



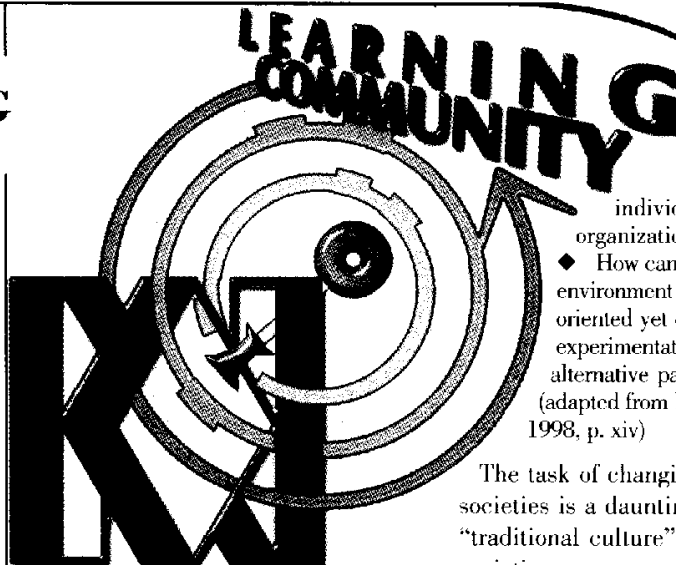
MAKING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Dorothy I. Mitisifer

This headline heralds a natural enhancement of the impressive history of Kappa Omicron Nu and its forebears: Kappa Omicron Phi and Omicron Nu. In this year of 2000 it is right and proper to chart a course for the new millennium. During this past year Kappa Omicron Nu sought input from its ownership and stakeholders. A survey of active and inactive members and a survey of higher education stakeholders provided insights regarding needs and goals. Kappa Omicron Nu as a learning community is gaining currency.

Each word of the sub-title of this paper was chosen carefully.

- ◆ *Making* implies an ever-changing, fluid, and dynamic state that can undergo reconfiguration with new information, energy, or events.
- ◆ *Learning* connotes ongoing action and perpetual curiosity—engagement and growing. The learning paradigm rather than the instruction paradigm gives primacy to the learner and learning outcomes over the teacher and instruction. This paradigm also “extends learning beyond the classroom and builds on students’ interests, critical thinking, and problem solving skills as the goal in undergraduate higher education. In addition it strengthens the university’s focus on community outreach and builds partnerships or bridges that assist in solving society’s problems” (Mitisifer &



Miller, 1999, p. 16). The emphasis on learning also recognizes that *knowledge* is gaining in economic value (Davis & Botkin, 1994).

- ◆ *Community* implies a group linked by common interests.

“Making a Learning Community” explores the development of people who have learned how to learn and that of organizational systems with the capacity for collective learning.

According to DuFour & Eaker (1998), a learning community requires “a willingness to learn from its external environment, and it is this willingness that most . . . [organizations] have not demonstrated” (p. xiv). Kappa Omicron Nu will need to use insights from other organizations to struggle with the following questions:

- ◆ How can we clarify and communicate the mission and values of Kappa Omicron Nu?
- ◆ How can we initiate, implement, and sustain a change process?
- ◆ How can we provide strong leadership while we empower chapters and those closest to the action?
- ◆ How can we shape the Kappa Omicron Nu culture and provide structures that support the culture we seek?
- ◆ How can we create collaborative processes that result in both

- individual and organizational learning?
- ◆ How can we foster an environment that is results-oriented yet encourages experimentation and alternative paradigms? (adapted from DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. xiv)

The task of changing honor societies is a daunting one. The “traditional culture” of honor societies on campus conveys little beyond recognition activities. This culture has the effect of making it incredibly difficult to change honor societies. Although there have long been higher expectations at the national leadership level of Kappa Omicron Nu, there has been little impact on the institution. It is therefore incumbent upon Kappa Omicron Nu to form collaborative partnerships with academic units if it is to increase learning outcomes.

In addition to the challenge and complexity of change efforts, lack of clarity of intended results undoubtedly played a role in the

In This Issue . . .

