

What's Going on in Chickasha?

By Connie Burke Ruggles



It wasn't planned that way, but on a smaller scale and in a highly experimental situation one of the University's alumni already has put into practice ideas similar to those proposed in *The Future of the University*.

Robert L. Martin, '59 Ph.D., is president of Oklahoma College of Liberal Arts, a small school of about 1,000 students in Chickasha. It has been operating in its present form for two years despite the fact that the newest building on campus was constructed during Raymond Gary's term as governor 12 years ago when OCLA was Oklahoma College for Women.

The task facing Dr. Martin when he became president of OCLA in 1967 was not an easy one. The State Regents for Higher Education had outlined the job: take a small women's college with a dwindling enrollment and convert it into an innovative coeducational liberal arts college geared to the superior student. Let us hear from you in two years.

In July Dr. Martin appeared before the State Regents for that two-year report. Here's what he told them:

1. *Enrollment is now up to about 1,000.*
2. *The students are wildly excited about the new study concepts that include the trimester system coupled with an annual five-week period of independent study.*
3. *The faculty has adapted well to the change in format. Things are going so well, in fact, that this year the faculty voted to abolish faculty rank. No more distinguished professorships. No more assistants, associates, etc. Just teachers.*
4. *A college constitution providing four distinct bodies (the OCLA regents, the administration, the faculty, and the students) has been approved by everyone but the students and awaits only their referendum to be implemented.*
5. *Students are serving on an equal representation basis with faculty members on virtually all college committees, and they are serving well.*

For Dr. Martin the way had been paved to a certain extent. The school had been re-named before he arrived. Men were being accepted for enrollment, and the faculty and students had been preparing a set of guidelines for development of the college. But implementation has been Dr. Martin's task.

The president himself is not a product of a small school. He took his undergraduate work at Texas Christian University and his doctorate at OU.

"The only school I ever felt any school spirit for was OU," he says.

Following completion of his OU work, Dr. Martin went to Arkansas where he taught and gained administrative experience at Arkansas State at Jonesboro. It was there that the OCLA people sought him out, recruited him and brought him to Chickasha.

"The idea of making something new out of the college came largely from the people of Chickasha," Dr. Martin says. "They saw a decreasing usefulness for a women's college, and they set out to see that things changed."

Some wanted a vocational-technical school, looking at that as a way to attract industry. Others favored an expanded liberal arts school.

But the concerned citizens did more than just discuss their ideas. They got together and went to their legislators to ask that the groundwork be laid for establishment of a coeducational liberal arts college. The result was a resolution from the thirtieth legislature directing the State Regents "to study the possibility of changing the present functions and standards of admission at the Oklahoma College for Women whereby both men and women students may be admitted to pursue four years of study in the liberal arts culminating with the bachelor's degree."

The State Regents changed OCW to OCLA in 1965, made it coeducational, and asked for preparation of a new academic program offering an "outstanding liberal arts program with strong undergraduate offerings in the traditional arts and sciences . . . a program particularly suited to the needs of academically and artistically able Oklahoma high school graduates."

They called for a trimester plan to permit students to complete a degree in three years or less. In addition the State Regents specified that a unique scholarship program should be developed, that admission and retention standards should be raised, that no intercollegiate athletic program should be entered, that the college should experiment with new instructional approaches, and that faculty salaries should be increased to equal the average at other four-year colleges in the state.

Careful experimentation became the order of the day. To meet the challenge of a "unique scholarship program," OCLA planners did double duty. In one move they provided scholarship assistance and at the same time encouraged full participation in the new trimester system.

"Come to OCLA for two trimesters," they said. "Succeed in those two periods, and we'll give you the third trimester free."

