

Academic vigor

Moeser hammers out objectives for next year

By SARAH BAKER
Senior Reporter

From academic rigor to diversity to questions of free speech, it has been a year filled with both controversial and important issues at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

But through the mass of debate, Chancellor James Moeser has pulled out what he says are numerous clear-cut goals, most of which are well on their way toward fruition.

Moeser, who throughout the year actively discussed academic rigor at UNL, said he is still con-

cerned with the issue.

"I think the most important thing is that we now have the matter on the front burner," Moeser said. "I think it is being successful. It's hard to measure, but I hear it being discussed."

Moeser said his ultimate goal concerning rigor encompasses more than just challenging students in the classroom.

"I want an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity," he said. "What this campus needs is a sense of electricity, an atmosphere of intellectual excitement that you can feel."

"Our goal should be complete fulfillment of everyone's

academic potential," he said.

James Ford, Academic Senate president and English professor, said he also felt progress had been made concerning rigor.

"We have plans to implement a debate series where we bring in authorities on academic topics," Ford said. "We want to involve people from the community in the debates."

Ford said he also plans to renew academic rigor as one of the goals of the UNL Academic Senate.

"It's clear that more people know about rigor just because we have talked about it publicly," he said. "We are going to have to use sticks and carrots to achieve this."

"The carrot is that we will have more fun if we have a more academically rigorous campus, but in order to get there we are going to have to use sticks to shame the people letting us

"What this campus needs is ... an atmosphere of intellectual excitement. ..."

JAMES MOESER
chancellor

down."

Ford's vision of UNL as a more rigorous university was similar to that of Moeser's ultimate goal.

"We need students who can think and speak critically, who are aware of what is going on around them and who have high standards for themselves," he said. "But I always think we need students who enjoy (college) and realize how much fun this is. It is a great satisfaction to be able to do something well."

Curt Ruwe, former president of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska, said he thought more evaluation needed to be done concerning academic rigor.

"I think it's an honorable goal and it's the right thing to do," he said. "But I also think we need to do some more research before we dive in."

Ruwe said he thought the student body should be evaluated before any more steps are taken.

"The university needs to look at student evaluations and come up with an accurate way to find out where students are discontent instead of just making a general statement," he said.

Over the past year, the national standings of the university have improved, as has the newest class of freshmen.

But Moeser said he has no plans for UNL to become an "elite university."

"A lot of people have that misconception, and I don't think that at all," he said. "We still want to be open and accessible to anyone in Nebraska who is qualified to go after a university education."

As much as Moeser would like to see the university become more rigorous, he also would like to see it become more diverse.

Concerns by UNL minorities were brought to light after a recent university audit conducted by the Office for Civil Rights.

"Our students of color have very different experiences on this campus than the majority of students do," he said. "I heard the word 'rate' mentioned in the conversation I had with the team."

Moeser said the news of the level of unhappiness of minority students took him by surprise.

"We have a lot of work to do," he said. "It makes me sad to think these students see their time spent here as a struggle, and that they didn't feel welcome."

He said he didn't think their unhappiness was the result of overt racism on campus, but stemmed from a culture clash. He also said the team discussed options to improve conditions for minorities.

"I think we need to better orient students at the beginning of school, and educate more about subtle forms of racial discrimination," he said.

"I think our minorities expect us to be better than the communities surrounding us when it comes to issues like this. After all, we are an institution of high-

er learning."

Jimmi Smith, multicultural affairs director, said his main goal has been to support the drive the university has put forth concerning diversity.

"I think the university is approaching diversity by letting the community know what the issues are that need enhancement," Smith said. "It's too early to say whether we are making headway on the objectives, but I think it's a good approach."

Smith said he thinks the university recognizes the problems it has with diversity issues.

"The enrollment of students of color is not where it should be, and our numbers of minority faculty are not where they should be either," he said. "We have a long way to go."

He said he hoped the new diversity plan would strive to be inclusive.

"I would call for this plan to enable people of color to be able to move forward and receive support and resources from academic colleges," he said. "These resources must be shared among everyone in order for us to get ready for the 21st century."

Ruwe said he felt the communication surrounding diversity issues had greatly improved, and he targeted the alleged racist e-mail messages sent earlier this semester by Assistant English Professor David Hibler and the Sigma Chi cross burning last year as examples.

"I think the student body has really come a long way," he said. "If you look at the way the Hibler incident was handled compared to how the Sigma Chi incident was handled, the communication was much quicker and much more complete."

Ruwe said he thought both ASUN and the minority groups worked together to achieve better communication.

"I think the students handled Hibler in a very responsible, mature manner," he said. "That didn't happen a year ago." Moeser said looking back on the racial turmoil surrounding Hibler, he would have handled things the same way.

