



At this time in the development of higher education becoming an alumni director is almost as masochistic as becoming a college president. As Steven Muller, vice president for public affairs at Cornell University, pointed out at the national AAC meeting last summer in New York, "Hell may have no fury like a woman scorned, but I could tell you a few things about the feelings of alumni who have been taunted by their friends about the calamities currently besetting their university. They are outraged and embarrassed, and they express a vigorous personal interest in seeing to it that the publicity generated by their alma mater reflects credit rather than contempt on their own status."

It is the alumni director, like the college president, who gets the barbs, the unanswerable questions, the threats of withholding money, and it is he who must seek ways to involve those alumni in the total university process.

Ronald T. McDaniel opened both eyes last summer, surveyed the situation, and still elected to take the job as OU's alumni director. A 1960 graduate of OU, he came to the job with new ideas and a personal knowledge of what it's like to be an alumni worker at the local level. Here he looks at the past and to the future of the Alumni Association at the University of Oklahoma.

SOONER—You are 31 years old, were a successful businessman in Tulsa, a community leader. What led you to leave that to take the Alumni Association post?

McDANIEL—My major motivation to accept the position at the University of Oklahoma as executive director was the desire to be affiliated with higher education in general and OU in particular.

For a number of years I have felt that many of the really exciting things that were occurring in society were to a great extent brought into focus on the uni-

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versity situation. For that reason I thought it would be very interesting to be at a university again. I also felt, of course, a real sense of appreciation and loyalty to the University of Oklahoma, which was a factor in my decision to return.

Through my participation in the Tulsa area alumni club, I came to the conclusion that the Alumni Association had a rather vital role to play in the University's development, particularly during the next decade, and that the role of the Association and the alumni in general really will be expanding in the 1970s. This feeling that there was an opportunity to make a real contribution to the positive growth of the University was probably as much a deciding factor as anything.

SOONER—Having never been at the University except as a student and later as a visiting alumnus, did you find many surprises?

McDANIEL—I think there were many surprises really when I came to OU in terms of the internal structure and what goes on within the University.

To alumni, when they are on the outside, even when they are pretty active in the Association or in various University committees, the University seems to be a little more of a monolithic structure than it really is. I don't think alumni probably appreciate the complexity, the diversity of interests, and the myriad pressures that exist within the University. It was actually a much more difficult task to work within the structure of the University than I had anticipated.

There are many, many groups that have different needs, different aspirations and different goals in the University. It's difficult to synthesize these goals. Overall, I found the University to be generally in a state of change and flux. In my judgment, most of the direction it is taking is of a positive nature that ultimately I think will be beneficial to the University.

SOONER—Having been a leader of a local alumni club, what do you see as the role of the Association in bringing the alumni closer to the University?

McDANIEL—As I stated earlier, I think this process of the Alumni Association being a more effective part of the University is a very vital concept. Particularly in this period of time when student activism is at a higher peak than it has been for many years and when there is a general questioning of any university's ability to cope with its problems, there is probably a greater need for the Alumni Association to responsibly inform its alumni than there ever has been before.

We have to accept the responsibility of attempting to find out to the best of our knowledge what is occurring at the University of Oklahoma, to find out what the motivations of the various individuals might be and then to go out and explain and try to interpret to our alumni what these mean and what this holds for the University—whether what is occurring now can be a very beneficial thing within a five-year period, whether it can be detrimental, whether it will end in a year, whether it is likely to be prolonged for a number of years.

I think the tension that we have on the campus level, according to a lot of people who are supposed to be experts in this area, would indicate that universities simply are not going to be immune to dissent and internal tension for quite a number of years. It's important for alumni to be able to differentiate between really crucial issues that affect the structure and direction of the University and the smaller emotional issues that may tend to upset us but are not really all that vital to us in this day and time.

In my judgment, trying to clearly identify the truly important issues is a job that is a very difficult one but a very necessary one for the Alumni Association. This is a very vital task.

