

# Professors fear race a factor in class

■ UNFAIR EVALUATIONS may be the result of direct or indirect racism on UNL's campus, some instructors say.

By JOSHUA GILLIN  
Assignment Reporter

Despite years of education, training and teaching experience, some UNL professors think there is one factor beyond their control when it comes to being evaluated and understood by their students — the color of their skin.

Susan Miller, instructor of history and ethnic studies, said that while prejudice in evaluations is rare, it is a concern. Miller said the relatively uniform racial makeup of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's student body makes it difficult for her and other minority professors to teach their students in a traditional manner.

"I'm not sure racism is the best way to put it," Miller said, "but there is a cultural homogeneity in Nebraska that doesn't allow for very many different world views."

Miller said she has been evaluated several times at UNL and has experienced several instances of what she thought to be unfair evaluations of her courses. She said the slanted view of some evaluations suggests there is a lack of open communication between teachers and students.

As a Seminole Indian, Miller said she might not always reach her students on a cultural level. It is a problem reflected in the fact that there are so few minority professors at the university and in the state, she said.

"It takes a whole lot of skill to represent one's own world view and present it in a manner that people unfamiliar with the concepts will understand," Miller said.

Cynthia Willis-Esqueda, assistant psychology professor, said the cultural barrier has affected evaluations of her performances as well.

"I know I've been evaluated unfairly because of it," she said. "I had one student say I was prejudiced against white males in my class, but I never even discussed white males."

Willis-Esqueda teaches an ethnic studies course and a graduate course about the psychology of racism. She said her Cherokee background is both a bane and a blessing to

her teaching ability.

Her background may be the reason for an occasional bad evaluation, she said, but she also has reached some students in ways she wouldn't have been able to otherwise.

"So many students ... write that they loved the material I presented," Willis-Esqueda said. "They said it gave them a new way to look at the history of the United States and the world in general."

Using a minority point of view is important, other instructors said, but miscommunication between a white student and a minority professor is not always an excuse for receiving a poor evaluation.

Keith Parker, associate professor of sociology, said claiming racial miscommunication as a reason for a poor evaluation might not be the best way to view student-instructor relationships. As director of UNL's African-American studies program, he said he could not recall an evaluation he thought to be influenced by racial bias.

"(Racism is) not in my daily routine," Parker said. "They (professors with complaints) may not conduct themselves in a way that gives them all the rights and privileges they're entitled to; I certainly do."

Associate English Professor Venetria Patton, in only her second semester teaching African-American literature at UNL, agreed with Parker. Patton said so many factors affect evaluations that it is unwise to single out race as a subject of debate.

"I can't assume it's my race if I get a poor evaluation," she said. "One thing I've noticed is that when people see a class about African-American literature, they assume it's going to be easy. When it's an actual course, they get frustrated."

Miller and Willis-Esqueda agreed with Patton's view, saying similar events had happened in their classes.

"Many students may have been opposed to my class at first, seeing it as some sort of requirement," Willis-Esqueda said. She said some of the students she was least likely to expect change from transformed themselves and saw her class as something positive.

Patton said dealing with student bias has more to do with students gaining confidence in their instructors' abilities than with battling racism. She said minority professors have to work harder to gain the approval the "typical old, white male professor" would probably receive.

"My experience at the University of Nebraska has been quite good," Patton said.

“

*Everybody needs to be able to communicate across cultures, myself included. The world is too small for isolation.”*

SUSAN MILLER

history and ethnic studies professor

"My main concern is that our university should be a place for everyone to be comfortable."

Miller said part of the problem is her own difficulty communicating with white students, who make up 96 percent of the student body.

"I need to develop my own skills at looking at things cross-culturally," Miller said.

"Everybody needs to be able to communicate across cultures, myself included."

"The world is too small for isolation."

Patton said prejudice in evaluations still concerns her, however.

"I guess I don't think it's always just an excuse," she said. "Whenever you're dealing with racism, it's rarely so overt you point to it and say this was the only factor."

Phyllis Larsen, UNL director of public relations, said she doesn't know of any complaints among the faculty about unfair evaluations. However, she said she is not in a position to hear about complaints if they are submitted privately.

