



Athletic successes

A few words about athletics. I know most of you don't need an "insiders report" to inform you of our various successes. Unlike the English Department, for example, the Athletics Department has its own page in every newspaper in the state. But beyond the scores and national championships, you should know that our department has many less visible successes. For example, we lead the country in Academic-All Americans. And, our Husker-Vision crew is far ahead of the competition in production quality and creativity. For any of you who attended the Rice football game — one of the first played after the horrible events of September 11th — you know how they achieved the right balance between remembering the victims and the resolve to return to normalcy. Bill Byrne and his staff are also exploring some very exciting ways to utilize the potential of the Internet to bring Husker athletics closer to its fans across the country.

I do hope that you will find this "Insiders' Report" informative and that it will keep you more closely connected to your University. More than ever, I realize that one of the great strengths of this University is its relationship with its alumni and friends. This is evidenced not only by the red in the stadium on Saturday afternoons (or this year, more often Saturday evenings) but also in the growing number of you who join and support the Nebraska Alumni Association and contribute your resources to the University of Nebraska Foundation. In addition I receive a number of letters— some complimentary, others with criticisms or constructive suggestions — and they are often passionate. These all show me that you care about your University. This means a lot to those of us who currently serve as its stewards.

Many thanks. There really is no place like Nebraska.

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CHANCELLOR'S INSIDERS REPORT

A report to special friends and supporters of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Dear Friends and Colleagues:

This is the initial "Chancellor's Insiders Report," which I intend to send periodically to special friends and supporters of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I want you to have the latest information regarding the good things that are happening on our campus and also the challenges we face. I hope this will give you a better understanding of your University. More importantly, I hope it will put you in a better position to offer your advice and counsel to me as we try to move the University forward.

We have made great progress in the past year, stabilizing our academic leadership and developing a list of priorities toward which we intend to move resources. We are enhancing those programs currently identified as strong and investing more attention in programs that are on the brink of excellence. With the support of the Governor and the 2001 Legislature, we are moving toward a good situation regarding faculty salaries. In the past year, we opened a number of new or renovated facilities that have created new energy for the faculty and staff who work in them.

There are issues of major concern, however. The first is the Special Session of the Legislature and what effect it may have on the university's budget. We are all aware of the rapidly declining state revenues that cannot support the two-year budget that was adopted last May. At this point we do not know what may be asked of us. We are working hard to inform the Governor and the Legislature of the positive strides we have taken over the last few years in so many facets of our enterprise, and how important it is to the State of Nebraska that we sustain our upward momentum.

Nonetheless, we must also begin the planning effort essential to an intelligent and humane reduction of our budget. Accordingly, I have asked the vice chancellors, and through them the deans and directors, to begin developing scenarios that reflect up to a 3 percent cut in this year's budget and a similar reduction in next year's budget. There is no other way to characterize a reduction in this amount except to say it will be painful. It will require the very best of all of us to avoid long-lasting damage to our ability to serve students and the people of Nebraska.

Our progress in research

While the budget uncertainties are indeed gloomy, we nevertheless have much to be proud of here at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. We are experiencing a phenomenal growth in research funding, having increased our research awards over the past five years by 88 percent. The largest award was from the National Institutes of Health, a \$10.7 million grant to establish a Center for the Study of Virology — the viruses that affect human, animal, and plant health. And most recently, Teachers College faculty members Michael Epstein and Ron Nelson received a \$4.5 million award to work with the Lincoln Public Schools to help at-risk children improve their academic performance.

The quality of our research faculty has been confirmed by the number of articles published in the journals *Nature* and *Science*. Both are regarded among the most prestigious journals in the world. Geoscientist Sherilyn Fritz has had two papers in *Nature* and one in *Science* resulting from her work at Lake Titicaca in Bolivia, which has produced new



insights into global climate change. Other UNL geoscientists, David Loope, Clinton Rowe, and Matthew Joeckel, were the featured cover story in *Nature* for revealing new information about the climate during the Jurassic period. Also in *Nature*, physicists Herman Batelaan, Daniel Freimund and Kayvan Aflatooni reported they were the first scientists to observe the Kapitza-Dirac Effect, an accomplishment that could lead to measuring devices thousands of times more accurate than current devices. These are quite remarkable achievements.

At the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, micrometeorologist Shashi Verma and Agronomist Ken Cassman have turned 480 acres of fertile Nebraska farmland into a unique high-tech laboratory. Their huge laboratory at NU's Agricultural Research and Development Center, the only one of its kind in the world, is dedicated to measuring and understanding how carbon dioxide cycles through the atmosphere, plants, and soil. The ultimate goal: to find a way to reduce the CO₂ in the atmosphere — a major factor in global warming — by storing more of it in the soil, a process called carbon sequestration.

