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Squeeze time in UNL classrooms Higher enrollment taxes space, faculty hours Incoming UNL freshmen What's going on elsewhere

BYLINE: Khristopher J. Brooks, WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

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LINCOLN | The student section of Memorial Stadium isn't the only place on campus that students are packing.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln freshman class has grown by 962 students over the last four years.

Campus administrators say that increase has led to a shortage of classroom space, overburdened some faculty members who must teach more classes and created overcrowded residence halls.

Chancellor Harvey Perlman said the university has created more sections of some freshman- and sophomore-level courses to accommodate the influx of students. In turn, some professors must teach more frequently during the week.

In fall 2005, for example, there were 1,648 students enrolled in 74 sections of the basic freshman English class. This fall, that number has increased to 1,817 students and 83 sections.

"We have faculty members instructing the same courses too many times a week, and that's not an efficient way of teaching," Perlman said.

This fall, UNL hired four part-time teaching assistants to instruct the freshman course and other areas of English, if necessary. The university hopes to hire two full-time English faculty members by next fall.

While the classroom space crunch isn't a dire situation at this point, Perlman said, the university wants to plan for the future and possibly build a new lecture hall to teach large groups of students.

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A consultant looked at classroom space a year ago and suggested that UNL construct a 400-seat classroom, two 300-seat classrooms and four 100-seat classrooms.

Currently, two-thirds of UNL's classrooms seat 50 people or less. The largest lecture room is a 262-seater in Henzlik Hall, which typically is used for freshman biology.

A new hall with lecture classrooms larger than what's currently on campus is on UNL's wish list, but "we don't have the money to build such a building," Perlman said.

The university is spending \$14 million to move the Nebraska State Fair to Grand Island and even more money to create a research park at State Fair Park. The research park buildings won't create any classroom space, UNL officials said.

While a big lecture hall could alleviate the need for multiple sections of a class, some students say it might be harder for them to learn in a larger setting.

"I learn a lot from discussions, and in a classroom with 200 to 300 students, you don't get much of that," said Kay Norgard, a sophomore from Wisner, Neb.

Norgard, 20, takes a sociology course in a 250-seat lecture room. The professor, she said, quickly spills out course information as students frantically scribble notes. She often can't comprehend what the professor is saying.

"In a class like that, I feel it's not so much of making everyone understand fully, but just putting out a lot of broad stuff to a lot of people," said Norgard, who is majoring in communications.

But Norgard loves her other sociology class -- it has only 20 students. Students read several news reports, then discuss them.

William Nunez, institutional research and planning director, said UNL's student body is growing faster than most university officials expected. Aggressive out-of-state recruiting has resulted in larger freshman classes and more graduate students, university officials have said.

Next fall, Nunez projects overall enrollment to reach 24,100, up from 23,573 this fall. The largest enrollment was 25,075 in 1982, the last freshman class of baby boomers.

A 550-student, \$40.5 million residence hall set to open in 2010 should eliminate the need for more on-campus housing.

Doug Zatechka, UNL's housing director, said dorm space is limited for two reasons: the influx of freshmen and a higher number of upperclassmen staying on campus.

After a freshman year of living on campus, students usually move off campus, into fraternity or sorority houses or with a nearby family member, which frees up room for next year's incoming class.

That trend has diminished over the past five years, Zatechka said, because apartment-like housing such as the Courtyards and the Village have attracted sophomores, juniors and seniors.

In 2003, UNL had 2,008 upperclassmen returning to campus housing. That number increased to 2,450 this fall.

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The five-story residence hall at 17th and R Streets will open July 2010, and officials think it will fill quickly.

Given the rate of enrollment growth, Perlman said he's unsure if the university will need another residence hall in coming years.

"We don't have any plans at this point to build another residence hall," he said, "but you never know."

Incoming UNL freshmen

1997: 3200

2004: 3238

2008: 4200

What's going on elsewhere

Freshman students, by year. Numbers are for fall semester.

University of Iowa

2004: 4,083

2005: 4,017

2006: 4,289

2007: 4,287

2008: 4,246

Iowa State University

2004: 3,729

2005: 3,769

2006: 3,983

2007: 4,347

2008: 4,546

University of Nebraska at Kearney

2004: 1,098

2005: 1,027

2006: 957

2007: 948

2008: 1,045

University of Kansas

2004: 4,269

2005: 4,201

2006: 4,153

2007: 4,084

2008: N.A.

Kansas State University

2004: 3,466

2005: 3,474

2006: 3,385

2007: 3,526

2008: N.A.

SOURCES: The Universities

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Contact the writer
444-1229, khristopher.brooks@owh.com

GRAPHIC: Color Photo/1 Students gather in a hallway in Hamilton Hall at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. University officials say that with enrollment up, the campus is short on classroom space. Line Graph/1 Incoming UNL freshmen 1997: 3200 2004: 3238 2008: 4200 Table/1 What's going on elsewhere Freshman students, by year. Numbers are for fall semester. University of Iowa 2004: 4,083 2005: 4,017 2006: 4,289 2007: 4,287 2008: 4,246 Iowa State University 2004: 3,729 2005: 3,769 2006: 3,983 2007: 4,347 2008: 4,546 University of Nebraska at Kearney 2004: 1,098 2005: 1,027 2006: 957 2007: 948 2008: 1,045 University of Kansas 2004: 4,269 2005: 4,201 2006: 4,153 2007: 4,084 2008: N.A. Kansas State University 2004: 3,466 2005: 3,474 2006: 3,385 2007: 3,526 2008: N.A. SOURCES: The Universities Contact the writer 444-1229, khristopher.brooks@owh.com

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