

After 25 years of research and teaching at UNL, I retired in 2001. Not long after retiring, Nancy and I spent a year in Washington, DC, while Nancy was on sabbatical leave working at USDA. During that year, I started work for the National Academy of Sciences—National Research Council (NRC). It began as a six-month, 50% full-time-equivalent position, but evolved into a nine-year second career that fluctuated between 50% and 75% FTE, depending on the needs of the NRC. I transitioned to “phased-retirement” in 2012, which means I still do occasional work.

How things changed during my two careers!

When I joined the Department of Animal Science at UNL, all the faculty members were men, there was a secretary for every two or three faculty members, and a computer was something that took up a couple of rooms in Nebraska Hall on City Campus.

At the NRC, my boss and all the 10 other members of my department were women. This meant that the chit-chat before department meetings was about clothes and recipes instead of sports and prices of ag commodities. I was just getting adjusted to this and thought I was acting super-cool about it. Then, one day when all 12 of us were together in a small space, one of the women looked at me quizzically and asked “too much estrogen?”

There are no secretaries at the NRC and very little hierarchy. Yes, I had a supervisor and I supervised an employee, and, yes, we did annual performance evaluations, but we functioned as a unified team. We learned a lot from each other.

At the NRC, computers rule. Although that’s true in most major organizations, it is very evident there. Personal computers, the Internet, and a virtual private network connection to the NRC servers allowed me to do most of my work from home. I had an office in DC and visited it about once a month. When working from home, I almost always started my day with a Skype video call to my assistant in the DC office. Being on video means you have to change out of your pajamas and brush your hair, but your feet aren’t visible so you can still wear your bunny slippers.

When Nancy retired from her faculty position at UNL in 2011, we moved to North Carolina to be closer to our son, and I continued to work from our new home. Working for the NRC was an exceptional experience. It’s an outstanding organization with a stellar reputation. The people who volunteer their time to serve on NRC committees represent the top experts in the country. My staff colleagues were dedicated, hard-working, and bright.

Now, I spend a lot of time on behalf of our homeowners association. I chair the communications committee, so I put together newsletters, send out email blasts, and set up and maintain the website and Facebook page.

Like other emeriti, Nancy and I have done our share of traveling since retiring. The two most significant trips were to Australia and to Alaska, where Nancy has a brother. We took the inside passage cruise from Seward, AK to Vancouver, BC. As you can see we are starting with the As—anyone for Albania? Azerbaijan? Maybe Aruba?