

Counselors' lack of perspective hurts minorities, professor says

By Paul Coughlin
Of the Emerald

The University Counseling Center's service for minority students is inadequate, according to Ed Coleman, director of Ethnic Studies.

Coleman has observed and talked with minorities at the University for 16 years.

The problem is most counselors lack the cultural perspective needed to assist minorities, Coleman says. Therefore, students who might need counseling tend not to trust the Counseling Center, he says.

"Also, there is a real barrier in the kind of information that many people in the counseling field have — they lack that needed dimension. Most of the training comes from the white European model, and there is little or no opportunity for them to take courses for the culturally different," he says.

Coleman says minorities have different mental attitudes and psychological references, which counselors trained to help middle-class whites can't "decode."

The result is that middle-class white values are forced on the minority students, who then

leave the Counseling Center more confused and alienated than before, Coleman says.

To improve the Counseling Center, the University needs to bring counselors of different ethnic and racial backgrounds to campus, he says.

Dr. William Kirtner, director of the Counseling Center, agrees minority groups are not receiving adequate counseling.

The Counseling Center doesn't offer what it should because it doesn't have the personnel to cover the wide spectrum of ethnic backgrounds, Kirtner says. He agrees with Coleman's plan to bring counselors of diverse ethnic backgrounds to the University.

Currently, of the seven full-time professional counselors, one is a minority. One or two of the center's interns and practicum students who work in the center each year is a minority as well.

However, Kirtner is suspicious of Coleman's statement that many minority students leave the Counseling Center more confused than when they enter.

He says he believes in "some degree of science." He upholds the idea that what is good

counseling for one is good for another because all people possess intrinsic needs and wants, he says.

"I know some middle-class white people who come here and leave saying the same thing (that they are more confused)," Kirtner says.

Coleman says his plan to bring minority counselors to campus "would also add to the cultural dimension on this campus."

But he is pessimistic about the plan's future. "I wouldn't expect it to happen given the present budget and attitude that the University has. I wouldn't expect us to bring any (minority counselors). If we brought one, I would be more than surprised."

There are two reasons why the University has many minorities, Coleman says. "We have an active recruitment program, and the University has a reputation as a leading college."

Both the University and the state benefit from allowing foreign students to study at the University because of increased revenues. And the mixing of cultures is healthy for all students, Coleman says.



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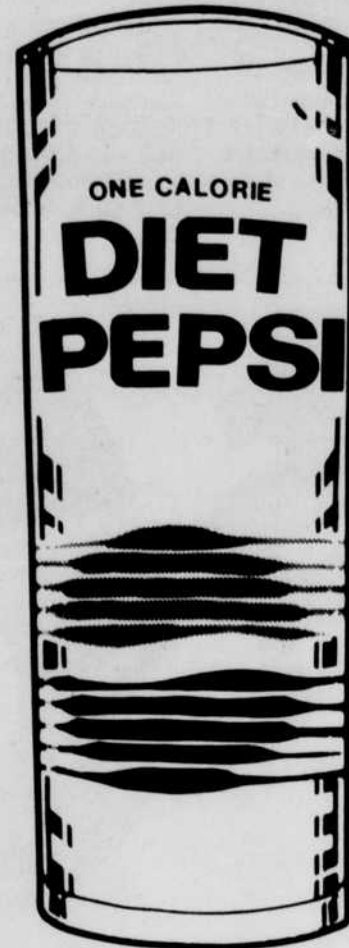
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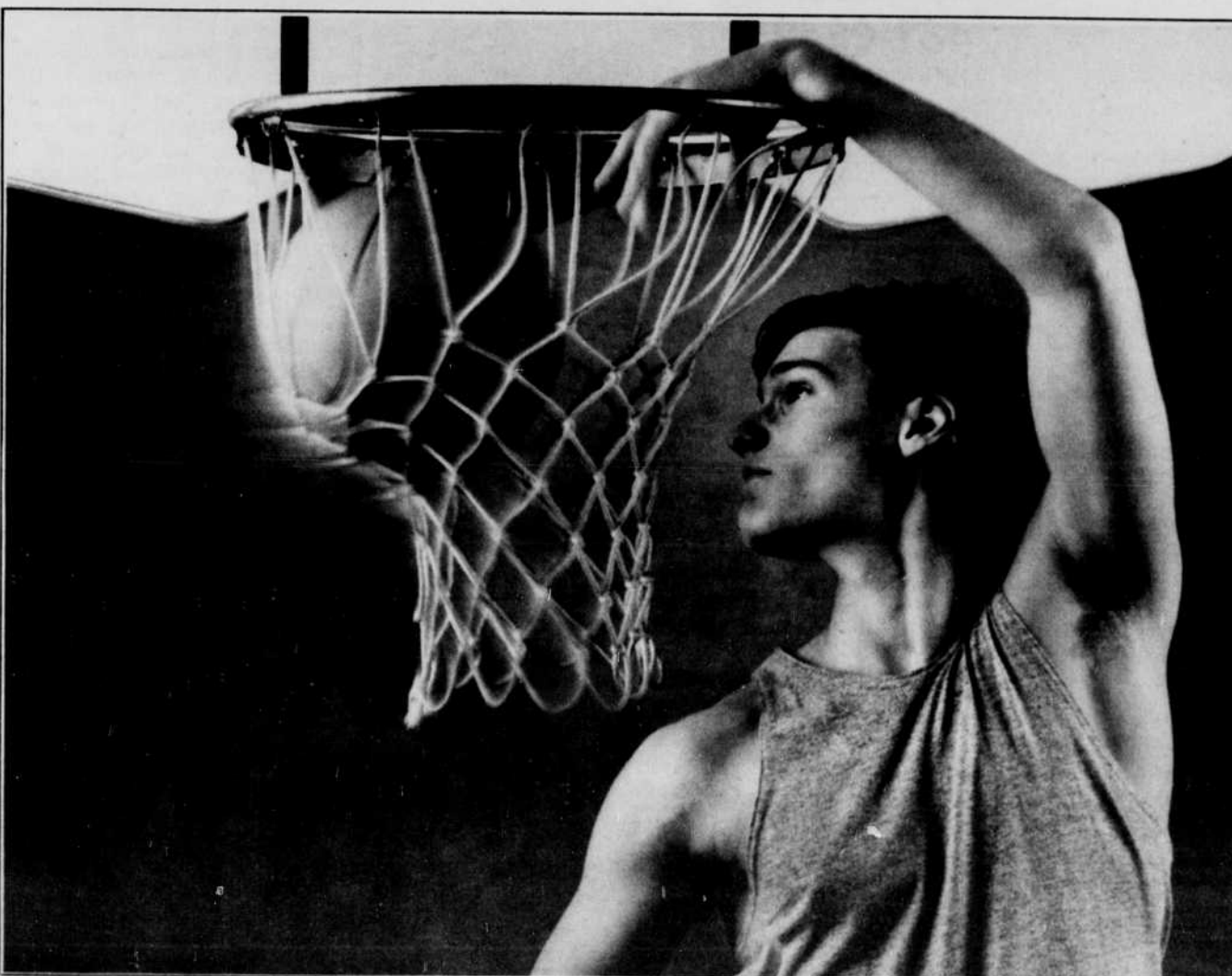
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