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Distance makes holidays difficult

Traveling takes time and money some don't have

By Sean McCarthy
Staff Reporter

The traditional family gathering for the holidays is becoming less common as family members are increasingly moving around the country, UNL family science professors said.

Douglas Abbott, associate professor of family and consumer sciences, said changes in the job market were one factor that scattered family members around the country. Come the holiday season, it is harder to bring those relatives back together.

Even when families can organize and pay off a trip, the distance traveled may strain a typical family gathering, he said.

"If you have the desire to see the family, you have to spend the time and the money to get to them," Abbott said.

Shirley Baugher, professor and chairwoman of family and computer sciences, said the time people spent over the holidays with their families who live far away was short and intense.

Baugher said repeating the family feel of gatherings past is hard today. Much has changed, she said. "We try to duplicate what we felt as children, and it is hard to do so," she said.

Abbott said time spent with relatives was annoying for some. But he said time over the holidays may be short enough so relatives don't get on each others' nerves, he said.

It may be hard to get together for the holidays, but Abbott said some people feel the effects of their distance from their loved ones.

"We think of the holidays as being happy and fun with free time on peoples' hands," he said. "However, you may not have any close friends and families to share the holiday with."

Loneliness during the holidays can be positive, though, Abbott said. The time allows people to look for others who seem left out of the holidays and invite them into their homes, he said.

Alternatives to the traditional celebrations with immediate family members are becoming common, Baugher said.

Different groups of people, ranging from singles to single parents, have created holiday rituals with friends, she said.

"It's important to establish rituals whether you're with your natural family or not," Baugher said.

The problems created by distancing, however, don't have a large effect on students, Abbott said. Because the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has mostly students from Nebraska or nearby, students can easily get home for the holidays, Abbott said.

They can hitch rides from others or go to a friends' house over the holiday, he said.

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From Staff Reports

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