure how long that acceptance was going to last.

The tuition increase received unanimous approval from the NU Board of Regents, including the reluctant vote of each student regent.

"It's against how I believe the university should be run," Loudon said, "to continue to stick it to the students

in the form of huge tuition increases. "Unfortunately, it's a necessary thing at this time."

It's necessary because NU's budget has come up short.

NU President Dennis Smith said money the central administration uses for improvements comes from the state and from tuition and fees. When needs are not met by one, the other has to make up the difference.

"Lots of things are happening nationally and internationally and most of them are happening very rapidly," Smith said.

"Universities are very slow institutions to respond to change," he said, "and legislatures are even more reluctant to allow universities to change."

NU receives roughly \$300 million from state tax revenues and \$100 mil-

lion from tuition and fees, Smith said.

But the timing of this year's increase couldn't be worse.

UNL students don't feel like they're important to the university, Loudon said.

It's an attitude that has developed from increases in student fees, football tickets, parking, etc., he said. And it's only being fed by further increases such as this tuition increase.

Tuition increases are a national trend, Smith said. Universities are moving away from a previously unwritten rule of low tuition/high accessibility to high tuition/high financial aid.

Smith said previous rates were essentially subsidizing the wealthy.

See TUITION on 9

UNL	Tuition Increases		
	1993-94 Rates	Proposed 1994-95 Rates	% Increase
Undergraduate			
Resident	\$64.50/cred. hr.	\$68.50	6.2%
Nonresident	\$176.00/cred. hr.	\$186.50	6.0%
Graduate			
Resident	\$85.50/cred. hr.	\$90.75	6.1%
Nonresident	\$211.25/cred. hr.	\$224.00	6.0%
Nebraska Peer 94-95 Tuition Increases			
Colorado State	5%	University of Kansas	9%
University of Colorado	5%	Ohio State	5%
University of Illinois	8.2%	University of Minnesota	4.2%
Iowa State	5.1%	University of Missouri	10%
University of Iowa	4%	Purdue University	7%
Average Increase: 6.25%			

DN Graphic