

Provost hopeful: 'Change is challenge'

By Paula Green
Emerald Reporter

Provost aspirant Gerhard Meisels, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Nebraska, addressed a gathering of 50 in the Gerlinger Lounge on Monday.

The topic of Meisels' speech, "Universities and Change," is one that he considers an "issue that is perhaps one of the most important challenges that universities face in the late 20th century."

Citing an ancient Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times," Meisels said interesting times are those in which new conditions, circumstances and knowledge must be addressed. Meisels pointed out that the rates of change threaten the control in our lives, and it is a university's responsibility to face this.

Meisels said the underlying values, priorities and strengths of a university need to be protected from change, but that such protection can be achieved in the production of "thoughtware," rather than technological "hardware."

"A university must remain concerned with the knowledge, insight and growth of the students, and not respond to every external pressure," he said.

Meisels explained that universities should prize careful study in analysis and depth, and must remain reluctant to make or accept major decisions unless all relevant facts are at hand and the potential outcomes are identified.

"This approach assures objectivity — establishes integrity and credibility, and ensures commitment by all those involved," Meisels said.

Another conflict he addressed is the pressures that universities feel while responding to the needs of society at large.

"We are often asked for a 'quick fix' or a magical cure, or perhaps a solution to the immediate short-term problem," Meisels said.

He said the solution to such a dilemma must take time and should not follow the perceptions that universities should be conducted as businesses, consulting laboratories or contractors in return for price and profit.

"A university can never jeopardize its integrity and ob-

jectivity, or afford to allow academic profit to dictate its residuals," Meisels said.

While addressing the issue of change, Meisels explained that universities must not resist change simply because it exists, but rather reach a state of mind that views change as an opportunity instead of a curse.

"The future belongs to those who see opportunity where others see only problems," Meisels said, quoting the president of a company mentioned in the popular motivational guide "In Search of Excellence."

While Meisels agreed that the values of traditional education must be preserved, he noted that the university's research function creates new knowledge and insight, as well as an understanding of the past and a new view of the future.

"The objective of a major university is to create new and innovative insight," Meisels said. "A university must allow this to happen."

He said he sees an accumulative expertise in faculty, who can provide an outreach to the community, as another key function of a university.

"All universities of quality provide some form of service or outreach to a community, which eventually takes advantage of the discoveries within the university," he said.

Meisels said he believes academic quality can be achiev-



Gerhard Meisels

ed through the use of faculty role models as well as students.

"(We) must ensure that the student is more concerned with the process of learning than with the result itself," Meisels said, adding, "but that can only be brought about by the academic 'change-masters' of the faculty."

Meisels received an equivalent to a bachelor's degree from the University of Vienna, Austria, and a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from the University of Notre Dame. He is the third and final provost candidate to visit the University and give a public presentation.

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