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- ◆ *Message from the Board of Directors*
- ◆ *Learning Community Partnerships*

difference in expectations at the highest levels and reality at the grassroots chapter level. Instead of the Kappa Omicron Nu focus on content and processes, a new effort needs to generate consensus on and articulate intended results. Senge et al. (1994) refers to learning communities as “deep learning cycles.” By this he means that the essence of members and the community itself are changed in terms of awareness and sensibilities, skills and capabilities, and attitudes and beliefs. Results are achieved in the milieu of trust, relationships, acceptance, and synergy.

Senge described the means of activating the deep learning cycle in his earlier work: “Today, I believe, five new ‘component technologies’ are gradually converging to innovate learning organizations. Though developed separately, each will, I believe, prove critical to the others’ success, just as occurs with any ensemble. Each provides a vital dimension in building organizations that can truly ‘learn,’ that can continually enhance their capacity to realize their highest aspirations” (1990, p. 6). Senge called them five basic learning disciplines—developmental paths for acquiring certain skills or competencies:

1. Systems thinking - a conceptual framework for making full patterns clear and for helping to see the whole.
2. Personal mastery - the ability to clarify and deepen vision, focus energies, and gain proficiency—continual growth.
3. Mental models - the internal pictures that influence how the world is understood and how action is taken.
4. Building shared vision - shared goals, values, and missions “bind people together around a common identity and sense of destiny” (p. 9).
5. Team learning - “team learning starts with ‘dialogue,’ the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine ‘thinking together’” (p. 10).

When these five disciplines develop as an ensemble, three key ideas, according to Senge et al. (1994), characterize learning communities. First, relationships are more fundamental than things. The community as a living system, a pattern of interactions, demonstrates the “primacy of the whole.” Second, individuals embody community in their nature. Human nature is not independent of culture; the community nature of self prevents isolation, loneliness, and loss of “sense of place.” The *ubuntu* culture holds that the sense of self is found in “being in relationship” to other people. This notion reinforces the idea that individuals become more fully human in community. Third, the power of language lies in its generative nature. Instead of language describing an independent reality, its power stems from its ability to help us interpret our experience in a myriad of ways so that out of multiple interpretations comes those that are most useful for the particular purpose.

Organizations in the new millennium will be characterized by unending transitions. Kappa Omicron Nu has the opportunity to build upon its past by using the wisdom of its members and stakeholders to move toward the vision of a learning community. Although it would be comfortable to have a map to the future, the insight of Stacey (1992) should be heeded. “Route and destination must be discovered through the journey itself if you wish to travel to new lands. The key to success lies in the creative activity of making new maps, not in the imitative following and refining of existing ones” (p. 1).

The new map must expect uncharted waters, the unknowable. An innovative organization must create, invent, and discover the destination as it goes. Instead of a chief, teams

need to question everything and generate new perspectives. Rather than building on strengths, they must develop new strengths and create their own environments. (Mistifer & Miller, 1999, p. 7)

In general, they must develop their navigational principles, draw their maps, as they go along. To do this, they must drop the stable equilibrium mind-set and develop a new one that recognizes the positive role of instability and the fact that long-term futures are unknowable. (Stacey, 1992, p. 4)

Some may question the legitimacy of exploring a learning community because it might seem to imply that learning has not been the objective. That’s not the case, but the challenge is to institutionalize learning—i.e., to define and build the community capabilities and structures such as culture, processes, systems, and skills (Hutchens, 1998). “. . . learning is a journey. It is not a skill or a technique; it is a discipline. It’s a way of looking at the world. It is about growth and discovery” (p. 61). Through the learning community system, each individual’s “vital force” and the “collective force” are enhanced. When learning is aligned and deliberate, Kappa Omicron Nu can surpass our fondest expectations. Thus, the development of a learning culture should become our highest priority.

A caution: MacKenzie (1996) warns about developing a model out of successful ventures.

It is common history of enterprises to begin in a state of naïve groping, stumble onto success, milk the success with a vengeance and, in the process, generate systems that arrogantly turn away from the source of their original success: groping.

If an organization is to choose vigor over "an ultimate state of inert uniformity," it must honor and support both the rational exploitation of success and nonrational art of groping. (p. 92)

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Web-based Course Announced

Kappa Omicron Nu announces the release of a web-based course entitled *Self-Managed Mentoring*. The course was developed to support the leadership development mission of the Society.

