

# OU Dorms Get a New

"If university housing were the only housing in the world, I would still feel tempted to move out."

This statement made by an OU student echoes the past sentiment of most students in university housing.

Dissatisfied students greatly resented the mandatory housing rules, the limited visitation policy and the lack of individuality and self-determination in housing.

In October 1969, as a response to the growing disinterest and dissatisfaction of students with university housing, the Model Dorms Executive Commission was formed. The Commission submitted April, 1971, a lengthy report to the OU Board of Regents.

The recommendations of the report, which was a comprehensive study of the major problems existing in housing, outlining the symptoms and causes of the problem and offering specific solutions, were approved last spring by the Regents. A wide survey of OU student opinion and a summary of reports from over 70 universities, including the other Big Eight universities, was included in the report. From a study of the universities' reports, it was learned that the proposed changes in OU housing were comparable to changes at other Big Eight schools but were not as liberal as those at eastern or western schools.

As a result of the report's approval, the University of Oklahoma has begun a long-range program to improve university housing — making it more acceptable to students. Among the changes are expanded dorm visitation hours, a modified form of coeducational housing and the easing of the compulsory housing regulations.

Since a growing number of students wanted to live off-campus, it was evident before the report was submitted that the University was far from able to fill housing to capacity. The consensus of the Commission was that students would want to live in university housing if certain programs and changes were implemented.

The first step, as requested by the Commission, was to lower the age for mandatory housing. As of fall semester 1971, a student must have completed 60 hours of course work or turn 21 by May

1, 1972, to live off-campus. The previous requirements were that a student be 21 years old or have completed 90 hours of course work.

Compulsory housing requirements were decreased on the theory that students should have more choice in where they live when they reach a certain age and level of experience. "Every student must be responsible for his own life and educational progress, and he must be entrusted with the responsibility of examining the alternatives and choosing the one he deems most beneficial to himself," explained Dr. J. R. Morris, vice president for the University community.

The problems the University faces today are fundamentally different than they were even a few years ago. "With the available city housing, the varied life-styles of students and more cars on campus, the University is no longer in the position of the 'in loco parentis' concept," said Morris. "Consequently, we must gain the cooperation of students. We believe, if we can accommodate the needs of students by creating a number of options to a very diversified student population, we will gain this cooperation, and there will be a continued demand for housing."

Since lowering the requirements, not many of the junior students are leaving university housing. "This is partially a psychological effect, as forcing a student to live in university housing instills in him from the beginning a negative attitude toward dorm life. Perhaps, if there were even lighter restrictions, more students would live on campus," stated Jack Stout, director of residential programs.

The Model Dorms study stressed that forcing a student to live in university housing robs him of the chance to discover that he might not want to live in an apartment. He would have no way of knowing he might not enjoy cooking his own meals, cleaning, driving to campus every day and hunting for parking spaces.

"Once the people are out of university housing who don't want to live here, we will have fewer problems. This would be due to a natural increase in the percentage of people who are living in uni-

## Lease on Life

ersity housing because they so desire," Stout continued.

It is planned to lower further the mandatory housing regulations. Freshmen, however, will still be required to live in university housing. University housing for freshmen has frequently been described as a living-learning experience. "A student can learn many positive things from a group experience. He can learn a lot about himself and others — some things he will like and some he won't. The University's role is to see that the student is provided with beneficial learning experiences and programs," said Stout.

