

Harris to leave UNL after 7-year stay

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After sharing it with many college students during his tenure, Harris feels it may be time to give his insights to the younger middle school or high school crowd.

But after seven years of helping college students go beyond their comfort zone with projects such as UNL's diversity retreat, which Harris has facilitated during his time at UNL, he admits it will be hard to go.

But he wants to assure students, faculty members and staff that he is not going far.

"UNL is a place that needs people like me — people who want to be a part of change and people who are willing to say some of the things that need to be said," Harris said.

Being part of campus change during his time here has not always been easy for him.

He cites the 1997 Sigma Chi Fraternity cross-burning as one incident that challenged him professionally as well as personally.

Affected deeply by the cross burning, Harris took two weeks off of his job to deal with the incident. During that time, Harris said, he debated whether he could come back after discovering the harsh reality that UNL was not exempt from issues dealing with racism.

"It said that UNL is a place like any place else," Harris said.

But the incident prompted him to evaluate his role and understand how important it is to the climate on campus.

"It hurt me emotionally and challenged me spiritually," Harris said. "But whatever role I played, it needed to continue."

With time to reflect back on the situation, Harris said he realizes that a cross burning doesn't have the same meaning to white people as black people.

"My problem was expecting that they would feel the same kind of indignation that I did."

Open door, open heart

Since Harris has been a part of the university, he has set out to educate students to be more aware of the feelings of those around them.

By organizing the diversity retreat, he has realized that erasing the attitudes and feelings that people are socialized with is not a process that people can be taught.

"I've had to learn that learning is a process," Harris said. "I shy away from words like diversity training."

"Diversity education is a process."

Many students during Harris' tenure have come to learn that firsthand.

Matt Boyd, a senior broadcasting major, had contact with Harris from his first day on campus at the Summer Institute for Promising Scholars.

Since then, Boyd said, Harris has had a strong influence on opening his mind and has given him inspiration to instigate change at UNL.

After attending a diversity retreat, Boyd and some other students who attended the retreat were prompted to form the Diversity Council.

Boyd said the council was an example of Harris motivating students.

"He gave us tools to start that sort of thing," Boyd said. "He didn't want to do it for us."

"(Harris) really gets you started," he said. "Once he gets you started, he gives you positive energy."

While Harris often works with large groups, Boyd said his care for individuals runs deep.

"He'll sit down and work with you on an individual basis," he said. "A lot of his time is spent there."

The time that Harris has spent with so many groups and individuals on campus will be missed, Boyd said.

"Losing (Harris) is a huge loss," he said. "Everything that he has in his heart and his mind to convey to other people will be gone."

Being a strong voice on campus also has benefited everyone at UNL, said Chuck van Rossum, assistant director of the Minority Assistance Program.

"Not only in big ways does he make change, but in the time he spends with students and staff talking about the values we need," van Rossum said. "The values for life, not just the values for today."

"His door and his heart are always open," he said.

Bring it on

Though Harris has strong allies, he said he also knows many disagree with him. But he welcomes his critics, saying their open disagreement provides discussion that will eventually lead to solutions.

"I don't want to agree with everybody," Harris said. "If there is common ground to find, how do you find it?"

With many differing opinions on many issues, Harris understands that there are things that he and his critics will never agree on. But he thinks that is OK, as long as one condition is fulfilled.

"The one thing I want from my critics is the one thing I'm willing to give — respect," Harris said.

At the end of the semester, Harris said, he will be gone from UNL. With a mixture of fear and anticipation, Harris tries to imagine what his life will be like away from UNL and tries to understand where he feels God is calling him.

While he doesn't know much about what the future holds, he said, he does know one thing that will have the greatest influence on him.

Pointing to the 8½-by-10-inch sign hanging on his file cabinet, Harris said, "Your circumstances are not your problem, it's your attitude."

Regarding Harris ...

John Harris has never been bashful about sharing his thoughts on the Daily Nebraskan opinion pages. We chose excerpts from more than a dozen letters published in the last three years. Each demonstrates his willingness to engage controversial topics and to enact social change.

"Your cultural filter has obviously done what education in this country is supposed to do: Make white people feel good about being white."

Feb. 20, 1998, on an argument that was had on the DN's editorial pages between Harris and Chemistry Professor Gerard Harbison. Harbison contended that the phrase "Real McCoy" was coined in Scotland, while Harris said it could be attributed to Elijah McCoy, an African American who received a patent for the steam engine.

"As I have sat back and watched the events of the past week unfold regarding Dr. Hibler's e-mail, I have been reminded of something that noted African-American scholar and activist W.E.B. DuBois said many years ago. Du Bois said, 'The problem of the 20th century will be the color line.' Truer words have never been spoken."

Feb. 16, 1998, on English Professor David Hibler's allegedly racist e-mail.

"I just want to let you know that last week's cartoon depicting a dark-skinned man holding a little 'white' girl's hand in front of a police officer has not gone unnoticed."

Oct. 1, 1997, on a Sept. 24 cartoon about two Iraqi men accused of having sex with their underage girlfriends in Lincoln.

