

Officials want sports, school to share limelight

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All of these make it look as if the university has pulled away from academics, he said.

"The ideal is that people see the university as an academic institution," he said.

NU Regent Drew Miller of Papillion said he believes the university should spend what is needed to be No. 1 in its top academic programs.

In other words, determine what programs in which the university is strongest, and focus on being the best at those.

"We don't have the money to be No. 1 in everything," he said.

The chancellor agreed with this approach to academics.

But Moeser and Byrne said it was important to spend the money needed to have top-notch athletic teams across the board.

Spending to be tops in all sports is a way of ensuring all teams - men's and women's - will have the same opportunities. And Moeser said it wouldn't be fair to cut back on those now, creating middle-of-the-pack teams.

Under federal law, UNL has to have an equal number of women's and men's programs. To do this, Byrne said, it takes money.

"I don't want to tear down the quality of the athletic program," Moeser said. "I want to build up the quality of academics."

State money available for academic programs has been shrinking, while costs are increasing. Because of this, Moeser said, there have been academic budget cuts and shifting of money within the budget.

"If it weren't for athletics, our cuts would be larger," he said, referring to the \$1.5 million he mandates the athletic department give to the general university fund each year.

The money supports initiatives the university doesn't have the money from the state to cover, including some student scholarship and academic programs, Moeser said.

But Miller said making the athletic department give \$1.5 million reinforces his idea of taking money from athletics to support academics.

"That proves my point. You can transfer funds from athletics to academics," Miller said. "I want to do more of that."

Miller agreed the athletic department was an asset to the university.

"Our image is clearly stronger in sports than in academics. I don't think that's all bad," he said. "It is a reason why a lot of students come here. You never want to give up on a strength."

Building the Mind

Moeser said the university is working to build a stronger academic future - and it's starting with improving its buildings.

He pointed out the window in his second-story office in the Canfield Administration Building toward construction on the new Kauffman Residence Center, and noted that work was also being done on Love Library, Richards Hall and other academic buildings.

The construction is being paid for through private donations and a bill passed in the Legislature in April 1998. All told, about \$300 million is being used for academic building changes.

The university already has started to boast its academic successes, Moeser, and others, said.

It has bought space in the Chronicle of Higher Education, a newspaper distributed among college and university professionals, to advertise on-campus academic conferences or prestigious academic appointments.

Several professors have been contacted by national media, said Kelly Bartling, national news editor and a senior news writer for UNL's public relations office.

Sometimes, a press release is sent. Other times, the public relations office calls newsrooms to ask if they would be interested in the professors' comments.

Steve Taylor, a food science professor, has been quoted in The Wall Street Journal as a national authority on nut allergies.

