

By following students, dean can follow trends

By Rosemary Smithson

Special Sections Writer

Dean Caryl Smith is one of those people with a lot of titles. She is dean of student life, vice chancellor for student affairs and now, adviser to the class of 1992.

Four faculty members serve as class advisers, following the class they have been assigned from freshman through senior year. Smith has just said goodbye to her class of 1988 and is preparing to meet the class of 1992.

She has developed a keen sense of student trends through her 10 years dean of student life.

Smith could be seen as an example of a trend herself. Ten years ago, the separate offices

of dean of men and dean of women were combined under the title of dean of student life. Smith, then associate dean of women, was asked to fill the new combined post. "It's simply a matter of helping a student who needs resources, not a man who needs resources or a woman who needs resources," she said.

Smith sees today's students as more concerned about vocations than the students were 10 years ago. "It's, 'What's my degree going to do for me?'"

The school of education is making a comeback; students know there is a critical need for teachers now. The job market is good for teachers, and getting better.

According to the dean there is

a swing to increased conservatism: political, social, behavioral. "Students are much more insular. They're not as willing to take on the ills of the world as they were 10 years ago."

She also worries about the ramifications of lessening interests in social concerns. "The community gives to us and we should be giving to the community," she said. Smith sees a lack of global commitment, with fewer students taking foreign languages or studying abroad. While hundreds still do, many see these activities as not a impractical.

She believes there is less interest in politics now than 10 years ago, that school organizations are not as well

supported as in the past.

The good news is that there is a movement across the country against overuse of alcoholic beverages. Partially this is because of tougher laws; groups can't stand the liability of having unstructured parties.

Students are also more interested in health, fitness and wellness. Intramural sports are attracting enormous numbers and many students are participating in other physical activities.

So it's possible the class of '92 will be a bunch of light-drinking health nuts who are in professional schools and don't care for politics. But then again, students fool you — trends shift.



Photo: Kate Wozniak

Caryl Smith, dean of student life, vice chancellor for student affairs and adviser to the KU class of 1992.