Trimesters are designed to include 15 weeks of actual classroom work. The fall term begins early in September and ends before Christmas. The winter term begins after New Year and ends in April. After a week's break the five-week spring term begins. Students enrolled in the spring term must stay for the 10-week summer term, making a third 15-week trimester.

fall sing is a group thing



"The only drawback to trimester operation," Dr. Martin says, "is that everyone is dead tired. We have a small faculty and a small staff, and most of us work throughout the year leaving little time for professional improvement or vacation. While trimester operation has provided accelerated work for our students, it has placed heavy loads on all of us. It was thought it might also cut our operating expenses, but I don't think that has happened to any great extent."

During the five-week spring term students participate in independent study, one of the most fascinating and most popular facets of the OCLA program. This spring half the student body was off campus doing independent study. Twenty-five went to OU's hacienda in Mexico to study Latin American culture. Another 25 went to Europe for cultural study. Another 11 took a camping tour of Oklahoma's state parks learning camping and counseling techniques. Others worked in state hospitals and agencies and in business and industry. Still others adopted projects such as studying the history of jazz music.

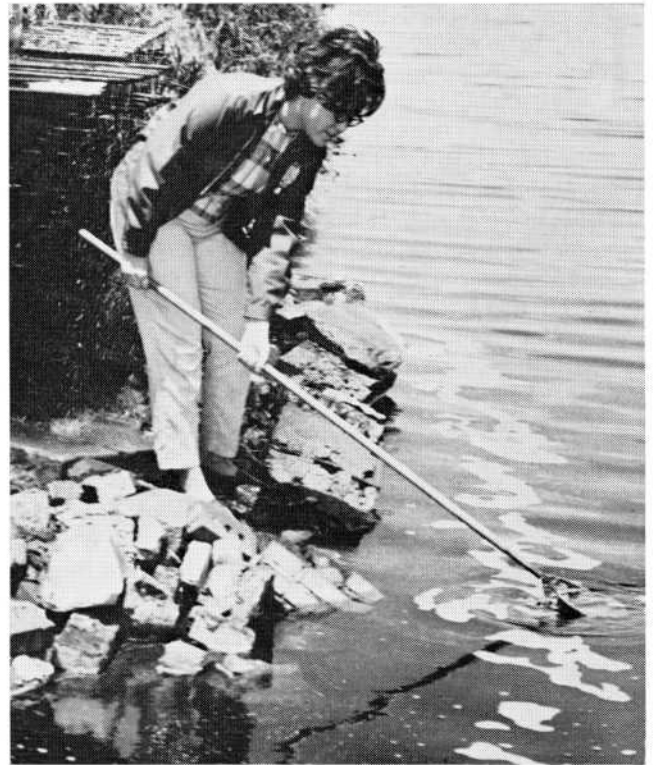
At the end of the independent study period each student submits a paper summarizing his work. For many OCLA students independent study is an opportunity to reach beyond their environment. One girl, an Indian who had never been outside the state of Oklahoma, spent five weeks in Europe. The experience was a revelation.

"The only problem we've found with independent study is getting some of the students turned off," said one OCLA staff member. "They get so wrapped up in their programs that they wear us all out."

Woven through all of OCLA's academic work is a core curriculum. "Are we really educating students with a long list of seemingly unrelated courses?" the planners asked. They decided they weren't, and they changed things.

For two trimesters students participate in a program called Contemporary Man in World Society, a three-hour course that is carefully structured to relate to other courses in mathematics, science, English and language. From there the core program goes to Principal Ideas of

big crowd at small college



independent study

Greece and Rome, Oriental Civilizations, Principal Ideas of Medieval and Renaissance Man, Principal Ideas of the Modern World and two trimesters on The American Experience in History and Government.

"I sometimes think that this whole core concept comes as too great a shock to some of our students," Dr. Martin says. "We use a great many audio-visual techniques, we force dialogue, we make these people think about their place in the world, and sometimes it hurts. They don't expect this, but after the shock wears off, they like it."

Working around the core program, everything a student reads, every paper he writes, every discussion group he participates in is related to the core subject. English overlaps mathematics; chemistry overlaps history.

To complete the integration of the curriculum, OCLA instituted a strong program in team teaching. When an English teacher and a math teacher both are discussing logic with their students, they may trade classes to illustrate the interrelationship of their subjects.

