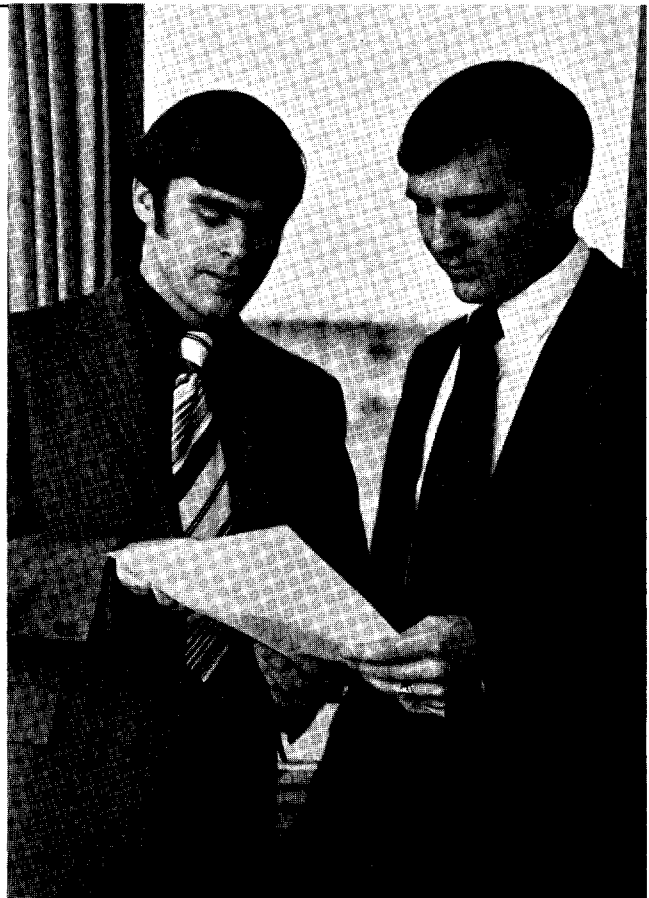

Eliminating Structured Lies



Jerry Matthews (left) and Ron Redus

"Fraternities don't die—they commit suicide," says Jerry Matthews, whose only job is to help OU's social fraternities with their problems.

When Matthews took over late last year as assistant director of residential programs for fraternities, OU became the only major school in the country with a full-time administrator to "advise and counsel" fraternities.

Matthews says the fraternity system is growing nationally, but has remained relatively unchanged at OU.

During the past 10 years, he says, the number of campuses with fraternities has increased from 300 to 567, and the number of fraternity chapters has grown from about 3,500 to 4,500.

But fraternities are going through some big changes, he adds. One of these is their efforts to adapt to the attitudes of incoming college freshmen.

In fact, Matthews believes that fraternities have begun returning to ideas that led to their formation 100 years ago—as student groups wanting to take active part in government and solving of social problems.

"Fraternities don't die," Matthews explains. "They commit suicide." If they don't meet student needs, then students don't become members. So fraternities, including chapters at OU, are going to have to change,

to provide the "fraternity experience, a growing experience," he says. Some have gone as far as eliminating the traditional pledge system.

"They bring a guy in as an 'associate member'," Matthews says, and some chapters have drastically shortened their pledge training programs to as little as 60 days before initiation into full membership.

On the other end of the spectrum, however, there remain those chapters which maintain the old image—an image which makes them part of "the establishment" so scorned by today's young people. Matthews says the lesser known and newer chapters are ones likely to change first and are most progressive.

"Once you have eliminated the structured lies on both sides of rush, it evolves into a more personal man-to-man relationship," he says. "I think we're getting to a more truthful rush system—one that will result in the de-pledge rate going down."

Discrimination in fraternities?

"That's a dead issue," he hastens to say. "The new people in the fraternities, I think will change themselves."

Matthews received a bachelor's degree in management from Stanford. Before coming to OU he was director of undergraduate affairs for Pi Kappa Phi fraternity's national organization based in Charlotte, North Carolina.
