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# Those Students Look Vaguely Familiar

Don't look for the social activist of the '70s. OU students have changed—they'll be the first to tell you in Part I of a two-part series. In Part II student affairs officers will offer their opinions.

By CAROLYN G. HART

*Illustration by George Dotson*

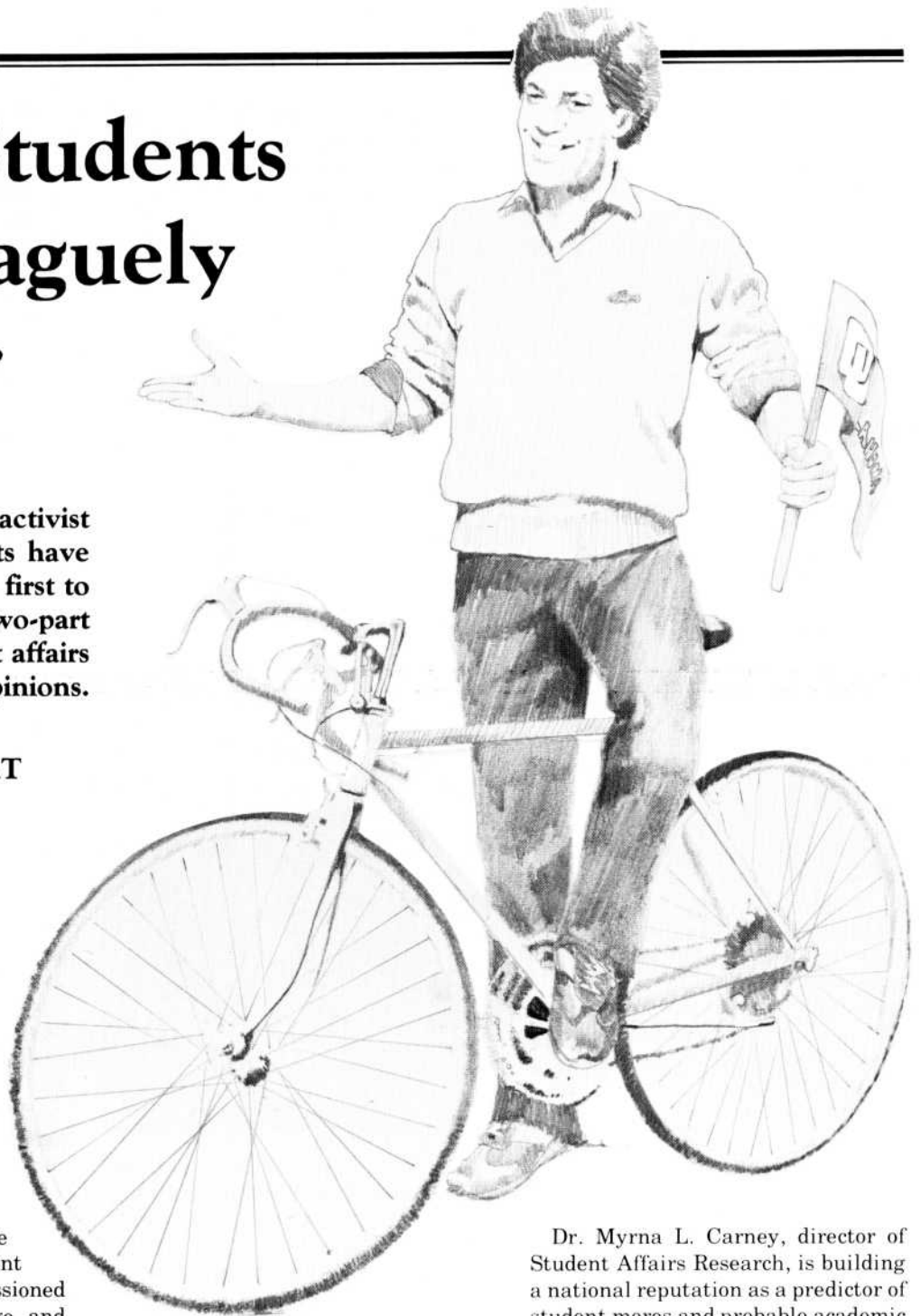
**T**hey still wear jeans, but now designer signatures peep from the pockets. They stage pep rallies to drum up excitement for football games; the impassioned protest marches are long ago and faraway. Although they continue to fall in love, drink beer on the riverbottom and cram for finals, today's students make very real Heraclitus' warning that the only permanent aspect of life is change.

