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WEATHER:

Today - Cold with a 40 percent chance of rain. Northeast wind 20 mph.
Tonight - Blustery and cold. Low around 20.



February 26, 1996

Regents give UNO engineering a boost

By Julie Sobczyk
Senior Reporter

After more than an hour of debate, the NU Board of Regents approved a three-part plan to improve engineering and information science programs at UNO.

The plan, passed by a 7-1 vote, improves existing engineering programs at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and creates a new UNO College of Information Science and Technology.

A new Omaha Institute for Information Science, Technology and Engineering also will be created, and will be jointly run by UNL and UNO deans. An amendment to the proposal,

passed unanimously by the board, included a time line that would have the project completed by July 1999 as well as a six-month progress review on the construction of a building for the college.

Cost figures for the program and building were not immediately available.

Regent Nancy O'Brien of Waterloo, a longtime supporter of expanded engineering in Omaha, said the approved plan ended two years of a heated engineering struggle.

"We got exactly what we wanted," she said. "We got commitment to the institute, a timetable and board monitoring."

Regent Drew Miller of Papillion,

the lone dissenting vote, said the plan could have been stronger if UNO's engineering building had been made the top construction priority.

"I hope we made a strong enough statement of support," Miller said. "I hope we have committed enough."

O'Brien tried to have the project moved to the university's No. 1 construction priority, but the board rejected that on a 4-3 vote.

Smith had talked with Omaha business leaders a few weeks ago about moving the construction date from 2002 to July 1999.

"We need to accelerate as rapidly as we can," Smith said. But he also

said the new time line "will be a real push."

To show the university's full commitment to the Omaha business community, Miller said, the new timetable should be part of the proposal.

"I support the change," Miller said. "But we should be bound to it. We have to be committed, or support won't be there."

Regent Charles Wilson of Lincoln said the only way the board could guarantee a new time line would be if funding for the building was guaranteed as well.

Funding for the plan will come from reallocation of university funds, state funds and private donations. The plan

must be approved by the Coordinating Commission for Post-secondary Education.

Wilson called the proposal a "compromise."

"It's administratively efficient and responsive to the needs of our campus," Wilson said. "It's a very effective compromise."

NU President Dennis Smith said the proposal allowed UNL and UNO to work together to strengthen the engineering program.

"It is a concept which brings together elements of engineering, computer science and information management under a whole new approach," Smith said. "It encourages partnership and collaboration."



John Paul Mua speaks during the Afro Unity Festac. The festival was presented by the African Students' Association. Jay Calderon/DN

Cultural connections

Afro Unity Festac celebrates diversity

By Michaela Pieler
Staff Reporter

Despite their different cultures, all people of African descent can learn much from each other by sharing their traditions.

That is what the first Afro Unity Festac participants wanted to prove Sunday night in the Nebraska Union ballroom.

"Out there people die and kill because of cultural differences," said Cecil Howell, vice president of the African Students Association. "But here, cultural differences are going to bring people together."

The festival, organized by ASA, began with a meal of various African, Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Hispanic foods.

About 400 visitors enjoyed the meal, which included dishes such as a Nigerian cereal called Ogi, a South African fruit salad and jollof rice from Ghana.

In a fashion show, John Paul Mua and Patricia Grant of ASA presented models wearing traditional African dresses. The shining, loose satin dresses ranged from wedding

"We must learn to appreciate each other and reach out for each other."

JOHN PAUL MUA
keynote speaker

and festivity fashion to casual home and work wear.

Mua, the keynote speaker for the evening, stressed in his speech the historic importance of Africa, a continent three times the size of the United States.

Many important tributes to civilization originate from those of African descent, he said, such as the development of the telephone and the telegraph.

Mua urged the audience not to underestimate Africa and its people.

"This land called Africa is a continent," he said, "not a country."

The festival helps Africans redefine their common history, Mua said.

"We must learn to appreciate each other and reach out for each other," he said.

"No man is an island," he said at the end of his speech. "No man stands alone."

UNL Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs James Griesen agreed. Cultural diversity enriches a university campus, he said.

"A meeting like this helps us to broaden our cultural horizon."

The festival continued with several events, including musical performances, poetry readings and dancing. The band Kusi Taki earned a standing ovation from the audience for their song "Takiiriasu," which means "Come, sing, dance and celebrate with us."

Thirteen-year-old Crystal Nelson, a student at Park Middle School, filled the union's ballroom with enthusiasm as she performed a traditional African dance.

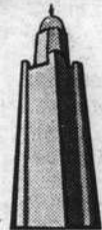
The Festac was organized by ASA members, including Howell; Fred Afuh, president; Ola Olude, organizing secretary; and Rudy Moseley, treasurer.

Teen smoking sparks debate in Legislature

By Ted Taylor
Senior Reporter

She couldn't reach the microphone, but her testimony spoke volumes.

Legislature '96



Twelve-year old Melissa Giles of Omaha told Nebraska lawmakers Friday that she didn't want to see young people like herself start smoking — and she needed the Legislature's help.

"It is bad for the young kids because they will start to smoke and not stop," she said. "I think we should help them stop."

Giles was one of three youths who testified in favor of Omaha Sen. Don Preister's LB1151, which would prohibit the automatic dispensing of tobacco products. The bill targets cigarette vending machines and self-service merchandising methods that would reduce underage tobacco use.

"We need to do more than we're doing to keep kids from getting access," Preister said. "It's time we treat underage tobacco use as a real problem in the Legislature and make it a priority."

By stopping self-service dispensing of tobacco products and putting them behind counters, supporters say, shoplifting of cigarettes would decrease among youth.

Ian Newman, a health education professor at UNL, said a recent survey of 1,356 seventh- and eighth-graders reported that 16 percent of those who obtained cigarettes did so by stealing them.

"Eliminating self-service sales will greatly reduce youth access to tobacco," he said.

A statement from the president of the Nebraska division of the American Cancer Association, Dr. Alan Thorson, echoed Newman's remarks.

"Research also indicates that requiring a face-to-face interaction to purchase tobacco does deter youths from even trying to make a purchase."

Thorson's statement said the measure would have positive cost implications for health care.

"By reducing the number of youths who smoke," he said, "many long-term health problems will also be reduced, resulting in cost savings to the budgets of Medicare and Medicaid."

Eric Akko of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department said it was time to prevent another generation from becoming addicted to tobacco.

"LB1150 would send a clear message that tobacco is reserved for adults, not for children," he said. "Base your decision on what is right and what is just for the children of Nebraska."

See CIGARETTES on 6