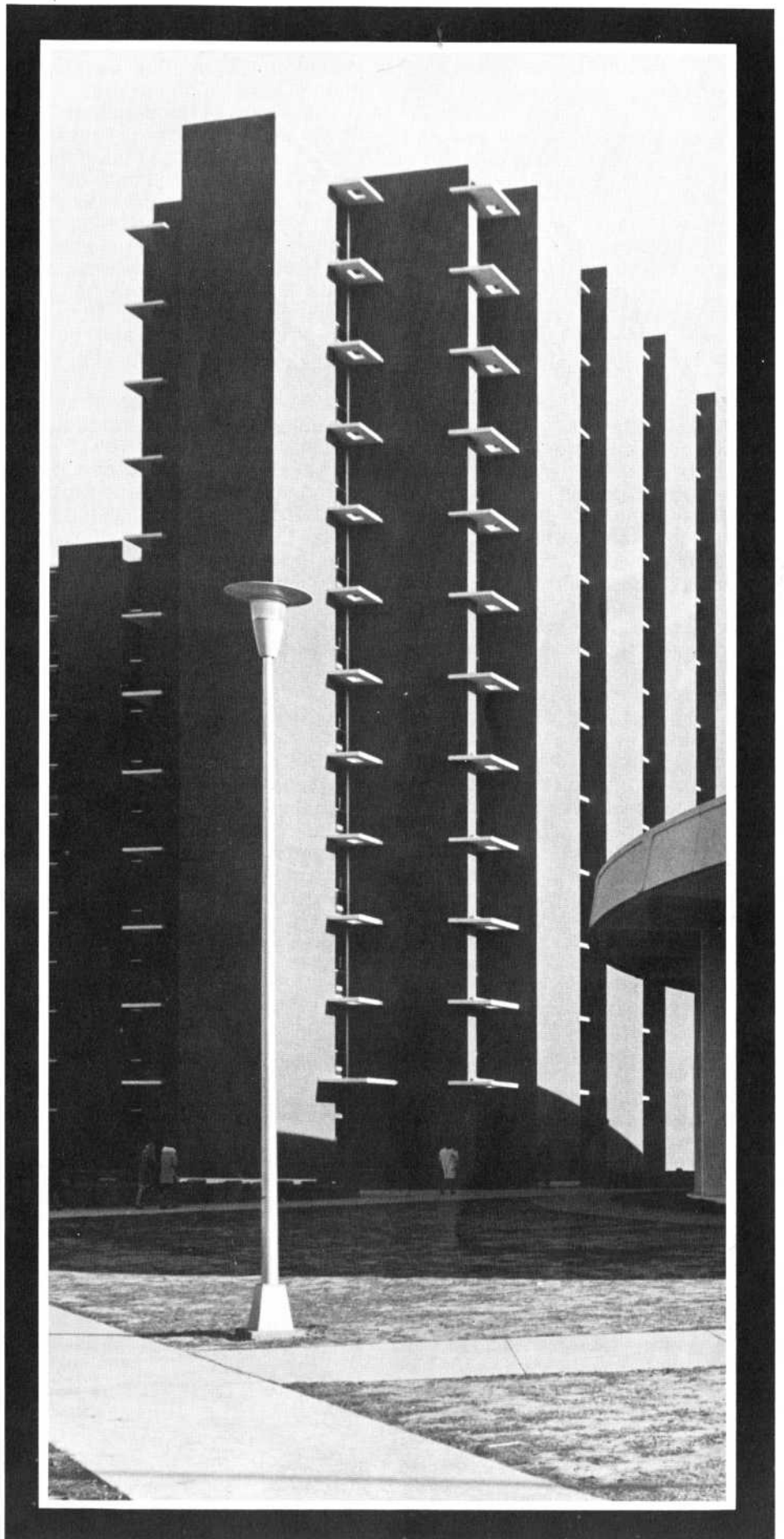
One of the greatest areas of dissatisfaction was Walker Tower — the only all-male center on campus. "I found Walker Tower very disappointing; the elevators and cafeteria were too crowded, and yet with all the people, I met only a few residents and no girls."

The Commission made an in-depth study of the second-semester withdrawal rate from housing. The study, which was broken down by houses, sex and class rank, showed that Walker Tower had the largest second-semester withdrawal—27.7 per cent. Numerically, this was a loss of 22 freshmen and upperclassmen.

In light of the higher withdrawal rate, the greater vandalism, complaints of noise and pranks and the lack of these problems in the coeducational centers, the Commission recommended that Walker be made a coed center.

In effect the term "coeducational housing" when referring to OU housing is a misnomer. Men and women students do not share the same hallways in housing or have neighboring suites. What OU's "coeducational" does mean is that men and women students share the same housing centers, adjoining lounges and cafeterias but live in separate wings and (except on two floors of Walker Tower) on separate floors.

"We have had men and women living in four of our housing centers — Adams, Ross, Cate and Wilson — for several years. After seeing the advantages offered by this form of living, we decided to try this year in Walker Tower," said Stout.