The majority of OU students today are:

- eager to hone job skills;
- convinced that women have a role to play in the world at large;
- becoming increasingly conservative;

- strong supporters of organized religion;
- opposed to the concept of trial marriages;
- against the legalization of marijuana.

This pinpoint delineation of today's students springs from a new kind of numbers game that charts student attitudes, abilities and opinions, and gives the University administrators the kinds of information that might prevent future shock.



Dr. Myrna L. Carney, director of Student Affairs Research, is building a national reputation as a predictor of student mores and probable academic success, important facts for administrators to know. She began surveying incoming OU freshmen in 1975.

"Our surveys, from 1975 through 1980, show that students are becoming more conservative, more pro-religion and more pro-women's rights," Dr. Carney reports. "Unless there is a national turnaround, I expect these trends to continue."

Dr. Carney believes that if these surveys had been done yearly since

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1965 they would show radical changes in attitude.

"Today," she explains, "most students feel that they reflect the same attitudes as their parents. This is a drastic change from the '60s. The student population today is more like that of the '50s. Students are career and vocation oriented. The No. 1 thing is job skills."

Dr. Carney ran a survey of OU freshmen in 1978 and 1979 and of seniors in 1978-79, asking what benefits they expected from attending OU. The freshmen placed the most importance on developing skills necessary for specific jobs, gaining a background for lifelong learning and developing vocational interests. The seniors saw as most important developing a sense of personal identity, gaining a background for lifelong learning and becoming more effective in communication.

Freshmen and seniors differed in the emphasis placed on the importance of job skills. Of the freshmen, 75 per cent rated job skills as extremely important, whereas only 46 percent of the seniors agreed. However, 83 per cent of the seniors felt that they had made substantial progress in gaining job skills through their four years at the University.

Freshmen and seniors both rated as the least important benefits becoming aware of other cultures and gaining an understanding of the sciences, humanities and fine arts.

Seniors felt that four years at the University had given them: a sense of personal identity, more tolerance of others, a background for lifelong learning, open-mindedness, an intellectual curiosity and effectiveness in communication.

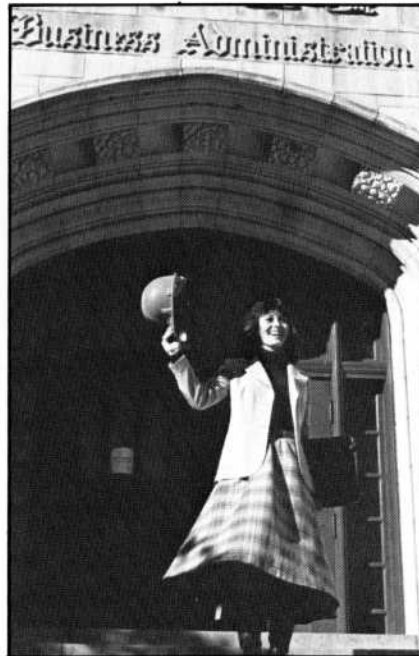
Another indication of the changes in lifestyle among today's students are the significant shifts in enrollment in the University's colleges.

From 1970 to 1979, enrollment in engineering jumped 101.6 per cent and in business 69.4 per cent. Students in arts and sciences increased by 15.5 per cent and in fine arts 6.9 per cent. The College of Education lost 1.1 per cent. A new college, environmental design, chalked up the biggest gain, increasing 186.6 per cent from its beginning in 1972.

A striking change in the last 20 years is the increase in women students. In 1960, the University enrolled 7,143 men and 3,173 women. The fall 1980 student body numbered 12,402 men and 9,301 women, the women comprising 46 per cent of the enrollment. Nationally, in the fall of 1980, women were in the majority in higher education, 50.2 per cent.

College enrollment figures dramatically support Dr. Carney's contention that women are moving into non-traditional areas, such as business, engineering and science.

In 1960, 1,351 men and 340 women



enrolled in business. This fall, 2,532 men and 1,500 women declared a business major. In engineering, the change is startling. In 1960, 2,042 men carried slide rules, only 18 women. This fall, the college enrolled 3,150 men and 435 women. Law, too, reflects the changing times. This fall, 424 men and 219 women were seeking law degrees as contrasted with 293 men and 8 women in 1960.

