

Conference focuses on UNL's future

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conference. The commission began in 1995 when the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges asked the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to support the mission to "rethink public education."

Wednesday's conference focused on the "student experience."

Seth Derner, a senior agricultural education major, warned the university not to get into a rut.

"Saying 'I can't go any farther,'" Derner said, "where are you reaching as an institution, and who told you to go there?"

Derner, former president of the national FFA, highlighted the Kellogg Commission's seven "action commitments" to academic reform, which included:

- Realizing partnerships with elementary and secondary schools.

Derner said he favored a "seamless" education from high school to college. He said when he began his education at UNL, some classes were "remedial," while he felt unprepared for others.

Also, Derner said UNL needed to make its new entrance requirements more specific. Instead of simply listing required classes, Derner said he wanted the university to tell high school students "you need to know this about math or science to succeed."

- Reinforcing commitments to undergraduate education.

Derner said he expected university instructors to "push your limits."

He said students would increasingly base their decisions on whether to attend college on the quality of instruction an institution offers.

- Addressing both academic and personal student development.

"Students grow as individuals in classes," Derner said.

- Strengthening the link between education and career.

- Striving for high quality while keeping prices low. Derner said keeping college affordable was important for students to succeed.

He said when students work 30 hours per week, it was hard to study and be involved in campus organizations.

- Better defining educational objectives for both parents and students.

He said he learned more in some classes where he's received a B- than in classes where he's received an A.

Derner encouraged faculty to consider a new way, instead of grades, to evaluate students' progress.

- Strengthening the link between discovery and learning.

Faculty needed "innovative ways to encourage critical thinking," he said.

"My best experiences," Derner said, "have been when professors have asked me to make a personal commitment to that class."

"I need to see that a professor cares about me as an individual."

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Technology commission could be law

BY BRIAN CARLSON
Senior Reporter

As Nebraska's technology blossoms and expands, the state needs a commission of experts to ensure technology is used productively and efficiently, Lt. Gov. Kim Robak said Wednesday.

Robak testified in support of LB924, which calls for \$3 million to place the Nebraska Information Technology Commission into state statute. The NITC has been in operation since December, after an executive order by Gov. Ben Nelson created the commission.

The state's technology resources currently lack coordination and efficiency, Robak said. Services often are duplicated, and ideas for efficient use of technology aren't disseminated well.

"This has to do with the way you think," Robak said during the Appropriations Committee hearing.

"Right now we're sticking technology out there, but never asking why it is we want it there."

"Our left hand doesn't know what our right hand is doing, and we keep recreating organizations to do the same thing."

Continuing to lead

Although Nebraska's technological infrastructure is "the envy of many states," Robak said, "we need to be able to coordinate our efforts so we can continue to lead the way in information technology."

Robak cited a Harvard University study which found that while corporate chief information officers have a 90 to 95 percent understanding of technology and its applications in society, the understanding of legislators nationwide was just 7 percent.

The NITC will be essential in helping policy-makers make informed decisions on technology, Robak said.

Sen. Joyce Hillman of Gering, the bill's sponsor, said the proposal had been too long in coming.

"The intent of the bill is to provide for much stronger management and handling of information technology in the state of Nebraska," she said.

Service for the state

The NITC comprises nine governor-appointed members, including five from the general public and one each from K-12 education, higher education, state government and community interests.

The commission's responsibilities would include planning statewide technology strategies, making recommendations on technology legislation to the governor and the Legislature, and creating an information clearinghouse to advise organizations on the best means of implementing new technology.

"It is, and should be, a service organization," Robak said.

LB924 also would create three councils to identify technological needs in their respective fields: the Education Council, representing elementary, secondary and postsecondary education; the Community Council, representing local government, health care, business and agriculture; and the Information Resources Cabinet, representing state government.

The Information Resources Cabinet would be led by a chief information officer - a "lightning rod," Robak said, for promoting greater efficiency.

Calls for cooperation

NU President Dennis Smith, who testified as a proponent, said he looked forward to increased cooperation in information technology, "one of the most important issues of our era."

"I view this as a partnership where we will be interacting with the commission in positive ways, not reg-

ulatory ways," he said.

The bill prevents the commission from limiting the authority of the NU Board of Regents to make its own decisions on the uses of information technology related to academic research.

The proposal will assist NU's growing distance-learning programs, Smith said.

Janet Wirth Poley of ADEC, a distance-education consortium, testified in opposition to the bill.

She said the bill was progressing too rapidly through the Legislature. Some components, such as specific desired outcomes and the impact of the commission on interstate technology, are still vague, she said.

"I don't think Nebraska needs walls, layers of bureaucracies and encumbrances," she said, suggesting the issue be further studied during the legislative interim.

But Sen. Roger Wehrbein of Plattsmouth, Appropriations Committee chairman, said the state must act soon.

"I'm of the opinion that time is of the essence, and we probably have delayed this too long," he said.

Under the bill, the Appropriations Committee would be required to review the NITC before Jan. 1, 2001.

The committee took no action on the bill.

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