"From the standpoint of conduct, noise, vandalism and the protection of property we have found that it is very helpful to have men and women students in the same centers. In the past there have been some problems in men's housing with pranks and accidental destruction as a result of roughhousing. Particularly in Walker Tower, where we have had 1,500 men, mostly freshmen, living layer on layer in the same center, there is a high frustration level and a rather noticeable immaturity level. This is somewhat tempered when there are women students in the area," Stout said.

Among the numerous advantages verified by the various university coed housing studies, it was emphasized that students participate in more cultural and community activities and that the sexual nature of male-female relationships is de-emphasized. An impressive fact in the surveys was that not one school marked "yes" to the question of whether sexual promiscuity significantly increased in coed dorms as compared to other campus housing.

Of the Big Eight universities, only Oklahoma State University and the University of Missouri do not have some form of coed housing, but there are plans for it at Missouri.

The other Big Eight universities all have coed housing by alternation floors. The University of Kansas, Kansas State University, the University of Colorado and two floors of OU's Walker Tower also have coed housing on the same floors. Kansas has coed housing by alternating rooms on the same wing.

Kansas State is completing its fifth year of having some coeducational living units and its third year of coeducational visitation. Its report stressed that the major purpose is to assist the student, or group of students, assume responsibility for their conduct and program implementation.

Included with the Colorado report were excerpts from residents. One student in coed housing said, "I like the friendly atmosphere which gives rise to a sense of belonging. I feel that each person could become a friend." Another student responded, "I have been made to feel a human part of the University, and not just one of the masses; which is what I believe was the chief purpose in a small,

close community within such a large one . . . This program has helped to keep me interested in school, in life, in other people, and that is what is important."

The dean of students at Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, answered that "relationships between male and female developed quickly on a friendly basis often described by sociologists as 'sibling.' The coed dorms fulfilled the students' expectations as a place for meeting more people in a friendly, natural way. There was less pressure to date, and the coed dorms were quieter and much cleaner."

"Since the beginning of the fall semester, a much better situation has existed in Walker Tower as far as student attitude is concerned, and many of the previous problems have been alleviated," stated Frank Teich, general manager of housing. "By the early part of last year we had several incidents of minor vandalism. That isn't the case this year."

The conversion of Walker Tower to a coed center required no construction expense as locked doors had previously been placed on each separate wing. Teich explained that this had been a preventive measure to reduce the late-night vandalism from passers-by off the street. The room key of each occupant fits the door of his individual wing, thus affording privacy to each wing.



In line with the goal to individualize each university living unit, guidelines for a room visiting policy have been set up, and each unit may elect to establish a room visiting policy within these guidelines.

The policies may vary among the living units to meet the needs of the members. This policy permits the establishment of room visitation between 11 a.m. to 12 midnight Sunday through Thursday, and from 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. Friday and Saturday. These hours parallel the already established closing hour policy at OU.

This program is still in a period of adaptation. It remains to be seen if students feel that visitation infringes on their privacy or if it will be a more comfortable social arrangement. Some students in housing without individual baths, such as Cate and Cross Centers, may find that their privacy is diminished. Of their own accord, they may then reduce their hours of visitation. But other units may find the hours perfectly acceptable.

"Our responsibility in university housing is to find housing that satisfies the greatest amount of needs and causes the least amount of duress and unhappiness. No students will be required to live in a residential unit under a visiting policy with which he can not agree, and none of the policies will negate or supersede other university regulations, or conflict with any federal, state or local laws," stated Morris.

A lack of individuality in rooms was also a constant area of dissatisfaction. Consequently, students may now paint their rooms and have a choice of 26 color combinations.

"Our major concern is with the quality of student life. There may be some physical changes we can make for a better living environment, but basically we have to get the cooperation of the residents. Institutional living is always a compromise, and we must find some standard which can successfully be placed on diversified people," Morris said. "What we in housing need to offer most vigorously and effectively is acceptable leadership."

As stated by the Model Dorms Executive Commission, "We fervently believe that the University, through guidance rather than forced obedience, can be transformed into an institution which not only permits but encourages the student's growth as an individual."