"You have no understanding about racism at all. Racism is about power and privilege. And because of the power of folks who looked like you, African Americans like myself and those of other racial groups have the privilege of hearing you whine about being thought of as a racist. In a phrase, 'Give me a break!'"

Oct. 3, 1996, on DN columnist Cliff Hicks' pride in his maleness and German heritage, and his anger about being called racist.

"This university never ceases to amaze me. In my four years here, there has been a number of things that have left me simply stunned. And the university has done it again. Mr. Melvin Jones, an African-American man, is hired, and Dr. Joan Leitzel, a Caucasian woman, is shafted."

Nov. 27, 1995, on the hiring of Jones as vice chancellor for business and finance, and Leitzel not being selected for the final pool of UNL chancellor candidates.

Students still relying on loans for education, officials say

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the cost of college here, Munier said. Today that only covers two-thirds of the cost.

"I got my loans to help defer the cost of school," senior architecture major Craig Unterseher said.

Unterseher said he also worked 16 hours a week at a university job to pay for school.

"It is not possible to work your way through school anymore," Munier said.

UNL graduates from May 1998 finished

school with an average debt of \$15,711, which is up from \$8,417 in 1994.

But the good news for students who do have to borrow money for school is that student loan interest rates have been slashed to their lowest rate in 17 years, thanks to the higher education bill Clinton signed last week.

The bill creates a new interest rate formula based on Treasury bill rates equal to 7.46 percent interest for students starting to repay their loans, and the rate is capped at 8.24 percent.

Students who already have loans can consol-

idate them through the direct loan program at a special low rate until the end of January.

After that time, consolidation loan interest rates will be based on an average of the interest rates on previous loans.

The bill also includes a special provision to forgive up to \$5,000 of loans for education students who work for five years in parts of the country with teacher shortages.

Munier said other parts of the bill will reduce the bureaucracy students face when applying for and receiving financial aid.

The bill also increased the amount of money students can earn before it will affect their federal aid, authorized the Department of Education to offer lower interest rates to students who consistently pay their bills on time and changed the way need is determined for financially independent students.

But Munier said the key to all these reforms is the money Congress appropriates for them.

"Congress has never funded grants at the maximum level," he said.

"The real test is appropriations."

Report sparks controversy in department

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bers were biased because they had written letters last spring to Moeser protesting the ARRC's ruling.

"They shouldn't have been appointed to Chancellor Moeser's committee," said Robert Herling, a senior criminal justice major who has helped begin a committee that will look at UNL's sexual harassment procedures.

Shavers said she signed a letter written to the chancellor but that the letter questioned whether the ARRC should have investigated the complaints, not its findings.

She and another faculty member, not associated with the committee, signed the letter.

Shavers said another letter was written but she would not say who wrote it or what the letter contained.

Schwebach said both letters criticized the ARRC's ruling. Each of the two members wrote a different letter protesting the ruling of the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee," she said.

Schwebach said the letters were written at the request of and with political science faculty members.

Though the ad hoc committee concluded the department's environment was not hostile, it made seven recommendations to improve the climate for women in political science.

The recommendations included:

- Work to recruit more woman

faculty members.

- Train faculty members on university policies and procedures to respond to claims of gender bias or sexual harassment.

- Develop practices that demonstrate its sensitivity to the needs of female faculty members and non-funded graduate students.

The ad hoc committee's recommendations were based partly on a survey last summer of faculty members, staff members and graduate students in the department.

Shavers said the survey was one of the committee's main sources of information. The committee had a "very high rate of return on the surveys," she said, though she would not say how many surveys were returned.

Other methods the committee used included some face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews, Shavers said. She wouldn't estimate how many interviews the committee conducted.

According to a statement released Tuesday, the committee reported the survey results showed that "a vast majority of respondents did not identify problems with gender-related differential treatment in the department."

Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, the political science department's graduate chairwoman, said she expected such results.

"Basically what the report says is that we should continue to do what we are doing in the department," Theiss-Morse said.

"I sincerely hope this report puts to rest the disagreements of last spring and that the department can get on with the task the people of the state of Nebraska pay us to do."

JOHN COMER
political science department chairman

She said other department members with whom she had visited seemed to agree with the report.

In a statement, John Comer, the political science department's chairman, said he supported the recommendations.

"I sincerely hope this report puts to rest the disagreements of last spring and that the department can get on with the task the people of the state of Nebraska pay us to do," Comer said.

But Schwebach said she would be taking "appropriate" legal action to fight the report. She said the committee's information-gathering was flawed.

"This is not the kind of thing decided by majority rule," Schwebach said.

Herling agreed.

"There's no way this survey could be objective," Herling said. He said it

was "typically the minority that become the victims of (harassment)."

Schwebach's attorney, Thom Cope of Lincoln, said the report was contradictory. He said it seemed the report, by making recommendations, agreed that the department had a long way to go in gender equity — yet it still rejected the ARRC's ruling.

Moeser will report the recommendations to the ARRC and Patricia Kennedy, the Academic Senate president.

Schwebach said she has filed many formal and informal complaints with UNL. But, she said, "when we were harassed it was done."

She said it was "beyond offensive" that the university had not taken her complaints seriously.

"I believe (the report) confirms that the university is not going to address this problem."

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