"I wouldn't change anything," Moeser said. "We didn't fall into his trap. It was strictly media manipulation."

Moeser said he has much of the same things in store for future goals.

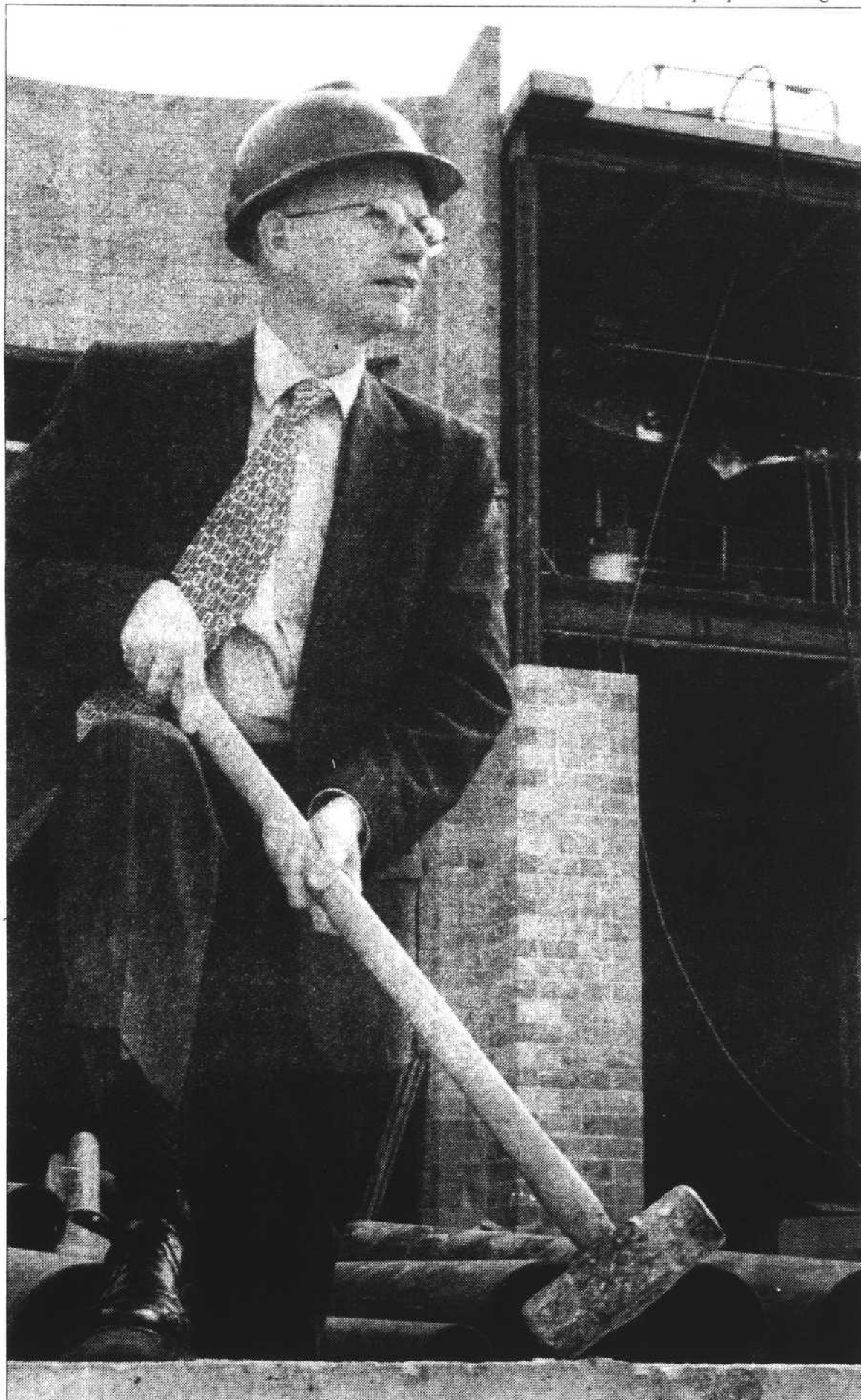
"We have had some real successes this year," he said. "I want to continue to have better contentment with student advising, and I also have some major fundraising issues as personal goals."

The fund-raising issues concern the expansion of the Sheldon Art Gallery and Love Library and renovation work on Burnett and Richards halls.

"I want to continue on the goals I've already set," he said. "I don't see any change of course."

Moeser said he also wanted to continue good relationships with the students themselves.

"I like working directly with students," he said. "After all, they are what we're here for."



DANIEL LUEDERT/DN

CHANCELLOR JAMES MOESER stands before the uncompleted Nebraska Union renovation, which is expected to be completed in the fall.