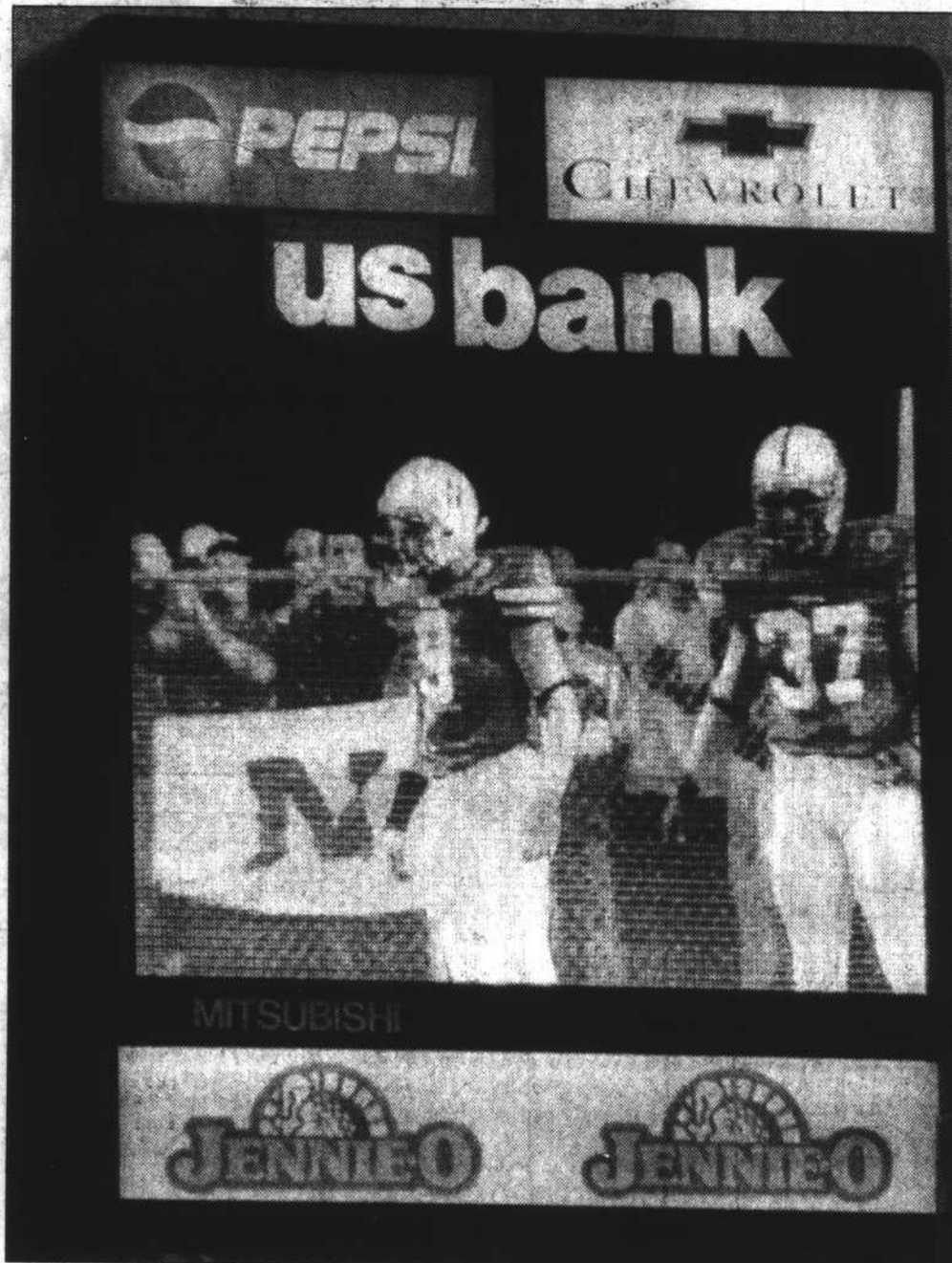
Entomology Professor Leon Higley's comments about the animated film, "A Bug's Life," were featured in more than a dozen newspapers. He said the insects in the film were anatomically incorrect - the insects had four legs, rather than six.

Higley's comments were reiterated by late-night television stars David Letterman and Jay Leno.

Moeser said UNL has also hired an East Coast firm to help promote the university in the national media, such as The Washington Post and The New York Times.

"I do think we have academic programs that are that caliber," Moeser said. "But I don't think we've been as successful in promoting the university's reputation for academic excellence."

The university has taken advantage of its 30-second commercials during nationally televised



DN File Photo

THE UNIVERSITY is often criticized for what some have called an imbalance between its image as an academic institution and as an athletic powerhouse. UNL is well-known for its football program throughout the country and even overseas.

football games to focus on the university's academics, Larsen said. And cameramen make sure to let viewers glimpse the Academic All-American banner hung in Memorial Stadium.

Timothy Gay, physics professor, has been featured on HuskerVision during football games, teaching the crowd about football-related physics phenomena. Even the players stop when Gay comes onto the screen, Larsen said.

Larsen said radio stations that broadcast Husker games are contracted to provide public-access commercials year-round. Some of these broadcasts reach other states, she said.

Athletic Marketing Director Heidi Cuca said the Husker sports image is a catalyst to getting the university's academic programs recognized worldwide.

"Why not use us to get that message out?" she said.

Tipping the Scales

To combat what some have called an unbalanced image, the chancellor formed the Institutional Marketing Team. Larsen and Meg Lauerman, an assistant advertising professor, were asked to lead the effort.

The team's No. 1 goal is to let the nation know about Nebraska's academic programs. It will make recommendations to the chancellor on how to do that.

UNL's academic reputation affects its annual ranking by U.S. News and World Report. About 25 percent of the ranking depends on academic reputation as determined by other universities in a survey.

"If they don't know about us, they can't give us a high number," Larsen said. Potential students pay attention to those rankings, she said.

The university has, in the past three years, floated back and forth between the third and the second tiers. In 1998, the third tier meant UNL was between 118-172 out of 227 national universities. In 1999, the second tier meant that the university was between 51-120 out of 228 universities.

The marketing team is composed of 16 people from various departments across campus, including individual colleges, the Office of Admissions, the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the University Foundation and the Athletic Department.