According to Executive Director Dorothy I. Mitstifer, "We are proud to introduce this course as a contribution toward our mission of empowered leaders. Self-managed mentoring is not the traditional mentoring model that tethers a mentee to a wise elder but a mosaic-building process of self-development. Self-managed mentoring is a decision-making

model that situates the responsibility onto the mentee and expands the notion of mentoring beyond traditional mentors to step-ahead mentors, peer mentors, niche mentors, parents and siblings, biographies, illuminating materials and media, reflection on field experiences."

The course was adapted from the educational module, *Mentoring: The Human Touch*, by Susan S. Stratton, owner of Leading Edge Mentoring, and Lisa H. Wootton and Dorothy I. Mitstifer of Kappa Omicron Nu. *Self-Managed Mentoring* offers four choices of depth: knowledge only, knowledge and selected experiences, self-managed life change, and life change facilitated by telementoring or e-mail mentoring. It can also be used for academic credit as a special problem, as a course or component of a course, and for continuing education or profession development units. Offered as a "freebie" to members and the public for self-managed personal development, other uses require the usual permission for copyrighted material.

Self-Managed Mentoring can be found on the Kappa Omicron Nu Web site: www.kon.org. For further information, contact Kappa Omicron Nu, 4990 Northwind Drive, Suite 140, East Lansing, MI 48823-5031; Telephone: 517.351.8335; Facsimile: 517.351.8336; E-mail: info@kon.org.

Comprehensive Leadership Competencies

Leadership as an active, mind-engaging process of meaning-making in a community of practice (family, neighborhood, organization, institution, or government) is accomplished by practicing the principles and

utilizing the core features of Reflective Human Action.

- 1) Principles
 - a) Accept chaos
 - b) Share information
 - c) Develop relationships
 - d) Embrace vision
- 2) Core features
 - a) Act with authenticity
 - b) Demonstrate ethical sensibility
 - c) Display personal substance in actions (spirituality)
 - d) Determine action (change) by framing issues and implementing interventions according to the theoretical framework of the Action Wheel (Mitstifer, 1998):
 - i) Mission – direction
 - ii) Meaning – significance and context (why)
 - iii) Existence – history and situation
 - iv) Resources – critical assets
 - v) Structure – plans and processes (individual, group, collaboration)
 - vi) Power – expenditure of energy (decision, passion, will)

Leadership Development Approaches

Kappa Omicron Nu developed an educational module (*Leadership: Reflective Human Action*, Andrews, et. al., 1995) with four chapters that explain the theory and three chapters of experiential activities. The activities, utilizing an experiential learning mode, teach the core features and principles of Reflective Human Action. In addition, the Margaret Wheatley video (1993), *Leadership and the New Science*, introduces the principles in a dazzling display of images that explain the concepts in extraordinary clarity and depth. These resources can be utilized in the following educational formats.

- 1) Introduction to Reflective Human Action (3-4 hours)
 - a) View Video, *Leadership and the New Science*
 - b) Dialogue in small groups to explore principles of Reflective Human Action presented in the video. Focus on "develop relationships."

- c) Explore core features of Reflective Human Action.
 - d) Apply Reflective Human Action to individual and group leadership challenges.
- 2) Reflective Human Action Workshop (1 day)
- a) View Video, *Leadership and the New Science*
 - b) Dialogue in small groups to explore principles of Reflective Human Action presented in the video. Focus on "develop relationships."
 - c) Explore core features of Reflective Human Action. Focus on "authenticity."
 - d) Explore Action Wheel.
 - e) Apply Reflective Human Action to individual and group leadership challenges utilizing the Action Wheel.
 - f) Set personal development goals and develop action plan for accomplishing the goals.
- 3) Reflective Human Action Course (1 or more credits as a single course or component of a course)
- a) View Video, *Leadership and the New Science*
 - b) Dialogue in small groups to explore principles of Reflective Human Action presented in the video. Focus on each principle.
 - c) Explore core features of Reflective Human Action. Focus on each feature.
 - d) Explore Action Wheel.
 - e) Apply Reflective Human Action to individual and group leadership challenges utilizing the Action Wheel.
 - f) Apply Reflective Human Action to specialization and professional issues utilizing the Action Wheel.
 - g) Conduct personal needs assessment and set personal development goals.
 - h) Develop action plan for small groups for accomplishing the goals.
 - i) Implement action plans.