Secondly, we have to attempt to offer a kind of structure for our alumni that makes their participation in the Alumni Association valuable. I personally think that the day of going out, holding an alumni club meeting, showing a film, serving a few drinks and hitting the road again saying, "We'll see you next year,"

is over. I just don't think that makes sense to anyone any more.

In virtually every community we've gone into this fall, we've found that individuals are very interested and desire to serve and assist the University in any way they can, but they want to do this within a framework that they are convinced is meaningful. They want to be certain that what they are doing will benefit the University. As I said before, creating a club that serves no valid purpose just to say you have an OU alumni club in a community is both nonessential and a waste of the time of the members of that community and certainly would reflect an inadequate job on our part.

SOONER—How do you assess the present job being done in keeping the alumni informed?

McDANIEL—I think we have probably two major tools at our disposal. First of all, our publications, Sooner Magazine and Alumni News. In both of these, if we are doing the kind of job we should be doing, we are able to explain to our alumni some of the really positive and valuable things that are happening at the University. And certainly we've got to be able to acknowledge those things occurring on the campus that are of a negative aspect too, and evaluate their meaning. I certainly think our publications are vital in this respect.

Of equal importance is having our staff go out and meet with our alumni personally throughout the state. In this personal context where we can talk with people—communicate—we really have an opportunity to explain what seems to be happening and the background of those events. This requires a great deal of traveling and a great deal of time. But in my judgment, we don't have any other meaningful alternative available to us, and on the basis of our experience during the past four months, I think it is a concept that is welcomed by the alumni. They seem to feel very strongly that they want to have this type of information. They want to maintain their feeling of loyalty and affection for the University, but sometimes when information gets out that is not entirely accurate or is misconstrued, it's hard for them to maintain this feeling.

SOONER—Do the alumni have any reticence about asking questions about rumors or situations that they've read about in the newspapers?

McDANIEL—This varies, of course, from meeting to meeting. Generally, at the outset of every meeting we have a little reticence before we really get down to the things that are bothering people. We hope to have the kind of informal atmosphere at our meetings that will permit people to be free and ask the questions that are really bothering them. We also find that sometimes questions are somewhat ambiguous in the way they are stated. In other words, an individual may ask a question about coeducational housing or dorm hours when what I really think he is asking is "Do we have the kind of campus situation here that would be encouraging our young people to participate in either immoral or questionable activities?" It is our responsibility to try to understand what the alumni are really concerned about no matter what form the question may take. Hopefully, we have been able to do this.

SOONER—What about the alumni clubs. What real purpose can they serve?

McDANIEL—I think the alumni clubs are going to have to play a more significant role than they have in the past for the University of Oklahoma Association. In terms of what we have discussed with clubs we've met with so far this year, we've emphasized two roles that we believe to be very important. The first has been the need for assisting the University in school recruiting. The problem of finding and getting the better students in high schools and junior colleges to the University has become a very real challenge. Recruiting is no longer limited to the athletic areas. It is now very much a fact of life in the academic field. This cannot be done with just a school relations staff. In Paul Massad, the University has one of the really fine men in that field, and I think we're doing a far better job in terms of school relations and recruiting than we've ever done in the past. But the simple fact of the matter is that it is impossible for him and his staff to go out and see all of the students and visit all the schools that should be visited. In this respect we really have to rely on our alumni clubs to supply us the names of competent, capable young students—students who have particular skills such as music or drama or history or athletics. The Alumni Association then passes this information along to the school relations department.

We are urging many of our clubs to attempt to formulate programs that will bring students who are juniors and seniors in high school to the University for a day's visit to become aware of the opportunities that OU has to offer them. I think that this school recruiting is really very significant. As I say, the alumni club simply has to fulfill this role because it can't be done effectively at any other level.

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Secondly, we think the alumni clubs have a very vital role to fill in the area of private giving. The need for better financing at the University is going to continue to grow, and in the next 10 years private money will continue to be one of the major resources. I believe, and think it can be substantiated, that those communities and towns that have had good strong alumni clubs consistently show a better record of giving to the University than those towns and communities that do not have an alumni organization. In the areas where we have clubs, we generally have groups that are better informed about what OU is trying to do. They're generally more interested in what OU

has achieved and certainly they are more aware of the financial needs of the University.