"It's nothing that's ever come up in any chancellor's cabinet meeting that I've ever been in," Larsen said.

Al Kilgore, associate vice chancellor for academic affairs, said the problem has never been brought to his attention, either.

"We have not received anything in the way of a complaint in this office, as far as I know," Kilgore said. He said he is not sure if such a complaint would even come to his office, although it would be a logical place to file.

Larsen said measuring complaints of prejudice would be difficult not only for the university but for the individual departments that give the evaluations.

"Evaluations are required to be done, but there are no standard forms," she said.

"Evaluations are customized on a departmental level. We don't know anyone who's done effective work on complaints people may have about evaluations."

But Thomas Sanchez and Cheryl Applegate, both graduate students in sociology, last fall gave a presentation at the National

Association for Ethnic Studies in La Crosse, Wis., dealing with racial issues in the classroom. Sanchez said group discussions after their presentation, which included a segment on biased evaluations, uncovered a nationwide concern among minority professors about prejudiced student reactions.

"This is a problem that's been present for the past 20 or 30 years," Sanchez said. "It's kind of discouraging that ... minorities are still having to face these problems."

He said his findings, based on personal experience and outside accounts, showed a general lack of understanding between white students and minority instructors.

"Students are defensive about the material, so they take their hostility out on the instructor," Sanchez said. He said students especially feel defensive if the course is about race relations or ethnic studies.

"The general feeling would be, 'Of course you're going to teach about racism; you have a vested interest in the subject,'" he said. "We need to find a way to fairly separate minorities' evaluations in those instances so we can find that misdirected animosity."

Willis-Esqueda said she is not surprised by Sanchez's and Applegate's study. She said that while she has been a victim of biased evaluations, she has to keep in perspective the real reason for such occurrences.

"Much of the time, (miscommunication) can be a problem because students feel threatened by the information and the unfamiliarity of the person presenting it," she said. "I have to tell all my students ... 'Leave your cultural group membership at the door.'"

"If they stop thinking of themselves in terms of group membership — as a European-American male, for example — they are able to see their interrelationships with other people and places."

This article was originally published April 4, 1997 in The Journalist.

## Commuter permits are almost sold out

PERMITS from page 3

administration technician Sherryl Chamberlain said the 4,300 green 20 permits were sold out and names were being put on a waiting list.

Less than 20 green 21 permits remained, she said, and an unlimited amount of purple perimeter and blue permits were available.

Parking services manager Tad McDowell said students left without a permit can look to the new parking garage, which opens Sept. 2.

"One reason the parking garage was built was to help us meet the unmet demand for parking permits," McDowell said.

On Sept. 2, students can put their names on a waiting list for yellow tag reserved spots, Chamberlain said.

Parking services is a self-funded department and does not receive any money from the university.

McDowell said that last year parking services acquired \$489,000 from citations, \$1.5 million from permit sales, \$180,000 from meters and \$190,000 from special event parking.

The revenue the department makes pays for the StarTran Bus agreement, on-campus bus transit service, electricity to light lots, parking lot maintenance and sev-

eral other things, McDowell said. Parking services is responsible for 145 parking lots on and off campus. In these lots there are a total of 13,700 stalls.

Of those, McDowell said, 8,500 are for students and 5,200 are for faculty and staff. In those 8,500 student stalls, 6,500 are on-campus permits, 1,000 are perimeter permits, 400 are meters and 600 are in the new parking garage, he said.

There are five types of parking permits, purple, green 20, green 21, yellow, and blue. Nine-month permits are \$27 for purple perimeter lots, \$72 for blue and green and \$225 for yellow reserved lots.

If students need to order a permit they can do so at Kimball Recital Hall today and Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday and Tuesday from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and after Tuesday at the parking services from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

McDowell said they sell 16,000 permits each year, which is 2,300 more spots than they have.

"If you don't oversell parking in a campus setting, you will have 50 percent of the parking empty on a daily basis," McDowell said. "Plus you will have 4,000 people who are angry because they see the empty spots."



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