UNL hopes to woo students with scholarships

BY ANGIE SCHAFFER

Many determined University of Nebraska-Lincoln and community college students will have the opportunity to continue their education, thanks to a National Science Foundation grant.

A new program will try to lure more students – especially minorities and women – into fields related to information technology.

The program, called CSEMS, will provide scholarships for UNL students and community college students to either finish their undergraduate degrees or start their graduate work in the fields of computer science, engineering and mathematics.

The professors hope the program will fill a shortage of people with math, science and engineering expertise.

"There are just not enough people in information technology," said physics and astronomy professor Kevin Lee.

UNL's program was the brainchild of Byrav Ramamurthy, an assistant professor of computer science and engineering. It was pursued by a group of faculty across different math and science disciplines. Starting in the fall semester, as many as 40 students will be given scholarships of $3,125 a year for two years.

Students entering the program must be of at least junior standing at UNL or a nearby two-year college when they begin, have a minimum GPA of 3.0, and be financially eligible for a Pell Grant.

Those in groups "historically underrepresented in computer science, engineering and mathematics" will be given special consideration for these scholarships, Lee said. These groups include minorities, women and students from poor communities.

Students receiving the scholarships will be required to attend a seminar. The seminar will allow students to interact with each other, talk with researchers and expose them to other fields.

They also will be given mentoring opportunities. The mentoring is intended to form a network of experienced students and local business leaders that will give students access not only to advice but possible connections to jobs.

Applicants need to fill out an application and submit it by April 15. The application requires students to give some basic information, answer two essay questions, and have one reference from a faculty member. Transfer applicants must also fill out a UNL application and a FAFSA form.

More information on the scholarship can be found at *www.unl.edu/csems*.

Lee, who is part of the implementation team, said he hoped the program would help draw students to UNL.

He said students should continue their education at the university instead of jumping to a job right after community college. They will have a deeper understanding of the thought behind their field, he said. In a constantly changing field such as information science, a university education may be necessary for students to succeed, Lee said.

Lee also noted that there were many vacancies in the field, especially in the government and small businesses sectors.

Ramamurthy's goals for the program are focused on the juggling of studies and jobs some students have to do to pay for college.

"The motivation and goal (of the program) is to allow students to devote time to studying instead of working to pay tuition."

Applicants must have one year of newspaper experience, preferably at the Daily Nebraskan, be enrolled in at least six credit hours at UNL this spring, summer or fall, maintain a 2.0 minimum G.P.A., and not be on academic probation. Applications are available at the Daily Nebraskan office, basement of the Nebraska Union, and must be returned with up to three clips by noon March 19.

Bill would alter death penalty

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Alan Peterson, a private attorney who has represented inmates on death row, echoed Keller.

"You can create life without parole," he said.

Moreover, he urged lawmakers to advance the bill to save taxpayers from the hefty financial burden tied to prosecuting capital punishment cases.

Most death penalty cases, when completed, have price tags that have seven figures, he said.

Advocates of capital punishment generally suggest limiting the lengthy appeals process to save taxpayers money.

However, several courts have raised concerns that the appeal limits would infringe on the inmates' constitutional rights.

Tim Butz, executive director of the Nebraska chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, said the death penalty itself infringed on the constitutional rights of the poor.

He said most people accused in capital cases could not afford experienced attorneys whose services carry a substantial price.

"If you're poor, your chances of going to death row increase dramatically," he said.

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