

UNLV's new provost not just another suit

BY TREVOR HAYES

CONTRIBUTING FEATURES WRITER

"I don't like to take life too seriously. I like to laugh and enjoy people and sometimes when you get in a suit and tie and have a seventh floor office and title, there are barriers to people getting to know that about you," said UNLV Provost Douglas Ferraro.

Ferraro says he really enjoys being on campus out among faculty and students where all the action is. He said he'd like students to introduce themselves to him and stop and chat. "It is important to have the voice of students as what constitutes our decision making," he said.

Ferraro returns to the Southwest after a six-year absence. He spent 25 years teaching at the University of New Mexico and various universities in Mexico. He also worked on numerous Indian reservations, after spending the first 24 years of his life in New York. He says his love for the Southwest stems from his belief that a soulful feeling exists here.

The last six years he spent as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Michigan University.

All of Ferraro's academic training came at Columbia

University where he earned his Ph.D. in psychopharmacology, the study of the interrelationships between people's moods, thinking, behavior and drugs.

"I left the academic safety of New York and went to the academic ambiguity of New Mexico," said Ferraro. "I was just a young guy seeking adventure."

While in New Mexico he transformed his area of expertise into an even more narrow field. When not teaching he testified in court cases on the effects of drugs on people, becoming a forensic psychopharmacologist. Even this wasn't enough of a specialty, as demand grew too great to continue teaching and testifying he limited his court work to cases involving the death penalty.

When asked to describe himself he spoke of family rather than career. "Who I am is a husband, a father, and a grandfather," said Ferraro.

The proudest moment of his life was also not related to his academics. "It would be some combination of marrying my wife and the birth of my children and grandchildren," said Ferraro. "I don't know that I could ferret out one of those."

He met his wife, Sandra Odell-Ferraro, Ph.D., while at the University of New Mexico.



Douglas P. Ferraro

They have two children, both grown, residing in Colorado and both having gone on to higher education.

A Las Vegas native and an alumnus of Bishop Gorman High School, Dr. Odell-Ferraro, is associate dean of the college of education at Western Michigan University, and has attained a national reputation in her own right, winning a national award for innovation in her field. She will bring her specialized skills in collaboration between public schools and universities, back

to UNLV where she attended her first year of college, in the fall as a visiting professor. Arriving with her will be their furniture and cherished art collection, not a moment too soon for Ferraro.

A strong emphasis on education was placed on this first generation American by his immigrant parents. He was born, the second of five children, in White Plains, New York to an Italian-born father and English mother. All of his siblings went on to higher education, attaining degrees ranging from a Bachelor's to a Ph.D.

Four of the five children work in an education-related career and the other is the Chief of Police in Scarsdale, N.Y. one of the richest townships in the country.

"I thought I'd be an engineer like my father," he said, commenting on his original career path. "I thought I'd be a petroleum engineer. It appeared to be exciting, full of travel and adventure."

That was before he took Psychology 101 in his freshman year with his eventual mentor and longtime friend, Dr. Frank Logan, who died earlier this year. Logan was a founder in the school of behavioral psychology and a colleague of re-

known psychologist B.F. Skinner.

"He set aspirations as to how one ought to be a university professor," Ferraro said. "This guy really represented student-centeredness before we ever really talked about it. He just was as a way of being. University professors with that ability do effect student's lives."

This relationship lasted throughout the years. According to Ferraro, "One's mentoring doesn't stop when someone gets a degree." Ferraro still remains in contact with people he mentored over 25 years ago.

On being hired as provost, Ferraro, a self-described perpetual student, said, "What better job could there be for someone who likes to be at universities? The difficult thing (about being a perpetual student), is that you have to make money. Being provost is the closest thing to being a perpetual student and get paid for it that I've been able to discover. The whole world is open to me."

"I have always looked at the role of provost as the best job at a university one could have," continued Ferraro. "The fun

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Grad student a math Starr

BY ERIN NIEMEYER

NEWS EDITOR

Fractions. Decimals. Permutations. Angela Starr knows all about 'em.

The 26-year-old mathematic department teaching assistant claims she "never wanted to do anything but teach."

"I can see myself doing this forever," Starr said.

A UNLV alumni, Starr began taking classes at the university in 1988. She graduated cum laude in 1993 with a bachelor of arts degree.

"I was going to become a high school math teacher after graduation but Dr. (Peter) Shiue (UNLV Mathematical Sciences Department chair) recommended me for a teaching assistant position at the university and I couldn't pass it up," Starr explained.

Three years later, the Wisconsin native is nearing completion of her master's degree in mathematics. She will graduate in May.

During her stint as a UNLV teaching assistant, Starr has taught 16 math courses including Basic Algebra, College Algebra, Finite Mathematics and Fundamentals of College Mathematics.

"I love it," Starr said of her teaching career. "I think our department is incredible."

The feeling appears mutual. Starr was awarded the Women in Science and Engineering Award Feb. 29 and was recently nominated Outstanding Graduate Student in the math department. UNLV's Graduate Student Association will select the winner this month.

