

UNL awards Olson for 40 years of service

OLSON from page 1

since. "A lot of my career has been at the university, but it hasn't been inside the university," Olson said.

Although many of Olson's semesters have been packed with classes — this spring he has taught two and part of another — Olson, 64, has always had time for outside projects.

One such project is the Annenberg Rural Challenge in Nebraska, a project to revive rural schools. Olson still works with it today.

The project gives young people maximum responsibility for their intellectual development and allows for the cultural and economic well-

being of their towns, he said.

As a result, young people invest in their small communities and are less likely to leave later in life.

"There's a quality of life that exists in rural towns that is rapidly disappearing in urban America," Olson said.

Preserving community is important, Olson said, in small towns and at the university. It's one of the biggest challenges the university faces, he said.

First, graduate students should feel more a part of the teaching community. They should be paid what they're worth, he said. Often graduate students make high-quality, knowledgeable teachers.

Another step is creating residential living-learning environments at UNL, he said. Such an environment would be a residence hall floor where a faculty adviser lives and works alongside students.

But even with a sense of community, he said, students will not be successful later in life without a sense of understanding and appreciation for other cultures.

"It's really important in terms of plain job skills," Olson said. "If you can't tolerate having a black or Chinese person ... a lesbian or gay student sitting around you, you're sort of crippled in the present job market."

Today's students care passionately about the people around them, he said. Many have a

highly developed social conscience, he said, but little spare time.

Students should use their course work as a channel to explore their own passions and views on life, Olson said. Then, through education, they can appreciate other cultures, not just show acceptance on the surface by using correct language.

Olson said the university could help students by giving them a week off from classes to seek in-depth advising. They could then make better decisions on their path in education and in life.

"I've had an incredibly joyous life, and the reason is I've never done a damn thing I didn't want to do," Olson said.

Woman, son prepare to receive degrees together at UNL's graduation ceremony

GRADS from page 1

a scholar," she said.

Peter Lavin, 26, said he didn't view the idea of his mother returning to college as out of the ordinary. He said his father's job as a professor has always kept the family around campus.

"We're all more or less in college," he said.

Stephen Lavin, a UNL associate professor of geography, said he was excited and supportive of his wife when she returned to school.

"I knew she was talented, and I knew she had an ability to go back to

school," he said.

Stephen Lavin said his wife shared many common characteristics with nontraditional students he had taught.

"They're more motivated, more serious. They tend to be good students," he said.

Ruth Lavin graduated with a teaching degree from D'Youville College in New York in 1965. She decided to return to college in the mid-70s after finding her teaching job didn't give her the opportunities she had hoped, she said.

"I felt I was stifled," she said. "I

had a lot of ideas, and there wasn't a way to make them go anywhere."

The Lavins moved to Nebraska in 1981, and it was at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln that Ruth Lavin began her studies in earnest, receiving her master's degree in 1989.

Although Ruth Lavin said she was initially worried about competing with younger students, she said her time away from school made her more focused.

"You find that your life experiences have prepared you," she said.

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Daily Nebraskan

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