The 7:00 AM meeting was devoted entirely to issues of enrollment. Admissions representatives from each of the NU campuses delivered presentations describing enrollment and marketing strategies. Following are highlights from the UNK presentation by Dusty Newton:

Freshman numbers: 2004 Fall head count was + 2.2% (25 students) over the last 3 years
First-time, FT freshmen: 2004 Fall head count was + 4.3% (44 students) over the last 3 years
Part-time freshmen: 2004 Fall head count was - 23% (19 students)
Nonresidents (U.S.) and International students: 5.2% and 5.8% respectively of student body 2002-04

Fall 2005 freshman indicators compared to 2004:
Applications slightly down
Advances in HomeBase and Colorado
Decline in Omaha area
Campus visits markedly up
SAE (Summer Advising and Enrollment) numbers level

Fall 2002-2004 Graduate/Continuing Education
Slight decline (27 students) over past 3 years
Online enrollments increasing markedly (251 → 697)
Face-to-face off-campus enrollments decline (218 → 141)

Undergraduate Targets Fall 2005:
Total head count: 5390 (+10)
Nonresident US: 337 (+6)
American Minorities: 242 (present count)
Internationals: 368 (present count)
Nebraskans: 4685 (+4)
Full-time, first-time freshmen: 1118 (+20)
Transfers: 335 (present count)

Grad Target Fall 2005:
Total headcount: 1000

[Note: The full report of Dusty’s presentation, along with the presentations from the other 3 campuses, is available upon request.]

Jay Noren, Executive Vice-President and Provost, then delivered a presentation over NU enrollment strategies and trends. Highlights from this report:

From Fall 1994-Fall 2004, NU is down 9.1% in total enrollment
UNK is down 16.2% in total enrollment (7820 → 6932)
Distance enrollments are rising steadily
Percentage of NU non-resident students is up from 9 → 17%
UNL and UNK had the great decrease in enrollment among their peers
Nebraska is below the nation-wide long-term trend in projected number of high school graduates from 2003-04 to 2012-13: +5.4% for the US, -7.7% for the contiguous states (minus Colorado) and -8% for Nebraska
Among the surrounding states, South Dakota had the largest increase in enrollment (+24.1%) and Nebraska had the largest decrease in enrollment (-1.6%)
The community college transfer trend is increasing.
Community colleges and private colleges have had increases in enrollment.

Following is a synopsis of the ensuing discussion:

Regent Ferlic suggested a unified NU recruitment task force and articulation agreements among the NU campuses. He also suggested that NU partner with community colleges.

Regent Miller was dissatisfied with all the presentations, recommending instead a SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. He called for specifics, for more on enrollment strategies rather than marketing, along with plans to fix weaknesses and an overall theme and strategy. How much do some of these programs cost? Are they worthy investments? Miller claimed to have “no confidence based on the presentations today” and asked that they be re-worked for a future date. Other questions from Regent Miller: How do other universities (example: Bellevue) boost enrollment? What are the best practices? He noted that NU can’t just have “business as usual,” suggesting that some outside perspective might be in order.

Regent Hawks stated that the BOR thinks we need to do more and better. How much do the 4 campuses strategize together? How do we get faculty more involved? How do our competitors do it?

UNK Chancellor Perlman cautioned against competing “down to the bottom,” citing an advertisement for Degrees in Two Weeks! No Studying! He fears that price and time are becoming more significant to consumers than quality.

Regent Wilson agreed that we can’t sell a cheap, easy degree.

Regent Schroeder questioned the claim that students choose a college based on the quality of its programs, suggesting instead that “touchy feely” factors may be just as important. He proposed a retreat to deal with enrollment issues.

Regent Hergert claimed NU hasn’t done a good enough job. We need to convince students and parents of the value of their investment. Students need earlier contacts (grades 8-9).

UNMC Chancellor Maurer stated that academic excellence sells.
Regent Hawks claimed that a ceiling on tuition increases might help boost enrollment.

UNMC Student Regent Behrendt stated that “personalization is the key.”

UNK Chancellor Kristensen, responding to Regent Miller’s criticism, noted that the UNK presentation was not intended to be a business analysis. Instead, it’s an overview, a broad strategy. He noted that UNK is busy changing its product every day rather than simply putting more money into marketing.

Regent Hassebrook noted that aggressive tuition increases will make us less competitive. Some families “aren’t in the market for a Cadillac.”

Regent Miller stated that many of these issues go way beyond recruitment and marketing. He called for more judicious use of adjunct faculty (professionals in their field whose presence in the classroom adds credibility) and accelerated programs.

Regent Wilson called for more discussion of faculty involvement in recruiting, citing a faculty member from Purdue who made weekly contact with a Nebraska recruit. He stated that personal contact is more important than brochures.

NU President Milliken asked how we stabilize and grow enrollment in the light of demographics. How do we involve everyone? He suggested that responsibility for enrollment (example: faculty involvement) might be tied to budgeting. The issue needs ongoing work.

The 7:00 meeting concluded.

The regular Board of Regents meeting followed.

UNK Assistant Director of Residential and Greek Life, Camilla Wacker, received a KUDOS award.

The Board approved a motion to implement a differential tuition plan, which would have effects on the curricula at the four campuses. Some examples of how the plan might work:

If the state faces a shortage of math and science teachers, tuition would be lowered for courses leading to certification in these areas.
Lower-level courses might have lower tuition rates (probably in an effort to compete with community college rates).
Upper-division students who postpone taking required lower-division courses might pay higher tuition for these courses when they do enroll.

The BOR cautioned that it is important to keep the university mission in mind when setting tuition. Regents also expressed reservations about charging higher tuition to students who take longer than 4 years to complete their degree, noting that many students who need more time are not lazy but are working off campus, perhaps full-time, out of necessity.
The Board also improved a 5% tuition increase, the lowest in 8 years. Regent Wilson emphasized the need for competitive faculty salaries. The estimated tuition increase for 2005-06 is +7.04% among UNK’s peers.

Discussion then turned to the FY 2005-06 operating budget. NU faces a projected deficit of nearly $7.5 million, to be covered by expenditure reductions. $10.5 million is the base figure for NU Programs of Excellence.

UNK Chancellor Kristensen presented a request that the BOR approve issuance of bonds for a housing project. The project will replace 2 residence halls recommended for demolition and add a building that will accentuate the campus entrance and add modern suite living to students’ housing options. Regent Wilson noted that given the competition factor, it is imperative that the BOR move on this project. He has been “appalled” at the condition of some of UNK’s housing. Student regent Brad Bohn provided anecdotal evidence of recruits who were impressed with the academic facilities and faculty, but not with campus housing.

The motion passed to issue bonds to cover the projected $20,280 cost of the project.

The BOR meeting adjourned at 11:30 AM.

The following documents are available upon request:

- Enrollment Strategies/University of Nebraska: Strategic Questions and Trends
- University of Nebraska Operating Budget FY 2005-06
- University of Nebraska at Kearney: New Residence Hall
- BOR Policies of the University of Nebraska on Tuition Level Guidelines
- Rules for Granting of Nonresident Tuition Scholarships to Children of NU Alumni
- Purchase of Commercial Federal Bank Property (UNMC)
- Individual campus presentations on enrollment strategies

Martha Kruse, UNK Faculty Senate President