Although I think we all have hopes that private giving will increase substantially over the next few years, even in the past the ADF and the other private giving resources available to the University have made a great deal of difference in a lot of areas. We've been able to achieve some levels of excellence that simply would have been precluded to us had we not had this private support. I think the local club is the key to success of this type, and I think we will have to rely very heavily on local clubs in the future for that.

SOONER—How are you going to help the local clubs?

McDANIEL—We are trying to establish a much closer relationship between the Alumni Association headquarters here in Norman and our local clubs across the state and nation. We have in Dave Dollarhide a very fine new field director who is spending a great deal of time on the road in contact with the local clubs supplying them with information and finding out what their needs are. We are beginning to formulate newsletters that are going out to club presidents to keep them aware of what's occurring at the University and what's occurring in other clubs. We are meeting the expense of developing newsletters that go out from local clubs and local officers to the alumni in their area, once again to inform them what the local organization is doing and what's happening at the University.

Also, something that we hope has a great deal of potential for the future, we are developing a leadership conference. This year it will be on the weekend of March 6 and 7. Many of our past and current presidents and other leaders in the clubs will be invited to the University for an evening meeting and then an all-day session on Saturday to discuss the University, its needs, where it seems to be going, what its aspirations are and to relate this to the Alumni Association. During the day on March 7 we will have speakers discussing the role of the student, the role of the faculty, the role of the Alumni Association, a panel made up of alumni leaders doing an outstanding job in local areas who will try to share their experience with the group at large and to explain to them how they have been able to bring effective organizations to their communities. I think this really has a great deal of promise, and we are very hopeful it will be something we'll be able to do annually that will really benefit our alumni. We want to give them as good a knowledge as we can in that short time of what the University of Oklahoma is doing and how we can responsibly relate to it.

SOONER—What do you see as the single greatest problem facing the Association?

McDANIEL—I think the greatest problem facing the Alumni Association today is one that's very similar to one facing the University, and that is the problem of communication to its alumni and former students and friends. I think too often alumni and friends of the University are hesitant to express their concerns or their criticisms about the University for fear that it would be interpreted to mean that they're not supporting OU any longer. I don't think anything could

be farther from the facts. I personally hope that through our efforts people will feel free to constructively criticize and offer suggestions about the University. In the last analysis, really, if our alumni and friends do not have the kind of information and the kind of interest to assist the University in its direction, we'll make far more errors and do a far less effective job than we will if they do take the responsibility upon themselves to continue to be participating members of the University of Oklahoma even after they graduate.

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If we are able to open up these kinds of channels, if we are able to provide people the kind of information they need, they can make these kinds of contributions to the University. Then I think we'll be doing a very effective job for the Alumni Association.

SOONER—You've been here roughly half a year. Have you gotten the kind of help that you need?

McDANIEL—I really have been very, very fortunate since I've come to OU in terms of the type of assistance that has been given from virtually everyone that I've come in contact with. The alumni themselves have been more than generous in their willingness to see the kind of job I was going to do and in working very hard for new concepts and new ideas.

Our alumni board is just exceptionally generous in their offers of assistance—Mr. Bill Martin, Mr. Roy Cartwright, Mr. Ed Livermore, Mr. John Stambaugh—all have been of great help to me in terms of getting acquainted with the job and what I needed to do. I think within the University structure, too, I certainly have had every bit of assistance I could possibly hope for. Dr. Hollomon has been most generous in offering to assist us in virtually any area that we needed. Mr. John Dean, vice president for University relations, has done everything that could have been done to acquaint me with the University structure, what he thought the problems were and the directions that we should be going—very helpful in every way.

And, finally, I think I was very fortunate because the staff that I came to work with here has really been very, very good in every respect. They have done an excellent job and have given me their unquestioning cooperation, particularly Mr. Guy Brown, who has been with the association for over 20 years. He has been absolutely invaluable in developing new programs and in making me aware of the concepts and ideas that preceded me in the Association. This group of people has made the job very, very easy to come into.