

Communication Conference to Explore Social Construction and Relational Practices

By *Tracy Manforte*
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- How do we achieve more humane and viable forms of relationship in our daily interactions, within our local communities and organizations, and within the rapidly growing global community? This question will be the focus of "Social Construction and Relational Practices," an international, interdisciplinary conference convened by the Department of Communication at the University of New Hampshire and the Taos Institute, Sept. 16 - 19, at the New England Conference Center.

The conference will address how social constructionism and relational practices have created and transformed diverse aspects of cultural life, and many academic and professional disciplines.

Speakers include Kenneth Gergen, professor of psychology and interpretive studies at Swarthmore College, director of the Taos Institute, and author of *The Saturated Self*; John Shotter, UNH professor of communication, an associate of the Taos Institute and author of the recently published *Conversational Realities*; Sallyann Roth, noted family therapist and co-creator of the Public Conversation Project; and Melissa Griffith and James Griffith from the George Washington University Medical Center and authors of *The Body Speaks: Therapeutic Dialogues for Mind-Body Problems*. Sessions include: New Directions in Constructionist Therapies; Discourse and Change Practices in Organizations; New Directions in Qualitative Research; Constructing Health and Illness, and more. In addition, roundtable discussions, participant presentations, drama, art, music and dance will be held throughout the conference.

The Taos Institute is an association of scholars and practitioners dedicated to exploring ways to integrate social constructionist ideas with everyday practices.

According to Sheila McNamee, UNH professor of communication, social construction involves the study of ways in which people create meaning together. "Through our conversations we form the nature of what

we take to be reality," she says. "As we develop meaning and take practical action, the future is created.

"Social constructionism has led to a deeper examination of important societal concerns, for example, how we create and sustain our beliefs in the real, what we consider the rational and what we take to be the just and the good," she continues. "Social constructionism involves understanding human activity in a most profound way."

The dialogue of social constructionism is becoming the common ground for such wide-ranging disciplines as education, social sciences, therapy, psychology, social work, community building and organizational change.

The conference is supported by the UNH Center for the Humanities and Sage Publications Ltd., London. For more information contact Kathleen Williams, University Conference Office, at 862-1900, or visit the conference website at www.unh.edu/taos/.

August 10, 1999

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