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CASNR fall faculty meeting

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CASNR fall faculty meeting
John C. Owens
Aug. 22, 2001
East Campus Union

12,000 miles
ACROSS NEBRASKA
CITIZENS of
NEBRASKA CARE
about their Under-
Grad University

Next week our campus will be "alive" with students. Students who have studied with us before, and are returning. Students who are with us for the first time.

Students from small towns and from cities – students who "know" what they want to do, and students who don't; students "seeking-skills" to start careers and to build their lives. Some of them will come looking for "mentors"; some will find mentors they didn't even know they sought.

For some, "this university" will be the largest community they've ever experienced. We'll meet them on the sidewalks and they'll look us in the eye, "hoping" for a friendly face and for recognition as they've been recognized in the small communities in which they spent their high school years. They'll say "hi" as they have to "everyone" in their hometowns, looking for "familiar-patterns" in this place so suddenly unfamiliar to them. They, and the students who join us from "all size" towns across Nebraska, come to us seeking "community" as well as knowledge, and it is our "great privilege to give them both". I count on "every-person" in this room to do

that. I count on every person within the Institute to do that.

I truly believe that those of us in the academy hold some of the most exciting jobs in the world. We get to encourage, to challenge, to counsel, and to applaud young men and women stepping forward in these great adventures that are their lives. We get to reach a hand back, as someone once reached a hand back to us, to transfer knowledge, to watch new ideas bloom. We get to see the thinkers of those new ideas bloom right along with them. The work we do here is work on which these young people will build and grow and move this world forward in ways you and I may not even imagine this afternoon.

It's no small thing, to be a teacher, and I don't know who on this campus could not help but feel proud when reading Fulbright Scholar J.P. Rhea's comment in the April *CASNR Class Acts* newsletter. He said, and I quote, "*The student/faculty rapport on East Campus is something that other universities, even other colleges at UNL, should try to model.*"

That is a wonderful testimonial to the work and dedication of CASNR faculty, and I hope everyone in this room today will relish that comment as we continue the tradition. I also hope everyone in this room will work with me and with the administration of CASNR and with all others involved to increase the enrollment in our college.

Like the entire University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources has the capacity for more students. We must do everything we can to fill that capacity. We need to fill it not just because it would be nice for us to have more students, but because people associate the quality of a college and its programs with the robustness of that college's enrollment. When enrollments are down, we run the risk of decision-makers deciding ^{THAT} the focus of our college is less important than it once was, and that simply is not the case.

I personally think it would be difficult to find a land-grant university with any stronger traditional agriculture programs than ours." As I've looked at our programs within the Institute and talked with people about them, I think the Institute's teaching, research, and extension production agriculture focus was built correctly in Nebraska. I applaud the people who built it, as well as everyone in the Institute who continues to build on our strengths today. This is fabulous work we are privileged to do.

The thing is, not enough people know that today. Nor do they seem to know the variety of natural resources and agriculture career opportunities available for those who study with us. This needs to change.

We provide quality education that prepares our graduates for exciting, productive, needed careers, and we need to get the word out. We need to work at

it, so young people, their parents, and their friends understand the careers our “field-to-table” food systems and natural resources programs offer. We need to share the excitement of our disciplines as well as the opportunities they provide. We need the importance of agriculture to be reflected in the number of College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources enrollments. And, once we've recruited new students to our campus, we need to retain them.

It's very important that we recognize the changes constantly occurring in our society, and look for new areas of study within our focus areas that respond to those changes by building on our traditional strengths. An example of that is the new professional golf management program that is being proposed from Agronomy and Horticulture's strong turfgrass program. We're building on a traditional strength to attract new students to our college.

As another example, I'm asking the Department of Animal Science to consider an equine science program, as well as a program in companion animals, and I welcome your suggestions for other new areas in which we can grow our student base. The College of Human Resources and Family Sciences is talking of revitalizing hotel, restaurant, and tourism management courses, and that literally would engage this campus in agriculture from the farm gate to the restaurant plate. It's exciting when we look at all there is out there for us to do.

Why am I "convinced" that such expansions are so important? Because expanding our offerings – and, with those expansions, people's views of the wide variety of careers CASNR degrees encompass – will allow us to build "on" and preserve "the strengths" of our traditional programs. We cannot afford to let those strengths erode or languish because of misunderstandings as to their importance, so we must do "all" we can do to preserve and build on our "strong suits." Adding new programs should build our base "to preserve" our strengths, not dilute them. And it should bring us students who will leave this campus "well-prepared" for their chosen careers and with a better understanding of the importance of agriculture and natural resources in the world – a plus for them, a plus for us, and a plus for the constituents with whom we work *all across NEBRASKA.*

I want to wish everyone here "a terrific school" year, and to "thank-you" for the excellent work you do. I look forward to "all" of us working together to build on CASNR's strengths for our students, for ourselves, and for Nebraska. Thank you.

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