Summary

Through Reflective Human Action all individuals have "the opportunity for creative engagement, for leading—even though some will choose not to. It is our earnest belief that all persons can empower themselves, then it is also our belief that all persons can choose to lead in some way, at some time" (Mitstifer, 1995, p. 1).

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Call for Papers – Service Learning

for publishing in
Kappa Omicron Nu *FORUM*
the journal of Kappa Omicron Nu
Honor Society

Topic: Service Learning: Its Opportunity and Promise

Guest Editor: Dr. Julia R. Miller, Michigan State University

Objectives: This theme will

1. Describe service learning as a value-added curriculum strategy for learning and teaching.
2. Explain how service learning implements Boyer's notion of the "scholarship of integration and service."
3. Propose models for how service learning can be used to create learning communities in higher education.
4. Present models for using the knowledge base and research in addressing societal problems through service learning.
5. Explore service learning as a vehicle for research (scholarship of outreach).
6. Explore service learning as a means of implementing problem-based strategies in the learning process, including the characteristics of effective experiential learning experiences.
7. Describe service learning as a tool for professional development and preparation of the next generation

of professionals as citizens in the workplace.

8. Discuss how partnerships and collaborations can be created with industry, business, government, and communities to develop service learning programs.

Overview:

Service Learning: Its Opportunity and Promise focuses on theory and "Best Practices" that anchor learning and teaching to rich experiential contexts. By engaging learners, opportunities are available to give new dignity to the service dimension, enrich learning, and renew commitment to reciprocal community and university partnerships and collaborations. Critical perspectives on connecting practice and research in the learning environment, around "real world" issues faced by communities, provide salient means to implement programming for an educated, responsible citizenry and career preparation. Authors are invited to explore and share different perspectives on forms of engagement that service learning offers in meeting the challenges and opportunities for learners today and into the next millennium.

Information and Deadline:

Kappa Omicron Nu FORUM is a refereed publication outlet for both members and nonmembers. Manuscripts are due August 31, 2000.

For further information or to obtain a copy of "Guidelines for Authors," contact:

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Amy Stoll-University of Missouri-Columbia

Learning Community Partnerships: Academic Units and Kappa Omicron Nu

The recent Kappa Omicron Nu project to explore the future of honor societies in FCS/Human Sciences and the issues identified during the Summit (on the future of the field in higher education) provide ideas for Kappa Omicron Nu to ensure a distinctive educational benefit to members and the field. Another motivating factor for change is the conclusion of leaders in the Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS) that honor societies must do more than recognize scholastic achievements to continue to exist in the new millennium. ACHS envisions the need for honor societies to assure their continued existence by making significant contributions to the academic goals of institutions.

Kappa Omicron Nu has been active in providing materials for leadership and professional development and has relied on honor society advisers to help chapter officers conduct significant programming. But this approach has tended to be a *laissez-*

faire one that has produced insufficient and irregular outcomes except in some model chapters. The Board has concluded that a more proactive and collaborative approach is indicated.

Both Karen Craig (UN-L) and Dorothy Mitstifer (KON), at the Seattle AAFCS Meeting, called for integration of co-curricular goals within the academic program. Further support seems to be indicated by the action group on "Learning Communities," formed at the Summit and headed by Suzie Crockett. This group has been sharing resources and discussing "How should the literature about learning models and learning communities inform the future of FCS in higher education?" Yet another rationale is the increased emphasis on assessment, which challenges every academic program to determine where educational goals will be learned and how they will be measured.

A variety of goals related to scholarship, research, leadership, ethics and professional standards, diversity, globalism, environmental quality, service/experiential learning, among others can be achieved through co-curricular activities. Kappa Omicron Nu had a unique opportunity to explore this initiative with advisers and delegates at Conclave. Kappa Omicron Nu is well aware that institutional support is necessary because the academic program is its domain. It is assumed that there would be multiple paths and strategies to accomplish partnering because each chapter needs to determine the approach through collaborative planning with departments and faculty within the institution. National Kappa Omicron Nu stands as a ready partner in planning and implementing this initiative. The generic question is "What should undergraduates learn through the honor society programming?"

