

18 of 312 DOCUMENTS

Omaha World Herald (Nebraska)

February 9, 2000, Wednesday METRO EDITION

From Brain Drain to Brain Gain Institute Impact Already Evident NU Program Growth

BYLINE: JIM RASMUSSEN**SOURCE:** WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER**SECTION:** ;NEWS; Pg. 1**LENGTH:** 1144 words

Trevor Clark says he probably would have left the state to go to college if it weren't for the University of Nebraska's new \$ 70 million technology institute in Omaha.

Now, a little over a semester into his education at the institute, Clark is glad he stayed in Nebraska.

"It's exceeded all the expectations I had coming in," said Clark, who was valedictorian of his class of 350 students at North Platte High School. The electronics engineering major picked Nebraska after considering Iowa State University and Colorado School of Mines.

Clark's decision was just what Nebraska leaders had in mind when they designed the high-tech Peter Kiewit Institute of Information Science, Technology and Engineering. A major goal was to slow the "brain drain" of young Nebraskans leaving the state for college and careers. The institute opened last fall. Although it's too early to say what its long-term impact will be, some early signs are positive.

Omaha enrollment in the institute's two affiliated colleges rose 11 percent in the fall of 1999, to 1,881. The institute has received 212 applicants for its elite Scott scholarships next fall, well ahead of last year's pace. Since Nov. 1, a dozen students have applied to transfer to the institute from other universities.

And while the majority of applications to the institute's programs are from Iowa and Nebraska, an increasing number are applying from out of state, including some from as far away as New Jersey and Texas.

"It's real clear there are a lot of young people deciding to stay here who would have gone outside of the state," said Winnie Callahan, the institute's executive director. "Then I think you've got the other side of the issue. With the reputation we're getting nationally, we have 'brain gain' taking place."

Omaha businesses are forging ties with the institute in hopes of hiring graduates in fields where workers are scarce, such as computer specialties.

One such business is LeaseTeam Inc., a growing Omaha company that develops software for equipment finance firms. The firm recently spent a week recruiting in the Kiewit Institute lobby.

"We've found it's sometimes very difficult to attract somebody to Omaha," said Russ Hallberg, the company's president. If the Kiewit Institute can keep computer-oriented students in Omaha, he said, it will help provide a better labor pool for computer firms.

University officials said the institute's drawing power will be increased by the addition of a residence hall and conference center next fall.

The \$ 15 million dormitory-conference center complex is being donated by Omaha billionaire Walter Scott Jr., chairman of Level 3 Communications Co.

From Brain Drain to Brain Gain Institute Impact Already Evident NU Program Growth Omaha World Herald
(Nebraska) February 9, 2000, Wednesday

Scott also led a private fund-raising drive that produced \$ 47 million to build the institute itself, including \$ 15 million from the Peter Kiewit Foundation. State government provided \$ 23 million.

The institute, built on former Ak-Sar-Ben land at 67th and Pacific Streets, was a joint effort of the university, businesses and state and local governments. Its creation was the result of a compromise after business leaders called for NU to start a new engineering college in Omaha to fill a shortage of technical and computer workers.

After a study of the needs, the NU Board of Regents agreed to begin a new College of Information Science and Technology at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and to build the new facility. First Data Resources, an Omaha-based unit of First Data Corp., donated the land for the new building,

Scott is funding 100 scholarships at the institute, which includes programs of both UNO and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Engineering and Technology.

The availability of a Scott scholarship was a key factor in Nick Hildebrandt's decision to attend UNO and the Kiewit Institute. The freshman computer science major from Lincoln scored a 30 on his ACT and compiled a 3.85 grade-point average. He also considered Iowa State and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

"I never would have come to UNO if this place wasn't here," he said of the institute. "All the classes in this building, everything's pretty high-tech. And a big motivating factor was that I got the scholarship."

Hildebrandt recently was one of more than 110 Kiewit Institute students who were looking for internships with local businesses, said Ted Plugge, the institute's career resource coordinator.

"I'm excited I have lots of students interested in internships, but companies need to come forward and start utilizing the resource they have here," Plugge said.

The institute made a strong first impression last week on UNO alumni Jim and Kathie Green of Grand Island and their son, Matt. A senior at Grand Island Central Catholic High School, Matt wants to study computer science. He has a 3.57 grade-point average and scored a 29 on his ACT.

Until recently, Matt's parents said they had never considered sending him to UNO. But after touring the Kiewit Institute Thursday, they came away impressed.

"I've never seen so many computers," said Jim Green, a vice president in an insurance consulting firm. "It looked like NASA."

The Kiewit Institute has raised UNO's standing in Kathie Green's eyes.

"When we went here, UNO was where you went because your parents couldn't afford to send you anywhere else," the 1976 UNO graduate said. "Now, if you want to study computers, this is the place to go - East Coast, West Coast, anywhere. It's very state-of-the-art."

Deans of the two NU colleges that offer programs at the institute say the new building boosts the university's ability to attract top-quality students.

"If you put together a nationally recognized program, I think our goal should be to cause a brain drain into Nebraska," said Wayne Dyksen, dean of the UNO College of Information Science and Technology. "I'm convinced we can attract students from Iowa, Kansas, Colorado, Illinois and other places."

UNL's College of Engineering and Technology is focusing primarily on three areas in Omaha: architectural and construction engineering; computer and electronics engineering; and engineering technology.

The college's dean, James Hendrix, said he plans to push for adding more postgraduate offerings in Omaha, including professional certificates, professional engineering degrees and a master's of science in engineering program.

He said the Kiewit Institute has been a big step forward for the college's programs in Omaha.

"It helps us attract the types of students we want and the type of faculty we want," he said.

NU Program Growth

Information Science, Technology and Engineering enrollment in Omaha (fall semester)

1997: 1, 475

From Brain Drain to Brain Gain Institute Impact Already Evident NU Program Growth Omaha World Herald
(Nebraska) February 9, 2000, Wednesday

1998: 1,693

1999: 1,881

Source: University of Nebraska

LOAD-DATE: February 12, 2000

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: Color Photo/1 JEFF BEIERMANN/1, **RISING ENROLLMENT:** The opening of the **Kiewit** Institute has been credited with boosting enrollment in the NU engineering and information science programs. Above, sophomore Troy McDaniels of Council Bluffs gives a report on landscaping to his class in Omaha and one in Norfolk, Neb., via satellite. Bar Graph/1 Darrell Forbes/1; JEFF BEIERMANN/WORLD-HERALD/1sf Darrell Forbes/World-Herald/1sf

Copyright 2000 The Omaha World-Herald Company