The reality of women pursuing careers evidently has been accepted by most students. This fall, 62 per cent of the incoming freshmen disagreed with the concept that the activities of married women are best confined to the home. As might be expected, 75 per cent of the incoming freshmen women strongly disagreed

with the house-bound concept, but so did 53 per cent of the freshmen men.

Dr. Carney's surveys also show a marked change in the perception students offer of their political orientation.

In 1975, only 18 per cent of the incoming freshmen classified themselves as conservative. This fall, 28 per cent preferred to be labeled conservative. The middle-of-the-road group remained constant — 43 per cent in 1975, 43 per cent in 1980. The liberals lost substantially, sliding from 39 per cent in 1975 to 29 per cent in 1980.

Among minority students, black freshmen continue to see themselves as being more liberal, while Indian freshmen have grown more conservative. In 1975, 42 per cent of black freshmen characterized themselves as liberal compared to 46 per cent in 1980. In 1975, 46 per cent of Indian students described themselves as liberal, this fall 25 per cent.

The majority of this fall's freshmen, 55 per cent, claim the same political views as their parents. Only 37 per cent see themselves as more liberal and 8 per cent as more conservative than their parents. In 1977, 49 per cent saw themselves as more liberal than their parents. (This question was not included in the 1975 survey.)

Student conservatism isn't restricted to politics. In 1975, only 32 per cent of the incoming freshmen were opposed to trial marriage, while 44 per cent approved. This fall, 49 per cent strongly opposed that alternative to tradition, 25 per cent had mixed feelings, and 26 per cent found trial marriage acceptable.

When asked whether organized religion was losing its importance, 30 per cent of the incoming freshmen disagreed in 1975, 47 per cent in 1980.

Moreover, when the new students of 1975 became seniors, they considered themselves to be more conservative and more favorable to organized religion than they had been as entering freshmen. Dr. Carney sees the increasing conservatism as the reflection of a national change in ideology and predicts that conservatism in social views will continue at OU.

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Opposition to the legalization of marijuana has increased substantially. In 1975, 40 per cent of the incoming freshmen opposed legalization. This fall, 58 per cent were opposed.

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**“The freshman drop out rate has remained constant . . . As the old war movies warned, every other man (or woman) will wash out.”**

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A cheerful note to health experts concerned with alcohol abuse is the increasing number of freshmen who profess not to drink, from 29 per cent in 1976 to 35 per cent in 1980. The percentage of students drinking five or more times a month has fallen from 23 in 1976 to 16 in 1980.

Dr. Carney's figures are based primarily upon responses made by incoming freshmen to a New Student Survey administered as a part of enrollment. More than 80 per cent of the incoming freshmen have filled out the questionnaire since 1975. From it and other specially designed surveys, Dr. Carney not only has determined the attitudes of new students, but she has profiled their general characteristics. Dr. Carney knows who's coming to school and can predict how well they are likely to perform once they get here.

Who can almost be counted upon to survive four years of academia and earn a degree?

The likeliest to graduate is a white woman who attended a college preparatory high school in a town of 50,000 or more and who scored 24 or better on the American College Testing (ACT) program. She will be sure of her major, even as a freshman, and will live either in a University residence or a sorority house.

Other indicators of probable success include being a member of either of the University's two prestigious freshmen groups, the University Scholars (based on grades) or the

President's Leadership Class (based on all elements of merit in a high school student's record); having earned high school As in math, English, social science and natural sciences; having a family income above \$30,000 and parents with college experience, and possessing the personal expectation of winning that degree.

Who will have the hardest time securing a degree?

A beginning freshman who is 31 years old or older is least likely to

cent were still enrolled. About half of the 1975 freshmen who were not enrolled at the end of eight semesters had dropped out after the first year. This high drop out rate after the freshman year has remained constant in succeeding years. Academic fields with the highest graduation rates are education, physical sciences, home economics, social sciences, engineering and business.

Dr. Carney discovered that group living significantly improves a student's likelihood of graduating.



complete a four-year program. Others likely to drop out eventually are students admitted on probation, students admitted through non-high school graduate testing rather than a high school diploma and students who waited a year or more after finishing high school to start their college work. Other bad omens include an ACT composite score of 10 or less, indecision on a major and failure to pre-register.

Freshmen standing in line at the bookstore could well look warily in front and behind. As the old war movies warned, every other man (or woman) will wash out.