In a nutshell then, Kappa Omicron Nu wishes to partner with academic units to identify academic goals and

strategies that Kappa Omicron Nu can deliver on behalf of its members and all students within the unit. Two credible observers of the college scene champion learning communities. Cross (1998) discussed the importance of learning communities in developing socially constructed knowledge. She noted that knowledge is maintained and constructed through negotiation with knowledgeable peers in a community of practice. Known as *constructivism*, this theory holds that "knowledge is actively built by learners as they shape and build mental frameworks to make sense of their environments" (p. 5). Thus the practice of scholarship is embedded in learning communities. Cross called this approach to learning "connected conversations." Boyer had a slightly different version. Because he perceived the "fragmented nature of the college experience—the disconnects . . ." he proposed that the "primary purpose of higher education is to 'connect the disconnects' and make the college years a more holistic, fulfilling, and significant experience for students" (Coye, 1997, p. 21).

Senge, the acknowledged learning community theorist and practitioner, explains Polanyi's notion of "tacit knowledge" as the dimension of knowledge that is generated within learning communities. Tacit knowledge is the kind of knowledge learned only through being part of a community, "trying new behaviors, seeing the results, and gradually assimilating that knowledge into one's behavior" (Senge, et al., 1999, p. 422).

During the Delegate and Adviser Forums at the 1999 KON Conclave, participants had an opportunity to consider the idea of Kappa Omicron Nu as a Learning Community and to brainstorm and prioritize possible goals and strategies to implement the notion. Several advisers committed to piloting Kappa Omicron Nu partnerships with academic programs. Case studies of these pilot programs will

be developed for the purpose of implementing this initiative on a broader basis during the 2000-2001 academic year.

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Message from the Board of Directors

Frances E. Andrews

Senge (1990), author of *The Fifth Discipline*, defined a learning community as "an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future" (p. 14). For an organization like Kappa Omicron Nu, what does "creating the future" mean? As I searched for an answer to that question, I recalled several phrases from Matusak's book, *Finding Your Voice*, which seemed to capture the essence of the question. Matusak (1997) equates creation of the future with making a difference and making things better. In other words, creating the future means we have to practice courage in action; engage in true soul-searching; develop a deep sense of connectedness; live authentically and ethically in relationship with others; embrace a strong sense of the common good; envision "what could be;" and understand, accept, create, and embrace change. Is this not the essence of leadership, that "community-specific process that arises in various forms and with various effects whenever people attempt to work together?" (Drath and Palus, 1994, p. 5).

The creation of Kappa Omicron Nu as a learning community conjures up visions of all sorts of changes! Many times our response to change is negative, even though we acknowledge from an intellectual viewpoint that many changes result in positive outcomes both for us as individuals and as members of organizations. "... we find ourselves fighting change rather than accepting it or creating it because we're afraid of losing something we care about, something familiar that is more comfortable and less threatening than something we know little or nothing about" (Matusak, p. 134).

Bridges' three steps in dealing with change seem appropriate for us to consider as we create Kappa Omicron Nu as a learning community (Olesen, 1993, p. 31-32).

◆ **Letting go or ending.** With any change, positive or negative, things do not remain the same. Things that are familiar to us are comfortable and less frightening than the new and the unknown. We have to take some time and make peace with the fact that the status quo, as we know it, is no longer the appropriate paradigm or mind-set for a 21st century honor society. "The greatest enemy of change, the biggest obstacle to innovation, is the lack of courage to take the risk" (Matusak, p. 135). Wheatley (1998, p. 92) asserts, "resistance [to change] is not a fact of life but evidence of an act of insult against life."

◆ **Transition.** Change is never easy! It has always been frightening. In this stage we search for meaning in the change. Anxiety, confusion, excitement, doubt, and feelings of loss of control are inevitable human responses. "If we are to create the future rather than be pushed into it, we need to anticipate change. . . . We need to



be leaders of change" (Matusak, p. 135).