Oddly enough Dr. Martin does not consider himself a team teacher.

"Team teaching requires a special ability," he says. "I'm strictly a stand-up lecturer. But that doesn't mean I can't see its value. It has worked very well here. Most of our faculty members have become very adept at it."

Few teachers are trained in the team concept. It is still fairly new in education circles, particularly at the college level, and the transition has been difficult for many. Some simply can't do it. But the idea of team teaching has drawn many new faculty members, many of whom have come to OCLA at significantly lower salary figures to participate in the experimental program which Martin believes is unique in this country.

For all its academic newness, OCLA is an old school. It was established in 1908. The campus is small, lined with old trees and shows signs of advancing age. Even now there is no flurry of construction. One building is being remodeled and expanded. A chapel built by the alumni has been completed, although it was begun a number of years ago. Faculty salaries are the lowest in the state despite the fact that this year Martin put 75 per cent of his new money into salaries.

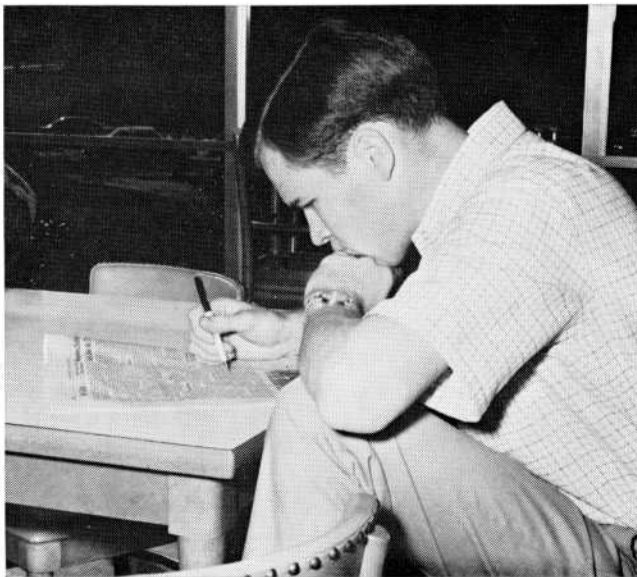
Yet Martin seems to have little trouble recruiting new faculty members. The faculty numbers about 60. Nearly half of these are new since the change, most are young. New ones keep coming despite the fact that they could be paid more almost anywhere else.

Not everything has been roses for OCLA and its president. The women who were Oklahoma College for Women alumnae were not uniformly delighted at the death of the school they had known. People have potshotted Martin and his program for being too liberal and for moving away from the tried and therefore supposedly true maxims of higher education. Often the little things draw the loudest criticism such as in April when Dr. Martin gave the students permission to play the Fifth Dimension's recording of "The Age of Aquarius" as the commencement recessional.

Dr. Martin takes nearly everything with studied calm. "If a student makes a reasonable request," he says, "I see no reason why it can't be granted. We are here to help them learn, not to impose our own limitations."

When students come to his office to complain, Dr. Martin answers their questions and then invites them to check the facts themselves, just to make sure. He encourages participation in student government. He even foresees the day when the student and faculty senates will be combined into one representative body. He opposes the credit hour concept as being an artificial measure of training. Far better, he says, to simply outline a series of courses without regard for how many times they meet or how

admitting men was first step



a new concept on an old campus

much credit they might be worth. He is eager to try to salvage underachievers, and OCLA now has a small program in that area which has shown good results. Like OU, OCLA now offers a pass-fail option in some areas.

While he is generally pleased with OCLA's development, Bob Martin is not out to sell his kind of education to the waiting world. He thinks it is by and large ideal for his school. He is pleased with the parallels between OCLA and OU. He knows, too, there are areas where the new program at OCLA has failed.

In some circles he might be regarded as a highly liberal administrator. But he sees himself as a rather typical college president at a pretty untypical college facing pretty typical problems.