The team has finished its research and has a strategy for pushing academics. Larsen said the

research was intended for internal use and could not be released.

If all campus departments worked together to promote UNL's name, the PR would be more effective. Now, the effort is split between campus offices.

"We need to turn up the volume on academics and alumni success," she said.

Money Matters

If the university's image were unbalanced, some say more would donate to athletic programs than to academic facilities.

Proving this would be tough.

"That's debatable," said Paul Meyers, director of athletic development and of fund raising for the athletic department. "I believe people decide where they want to donate."

Christine Aguirre, spokeswoman for the University Foundation, agreed.

"A lot of people want to give to a strong athletic program, but a lot of people want to give to strong academic programs," she said.

The University Foundation, a private corporation designated by the NU Board of Regents in 1936 to solicit and receive donations for the university, accepts donations for both academic and athletic programs, Aguirre said.

The athletic budget for the 1998-99 fiscal year was about \$35 million. About \$6 million of that came from donations. The rest came from areas such as licensing revenue and ticket sales.

The Athletic Department pays for all of its expenses, including building upkeep. No money comes out of the academic budget to support athletics.

The 1998-99 UNL budget was about \$609 million. The foundation was unable to provide numbers of how much was donated in 1998-1999 to just UNL, but to all four campuses, \$51.6 million was transferred for use.

That does not include money given in the form of an endowment, which allows the university to collect on interest every year.

To raise money for academic uses, the foundation identifies objectives for a specific time period, such as building and program needs, and those are recommended as areas people can donate toward, Aguirre said.

The foundation works with the Athletic Department so possible donors are not approached twice by the same university.

The Athletic Department receives no student

IN NEBRASKA A LOOK AT THE CORNHUSKER EMPIRE

DAY ONE	The System
DAY TWO	The All-Americans
DAY THREE	Athletes and their tutors
DAY FOUR	Learning Disabilities
DAY FIVE	The Sports Major
DAY SIX	Corruption in the System
DAY SEVEN	Isolation and Its Counterparts Athletes After Graduation The Social Scene for Athletes Athletes as Role Models A Day in the Life
DAY EIGHT	The Academic/Athletic Tradeoff
DAY NINE	Gameday

fees and no state aid. It uses corporate and private donations, as well as ticket sales and licensing revenue.

ASUN President Andy Schuerman said he is grateful he can tell prospective students they don't have to support the Athletic Department with their tuition or fees.

"I thank the stars every day," he said.

In the End

So, does the sports-dominated image the university has now affect students' decisions to come to UNL?

If they grow up in Nebraska, potential students have been bombarded with Husker paraphernalia since the day they were born. Big Red T-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, glasses, pants, pajamas, notebooks, blankets, clocks, posters and so much more can be found in every town and many homes.

What's missing in towns and stores nationwide are the pictures of Love Library, a central study area; Neihardt Residence Center, a popular spot for honor students; or even posters of the campus's beauty minus Memorial Stadium in the background.

It takes a Big Red Welcome visit, or being a high school junior or senior to receive postcards or a glimpse of such images.

"Our university is by far known by the majority of the people for its athletic program," Schuerman said.

But Schuerman said the university's image depended on who was asked.

At his Clatonia high school, Wilbur-Clatonia, he said he talked with his friends about Husker football. But when deciding where he wanted to go to school, he thought more about the academic side of things.

"I wasn't going to go to a place where my degree wasn't going to be looked at favorably," said Schuerman, a senior marketing education major.

Having a high-profile team can be both good and bad for recruitment, he said. When a player is arrested, for example, it shines a negative light on the entire university.

But the football team's successes shine a positive light, he said.

Drew Hanson, a senior international business major, agreed.

"Football helps to get people here," he said. Admissions Director Susanna Finnell, who just arrived this semester from Texas A&M University in College Station, said she never judges universities based on their sports images.

Potential students gain their impressions of UNL either through words and pictures in the media, which give UNL a mostly sports-based image, or through their own research, which yields a stronger academic image.

Spreading a solid academic reputation to other states to get top-notch professors and students takes time, Moeser said.

It's a reputation game, he said. Finnell agreed, saying though Nebraska's image as a football state usually wins, if potential students and professors look beyond that, they will find a treasure.

"Oftentimes football wins - it's snazzy ... it's out there, and it's big-time," she said. "How can you balance that?"

The trick, she said, is showing off the academic and scholarly side of UNL, including the renowned Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery on City Campus.

"How do you make that quick and snazzy?"