◆ **Starting something new.** "Being prepared for tomorrow's complicated, changing world requires us to courageously reach out with new experiments, new ideas, and risky possibilities that promise to improve our organization or community" (Matusak, p. 136).

Transforming Kappa Omicron Nu into a true and viable learning community requires a personal and collective commitment to continuous relationship-building, innovation, experimentation, and change. We might equate this action to Wheatley's organizing processes of life. She writes, "The process of organizing is difficult to chart because it happens in many places simultaneously within messy and expanding webs. It involves creating relationships around a shared sense of purpose, exchanging and creating information, learning constantly, paying attention to the results of our efforts, co-adapting, co-evolving, developing wisdom as we learn, staying clear about our purpose, being alert to changes from all directions. Living systems give form to their organization, and evolve those forms into new ones, because of exquisite capacities to create meaning together, to communicate, and to notice what is going on in the moment" (1998, p. 91).

As leaders and members of Kappa Omicron Nu, we recognize that

chaos is an essential process by which our organization renews and revitalizes itself; that information is the primary organizing force in our organization; that human relationships are the greatest source of strength, creative energy and personal empowerment; and that vision is an invisible field that can enable us to find the common good among a diversity of perspectives and create our own future.

The Board and our Executive Director, the positional leaders of our organization, cannot initiate and bring forth this learning community alone. As stakeholders of Kappa Omicron Nu, each of us is challenged to change our perceptions about organizations, to exhibit willingness and openness to change, and to be receptive to the influence of another person (Webber, 1999). Are you ready to create "what could be," to practice courage in action, to engage in true soul-searching, to develop a deep sense of connectedness, to live authentically and ethically in relationship with others, to embrace a strong sense of the common good, and to understand, accept, create, and embrace change?

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Kappa Omicron Nu Awards

- ◆ One master's level and two doctoral level fellowships were awarded for a total of \$6,000.
 - ◆ Michelle Townsend, Carson-Newman College, for study at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa
 - ◆ Verdie D. Samuels, Ohio State University, for graduate study in Early Childhood Education
 - ◆ Sharon M. Ballard, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, for graduate study in Child and Family Studies
- ◆ Two research grants were awarded for a total of \$4,000.
 - ◆ Shelly Nickols-Richardson, Virginia Tech, for study of "Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors Regarding Herbs and Phytomedicinals"
 - ◆ Tanya Horcock, Syracuse University, and colleagues: Jean Bowering, Eurestine Brown, Kathy Dischner, and Linda Quinn, for the study: "Assessing 5th Grader's Dietary Habits in Relation to Quality of Life Measures to Develop an Effective Nutrition Program."
- ◆ The Conclave Undergraduate Student Paper Award recipients were **Allison J. Archer**, Purdue University; **Michelle Gastineau Tracy**, Indiana University; **Rachell Harding**, Brigham Young University; **Sarah Jagers**, Bradley University; **Gail McNinch**, Texas A&M University; **Fawn Parks**, Baylor University; **Tambra R. Stevenson**, Oklahoma State University; and **Kathleen C. Walker**, Kent State University. These awards totaled \$4,500.
- ◆ Chapter Awards of Excellence for 1997-98 and 1998-99 were awarded at Conclave to the following chapters:
 - ◆ Kappa Beta Xi, Carson-Newman College
 - ◆ Omicron Tau, Penn State University
 - ◆ Omicron Omega, Ohio State University
- ◆ Kappa Alpha Theta, Eastern Illinois University
- ◆ Omicron Alpha Epsilon, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
- ◆ Kappa Alpha Pi, Middle Tennessee State University
- ◆ Omicron Tau Chapter, Penn State University, received awards for programming in mentoring, leadership and cultural diversity.
- ◆ Adviser Awards of Excellence recognized three advisers at the 1999 Conclave:
 - ◆ Betty Church
 - ◆ S. Jayne Ozier
 - ◆ Maxine Rowley
- ◆ Forty-seven scholar program grants totaled \$14,800.
- ◆ Nine Conclave Scholarships to Advisers totaled \$2,250.
- ◆ 1999 Delegate Scholarship Awards totaled \$23,000.