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## UNOPA Burham, Boss of the Year 1988

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

# Bulletin Board

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## Research, students are Woollam's priorities

John Woollam's conversation is peppered with words that describe his research into such things as mega-bit optic recording or ellipsometric analysis of crystal growth.

His words, carefully chosen and patiently delivered, make it easy for even nonscientists to understand the intricacies of the scientific experiments he conducts.

Even so, Woollam, a UNL professor of electrical engineering and of physics, is the first one to turn the conversation in a different direction.

With a grin on his face, he says, "Is there anyone other than an engineer who really cares about these small details? Let's talk about what this research means to the students and to the people of the state."

He starts by talking about dollars and cents. Research is a heavily funded activity—one that generates \$120 billion a year nationwide. During fiscal 1987, UNL was awarded over \$21



John Woollam

million in research grants and contracts.

At a university, scientific research stretches the boundaries of knowledge. Professors such as Woollam put that quest for knowledge to practical use by involving their students. This in turn gives the students valuable training that

they'll need when entering the working world.

Woollam's own research has meant nearly \$1.5 million to the state through grants provided by private industry and federal agencies during the nine years he has worked at UNL. He and a group of 16 student researchers are currently working on projects for six federal and four private groups that total approximately \$300,000.

Part of that money pays the salaries of three full-time UNL engineering master's degree holders. If UNL hadn't received the grants, those people would be working someplace other than Nebraska. "And they'd be spending their salaries there, too," Woollam says.

Students with research experience are very valuable to employers. Hands-on research in a laboratory is the best kind of training a student can get, Woollam says.

"It's only realistic that students be

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## Burham named UNOPA "Boss of the Year"

Duane Burham, UNL's chief design engineer, has been selected as Boss of the Year by the University of Nebraska Office Personnel Duane Burham Association (UNOPA).



Burham, who works in the planning and design section of UNL's Physical Plant Administration, was presented the award at last Tuesday's UNOPA luncheon in the East Campus Union.

He does not claim all credit for the

award, though. In a memo to his staff, Burham said, "It is through your dedication, cooperative spirit and commitment to the University community that this award has been presented to all of us. This award is truly yours."

Burham, who earned a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering from UNL in 1951, has worked in his current department since 1967. As manager of the planning and design section, he is responsible for budget, finances, personnel, records, operations and design.

Burham was nominated for the award

by Pam Bruestle, a UNOPA member and a clerical assistant who works in Physical Plant Administration. She said he "trusts and believes in his employees. He stimulates your interest in wanting to do the best job you possibly can." She said he also stays abreast of every project, from start to finish.

Bruestle also noted that Burham is a "community-oriented person" who is active in his church and as a Boy Scout leader. He also has served UNL in various capacities, ranging from membership on search committees to serving on

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## Woollam...

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involved in research. I can lecture about research topics in the classroom 'til I'm blue in the face. But it's lab work that teaches students how to make judgements and how to decide what steps to take in the right order," he says.

"Simply learning the facts from the textbook or teacher isn't enough. In research, judgement is as important as knowledge, both to the student and to potential employers. If you take the wrong path in a research project you waste your time and someone else's resources."

Woollam's days are a round of formal teaching and personal tutorials. A short visit to his office is marked by calls from people checking on details of an experiment they are funding and by students dropping by for advice or to ask him to check some of their results.

And even though there is a large computer-printout sign in his office that reads "I'd rather be sailing," Woollam clearly enjoys his work. So much so that he often works six days a week.

"But I really don't spend that much time doing intensive research myself anymore," Woollam says. "Outside of my teaching in the lab and classroom, I consider my main role to be that of a

broker to obtain funding so students can do research. During 25 years of research, I have been slowly building the credentials needed to help get grant money for the University."

Prior to coming to UNL, Woollam worked for NASA for 13 years. Contacts he made there now serve him well when he writes grant proposals.

For example, when he was writing a recent proposal for a large Department of Defense contract, he knew which people at the Air Force Office of Scientific Research would be reviewing the proposal. So he made arrangements for a meeting in Ohio between this group and the group of UNL people who would be conducting the research.

"We made sure that they knew we had the people and the equipment to get the job done right," Woollam says. "If you build your credentials and you build a situation, slowly and deliberately, then grants will come your way."

Acting as a broker has become second nature, he says. He promotes the laboratory facilities, the faculty and the students everywhere he can—while presenting papers in other cities or while happily buttonholing visitors to the College of Engineering and Technology, such as AT&T's vice-president.

Enhancing the reputation of the Col-

lege increases not only the chances for obtaining additional grants but enhances the reputation of everyone involved, including students.

"It's great for students and faculty to be doing research on issues that are on the cutting edge of scientific knowledge. Students leave here with some of the best training in the country. And the participation helps junior faculty out of an academic Catch-22," Woollam says. "You build your reputation by publishing, but without grants there is no publishing and without publishing there are no grants."

Woollam would like to see Nebraska businesses take advantage of the research facilities as well.

"There is a tremendous potential in the state for what I call spin-off business from the type of research we do. We can develop better techniques or better products that can be used in industries small and large," he says.

For Woollam himself, one of the best things about his research are the people with whom he works.

"I take tremendous pleasure in helping people learn. And I take tremendous pride in my mentor role and in helping students to get great jobs," he says. "I have made many lifetime friends."

Mary Ethel Emanuel

## UNL grad student tests safety of mailbox post design

Rural mailboxes can be hazardous. According to national transportation officials, more than 100 motorists die each year when their cars strike mailbox support posts that line a country road or highway.

"Your typical rural mailbox is more dangerous than most people realize," agrees Ron Faller, a UNL civil engineering research graduate student.

"The greatest hazard is that the mailbox, when struck, will separate from the post, fly through the passenger compartment, and strike the occupants. At high speeds, this can be deadly."

The good news is that such accidents may be on the decrease, at least in Nebraska. Last month the Nebraska Department of Roads, in conjunction with the Federal Highway Administration, approved a new safety design for rural mailbox supports. The endorsement came after Faller presented agen-

cy officials with the results of vehicle crash tests performed on the structure.

Faller presented his findings to the Transportation Research Board Jan. 12 during the board's annual meeting in Washington, D.C. The report documents a series of four full-scale vehicle crash tests that Faller conducted last summer as part of a contract between the UNL Civil Engineering Department and the Nebraska Department of Roads.

"Our study concludes that the new design meets the guidelines and criteria set forth by the Federal Highway Administration," he says. "In the event of impact with an automobile, the entire structure will break away with the mailbox remaining firmly attached to its supporting post."

The prototype in question was designed by engineers at the Nebraska Department of Roads and the Federal Highway Administration. Faller says it

is a modified version of an earlier mailbox support system designed by the agencies. Refinements include  
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## Boss...

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the UNL Parking Advisory Board. In the early 70s, he was president of UNL's University Association for Administrative Development (UAAD).

Linda Olson, chairman of UNOPA's Personal Growth Committee, said Burham was one of six University "bosses" nominated for the award.

Other nominees were Ray L. Jones, manager of General Stores; John Dzerk, operational manager for the Custodial Division; Jayne Wade Anderson, director of Greek Affairs and Cooperatives; Maurice Baker, professor of agricultural economics; and Bruce B. Johnson, associate professor of agricultural economics.