With our national attention turned toward the control of potentially harmful bacterial diseases, food microbiologist Andrew Benson's work is gaining attention. His new genetic fingerprinting method revealed startling findings about the deadly bacterium *E. coli* 0157:H7. His work, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, showed that the *E. coli* strain that causes serious illness in people and the strain most prevalent in cattle, once thought to be identical, are actually genetically diverse. Because Benson's genome-scanning method is applicable to many organisms, it's generating interest among genetics researchers.

There are many other fascinating research successes, which I will describe in subsequent reports. But I wanted to give you a small taste of some of the remarkable things going on in our research activities.

Undergraduate education — In and out of the classroom

Of course, the education of students remains our high priority. You will remember that we were nationally recognized last year for our innovative undergraduate educational programs — one of only five research universities to be so recognized. And our students' successes reflect our efforts. Angela Clements, a junior from Elmwood, received a coveted Truman Scholarship for postgraduate study. This is a nationally competitive scholarship awarded this year to only 70 students out of 592 candidates nominated by 303 colleges and universities. Three other students, Dorea Claassen from Denver, Lucas Sabalka from Lincoln, and Ellen Veomett from Lincoln won Goldwater Scholarships, another premier national undergraduate award. I hope to continue to report to you on student successes as well.

We also try to provide students with interesting experiences outside of the classroom context. For example, this semester alone we have had presentations by Alan Heeger, a 1957 University of Nebraska alumnus who won the 2000 Nobel Prize in chemistry; noted author Joyce Carol Oates; Meave Leakey, a British paleoanthropologist who recently discovered a 3.5 million-year-old skull in Africa; and Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

Our challenges

Several of my friends keep asking me if I'm "still having fun" being Chancellor. My answer is a strong "yes" and the happenstance that I am Chancellor during the time when we have experienced some of the above successes may account for my attitude. It is exciting to be engaged with this University when you can see so many promising opportunities for its students and faculty. But there are also fascinating challenges as well.

You may have seen reports of our efforts



to resolve a long-simmering controversy with the Native American tribes of this region over Native American remains that were once housed in our anthropological collections. It is sometimes hard for some of us to fully appreciate how important it is to Native Americans that their ancestors' remains be buried and at peace, as well as the strength of the obligation they feel to bring this about. New national legislation now requires that we repatriate museum collections of remains back to the appropriate tribes, and we have been leaders in working with the tribes to comply with the law.

We also had a unique situation. We have evidence that some time in the late 1960s, some Native American remains, without research value, were burned in an incinerator on East Campus. We do not know what became of the remains thereafter, but this entire episode is very offensive to the traditions and beliefs of Native Americans. We are hopeful that the memorial and repatriation of our museum collections will bring closure to this incident so that we can develop more constructive partnerships with the tribes in Nebraska. I am optimistic that we are making progress in this regard.

We have two initiatives under way designed to continue to enhance our academic programs. Last year we completed the first phase of a prioritization process designed to surface 25 percent of our programs that would have a priority in terms of additional investments. We know that we must build some signature programs on the campus in order to compete with other universities. We designated 86 such programs in our initial review, and we have now asked each of them to develop a plan — analogous to a business plan — showing how future investments will enhance their quality and, importantly, how we are to measure quality improvements. When resources become available, we will make the investments called for in the most promising of these proposals.

Measuring our quality

We are also engaged in an effort campuswide to identify measures of quality so that we will know whether we are, in fact, improving as an institution. It turns out this is more difficult than one supposes. A business enterprise has profit as an organizing principle, but a university has multiple missions, the success of which often defies objective quantification. How are we to measure the learning that takes place in our classrooms, the quality of our research, and the importance and success of our service to the people of Nebraska?

There are of course some national measures that have some value, and others that are more popular but less likely to provide meaningful information. In the latter category I would put the annual ratings of *U.S. News and World Report*. I am a little less animated about the subject this year after we returned to the "second tier" of national universities, but the survey still is a sorry example of journalism that cares more about profit than providing the public with valuable information. But unless we can create some alternative measures of quality, these popular surveys will continue to influence prospective students and the public at large.

So we are working on the matter. We are making an effort to identify those quality measures that relate to UNL and its particular role and mission within the State of Nebraska. This university's threefold mission of teaching, research and outreach, as you know, includes our Extension Division, which provides important local services to communities across the state, services not provided by private colleges for example.

A colleague of mine recently wrote to me that if you try to measure an institution such as UNL as though it were Harvard, then Harvard will always win. If you measure UNL on its own particular mission, then Harvard becomes irrelevant. That seems to me to be pretty sound advice.