Dr. Carney followed the 1975 freshman class through commencement of 1979. She reports that 52 per cent of the class had dropped out, 26 per cent were graduated and 23 per

The ACT data indicated little difference between the scores of Greek pledges, residence hall students and commuters, yet 63 per cent of the commuting freshmen dropped out as compared to 48 per cent of those living in residence halls and 37 per cent of the Greek pledges. Additionally, she found that Greek pledges and members of the President's Leadership Class have significantly lower ACT scores than University Scholars, yet the three groups have similarly low drop out rates.

Generally, students who drop out do so primarily for personal reasons such as work conflict, financial need, personal problems and lack of time for school.

Although the drop out rate for beginning freshmen who are 31 years

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old or older is grim (90 per cent), many more older students now are attending the University. However, many of them are returning to school to pursue further education and do not fall in the category of older freshmen. For the last six years, the average age of the student body has been 23. Approximately one of every two students is over 21, and during the last six years the largest increase in enrollment has been in the over 30 group. This fall, 32 per cent of the student body is 19 and under, 25 per cent is 20-21, 32 per cent is 22-29, and 11 per cent is 30 and older.

Dr. Carney's surveys show that freshmen with the highest composite ACT scores are the most likely to make a 3.0 (B) grade average. In a study based on the work of 6,487 new freshmen from 1975 through 1977, 82 per cent of those with ACT composites of 31 or better made a 3.0 or above. As might be expected, freshmen with the lowest ACT composites (10 or less) were ten times as likely as their counterparts at the other end of the ACT scale to have 1.0 (D) or lower

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**There's no absolutism in this college numbers game. Students can achieve success despite scores that indicate probable failure.**

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grade averages. However, 8 per cent of the students with ACT composites of 10 or less made 3.0 or better, thus proving that human beings can achieve despite being tagged with scores that would indicate probable failure.

Dr. Carney, who came to OU in 1966 after serving for five years as dean of women at Kansas Wesleyan, is not a believer in the absolutism of the numbers game. She has a favorite story to prove her point.

"I saw two freshman classes through to graduation during my time at Wesleyan. In one incoming class, there was one girl with an ACT

composite of 30 and another with a 16. The girl with the 30 flunked out her first year. The girl with the 16 was graduated magna cum laude."

However, Dr. Carney says the University can utilize the ACT scores without prejudging any students. On the basis of a study she and a colleague put together, the reading scores of 500 freshmen were correlated with their ACT scores. Beyond a doubt, the better readers scored higher on the ACT suggesting that special work in reading for students



DR. MYRNA CARNEY

with low ACTs might better their chances to successfully pursue college level studies.

Dr. Carney has conducted surveys for several branches of student affairs including housing, financial aids and the Goddard Health Center, and the results have been used to revamp services to students. She also runs surveys for other areas of the University. Student government asked her to determine whether students felt there was a need for legal assistance. (They didn't.) For the OU Board of Regents, she compiled information from a number of surveys to give the regents a profile of today's students.

To Dr. Carney's knowledge, only four other universities have offices that conduct surveys similar in scope

to hers. They are the University of Maryland, Kansas State University, the University of Missouri and the University of Michigan. In the last two years alone, 126 institutions have written to inquire about OU's research program and to ask for copies of various surveys.

Dr. Carney combines a background in mathematics, guidance and counseling, and psychology in her present job. She came to OU as assistant dean of women in charge of women's housing. From 1968 to 1972, she served as associate director of residential programs for men and women and from 1972 to 1974 as director of educational services, which includes academic tutoring, study skills programs and counseling for students who were considering dropping out.

In 1974, Jack Stout, vice provost for Student Affairs, asked her to head up a new, full-time department charged with providing the University with information on and about its students.

Dr. Carney began her surveys by herself with one part-time secretary. Today, she has a full-time secretary and two research assistants, Denise Casebolt, who is studying computer science, and Farron Hurst, who is working on his Ph.D. in educational administration.

A tall, slender, relaxed woman who began her own college career on a basketball scholarship, Dr. Carney finds her job challenging and satisfying.

"I feel that we perform a very important service to students because the surveys lead to changes and improvements in programs that we offer to students. It helps us determine what new programs are needed."

She considers no aspect of the University more important than serving the needs of its students. "If I were setting up a university, I would first establish an office of student affairs research, then I would use the data it provided to establish the other programs."

Dr. Carney's surveys come too late to aid in the establishment of the University of Oklahoma, but they are having an impact. And, when the wind of change begins to blow, she will be among the first to know. ■