

Helping minorities feel welcome is ongoing task

Diversity?

by Margaret Behm

With all the discussion surrounding the term "diversity" in recent years, a lot of questions have arisen.

Some students, and even faculty and staff members, wonder whether diversity is really that important.

James Griesen, vice chancellor for student affairs, said that a diverse campus is critical for students to be prepared for life outside of college.

"I think it is very important for the university to prepare students for the real world in an multicultural setting," he said.

And with all this talk, many ponder whether race relations have even started to improve. Or if it has, indeed, been just talk.

Jimmi Smith, director of Multicultural Affairs, said even though there have been positive changes at this university, there is room for improvement.

"I can say that race relations are better. My checkpoint would be compared to 10 years ago," he said. "Now, whether race relations have improved enough? No."

Some may also question if what administrators call a small number of minorities is noticeable.

Stephan Reyes, a junior construction management major, said he notices few minorities on campus.

Reyes said that having few minority students on campus can be a surprise to some students.

"After the initial shock, you learn to deal with it," he said. "If I woke up every morning and said that I am an underrepresented minority, it would be

a long time for me at this university."

An up-to-date Culture Center, closer to the union, may help minority students feel more welcome here, Griesen said.

Reyes said the condition of the current Culture Center makes the university look bad.

"I think the Culture Center reflects very poorly on the university and its attitude toward students of color," he said.

Daryl Swanson, unions director, said \$37,000 has been allocated to the center for improvements.

Swanson is deciding whether to put that money toward a \$60,000 improvement project or a \$120,000 project.

The \$60,000 would replace the furnace and air conditioning units. The \$120,000 would replace those and the ducts and improve the control system.

Griesen said a more diverse faculty also would help students feel welcome here.

"It's easy to get a perception that this campus isn't multicultural if (students) only see white staff and white faculty," Griesen said.

Smith, director of Multicultural Affairs, said it is obvious that there aren't enough minority faculty mem-

bers on this campus.

"In looking around the campus, we are a European-based campus in numbers and in the faculty hiring politics and promotion politics," he said. "And until you can change that, we're in trouble."

A legislative bill passed this session that will give the university \$500,000 for the recruitment of women and minorities.

An important part of races' coming together is admitting to racist actions, Smith said.

He referred to Neal Obermeyer's cartoon (in the Daily Nebraskan) featuring senior marketing and business major Eddie Brown as a mascot.

Obermeyer said that the purpose of the cartoon was to show that the university uses Brown to present an image of diversity that doesn't exist.

But Smith said that people should admit that the cartoon was racist.

"Sometimes you have to call racism for what it is when you make a mistake," he said. "You don't have to hide under the banner of saying, 'It's

my job, I have to push and show another side of the story," Smith said.

Smith said that Chancellor James Moeser was correct for

acting quickly by writing a letter to the Daily Nebraskan.

"The chancellor is the CEO of the campus. One would expect that he would lend his voice in helping us know what diversity is," he said.

Brown and Moeser were unavailable for comment.

Obermeyer said he had one regret about the cartoon.

"If there was a way to do it without personally insulting Eddie Brown, that's the only thing I would change about it."

Pat Tetreault, sexuality education coordinator for the University Health Center, said getting equal rights for gays and lesbians still hasn't become a universal concern.

Issues in the workplace such as the denial of domestic partner benefits show gays and lesbians that they're not as important as straight people, Tetreault said.

An accomplishment for the gay community this year was the first annual Outstanding Contribution to the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Community award.

Moeser presented the award to Vernon Williams, an educational psychology professor and career counselor at UNL.

Chuck van Rossum, assistant director of minority assistance program in Multicultural Affairs, said that he would like to see all people celebrating their cultures.

"I would like to see students who aren't of color talking about their culture," he said.

"That's one thing that I don't see much encouragement for."

Van Rossum said people should be patient because someday the outcome of their actions to diversify the campus will come.

"I am very optimistic that if the university keeps making efforts to bring people together, one day we will see the gain," he said. "But it's slow in coming."

"Now, whether race relations have improved enough? No."

Jimmi Smith
director of Multicultural Affairs

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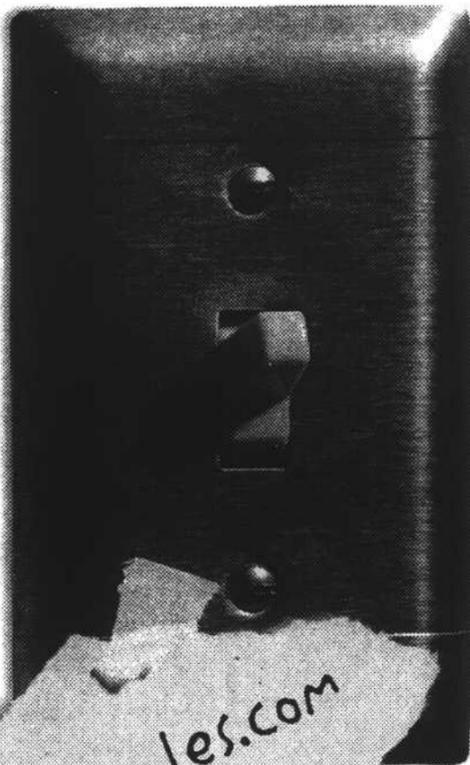
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