"She's perfect," Shiue said of Starr. "Her grade point average is consistently a 4.0 and more important than her scholarship is (Starr's) self-motivation and personal study of the subject matter."

"She has displayed thoroughness to work and an insight for mathematics," Shiue added.

Starr's love of math extends beyond the classroom. In August of 1994, the Bonanza High School graduate married her high school calculus teacher, Norm Vordahl.

The two met in 1985 when Starr was 15-years-old. "I didn't really become interested in him until my senior year of high school," Starr said. "I'm sure he suspected I had a crush on him but he never acted on it."

Starr, 18 at the time, was not concerned with the age difference. Vordahl was 39.

"The day after I graduated I called him and asked him out," Starr said. "The funny thing about it is that I was

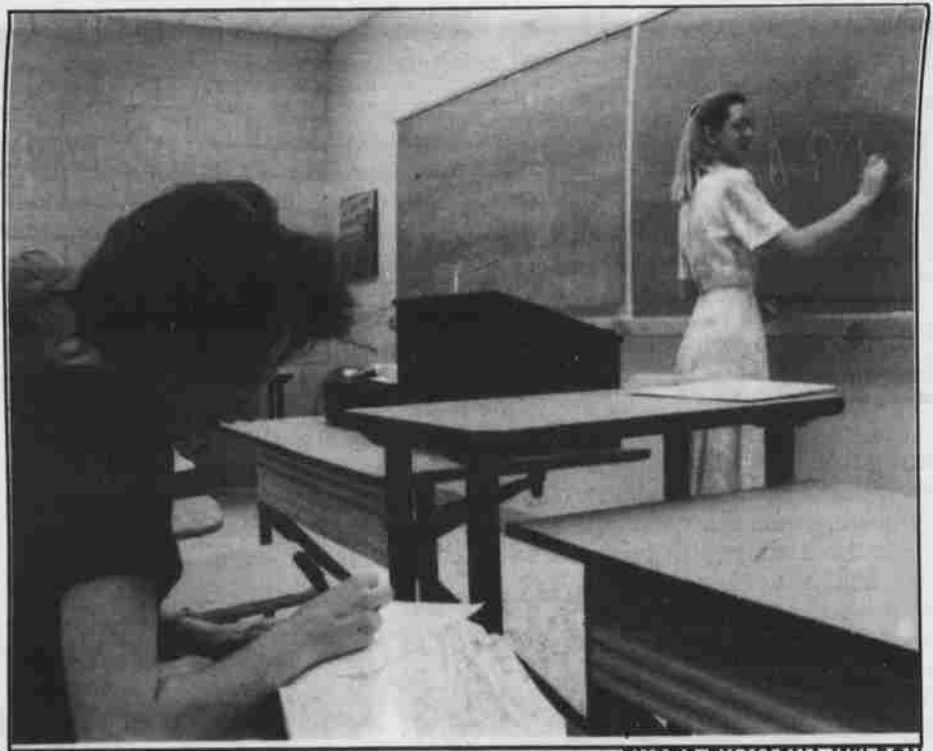


PHOTO BY VASNA WILSON

Math grad assistant, Angela Starr, illustrates the finer points of math.

voted by my high school classmates "Most Likely to Ride a Harley," and he had one," she said.

"She made me an offer I couldn't refuse," said Vordahl, who had been divorced for 20 years.

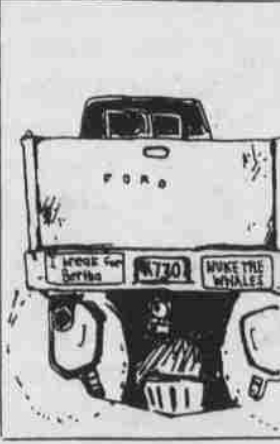
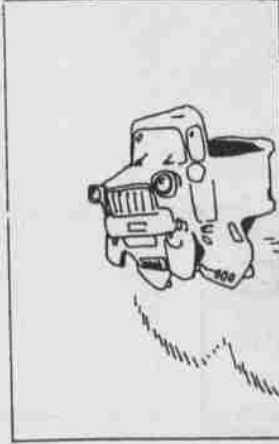
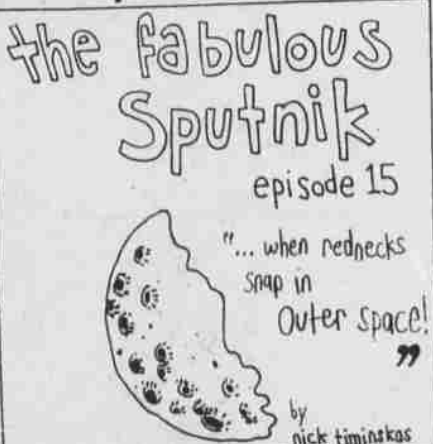
The couple's 22-year age difference has not posed a problem in their relationship, Starr said. "I was old for my

years. "I had to grow up so fast...guys my own age weren't intelligent enough for me."

Reaction to their romance varied. Vordahl's friends and colleagues "were open to it," Starr said. "I think

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Fabulous Sputnik Man



BY NICK TIMINSKAS