



Late-night library session ends for Margaret Sprinkle with an escorted walk to the dorms with Kendall Ross.

**on the streets
at night, you
have good
reason to fear
the dark, but at
the University
of Oklahoma—**

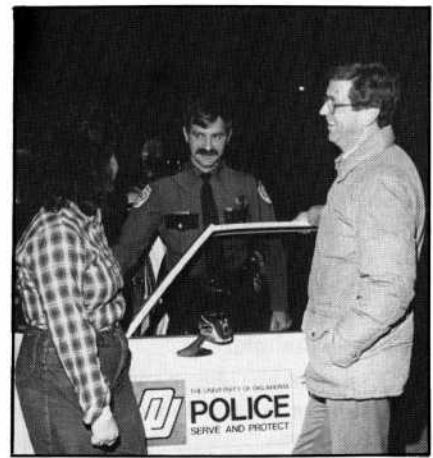
When the sun sets on a university campus, the student work day is still in full swing. Grabbing a quick bite to eat, they're off to night classes, tutoring labs, library research, organizational meetings, fine arts performances, public lectures, all-night practice and study sessions. The days of "closing hours" and "lights-out" are lost forever. These kids never sleep.

But if they follow a life style all their own, college students — especially the women — face hazards that have become common to anyone who ventures out at night. The dangers of the dark that accompany an innocent trip to the 7-Eleven also transform a walk to the library into a calculated risk. Unfortunately, it's a chance that the student, male or female, feels compelled to take.

At the University of Oklahoma a unique service has been organized by the students themselves to minimize this risk. A self-help effort called the Escort Service operates on the safety-in-numbers principle, espousing the motto, "Don't Walk Alone."



**YOU NEED
NEVER WALK**



Grigsby and Schrage check OUPD outside Walker Tower as another evening's escort work gets under way.

The Escort Service headquarters in the ground floor lounge area of OU's largest dormitory complex, Walker Tower. Much in the style of the local cab company, volunteer dispatchers take calls from dusk to 1 a.m., Sunday through Thursday, sending out volunteer escorts to accompany Sooner coeds on their appointed rounds.

The escorts are all men — there were 31 of them this fall — who take 2½-hour shifts once a week. The dispatchers are all women — 28 of them — who staff the telephones for 1½ hours once a week. The division of labor along sexist lines is a practical matter, not a discriminatory one. When women students operate as escorts, two must be dispatched together for their own protection, which simply requires too many volunteers. On the other hand, since almost all the Escort Service users are women, it is reassuring to have a woman answer the phone.

The escorts will answer calls anywhere within the main campus area, to and from the academic buildings and university-approved housing units, such as dormitories, fraternities and sororities and Yorkshire and Kraettli apartments. Most of the

ALONE

travel is on foot; however, for long distances and bad weather, the OU police department makes a car available and supplies the gasoline.

In addition to calls received by regular telephone, OUPD will forward calls to the Escort Service from the 25 direct-line emergency phones throughout the campus. A student may also make advance arrangements to be met by an escort at a specific time and place.

"There is no reason why anyone should have to experience the fear in walking alone," escort captain Peter Lashenick, Inwood, New York, freshman, insists. "There is always someone just a phone call away."

The Escort Service has gone to great lengths to build confidence with their student customers in the reliability and safety of their service. Before they are accepted, all volunteers undergo a security check and are issued a photo ID by OUPD, whose officers also conduct a basic training course and driving check for the escorts. Besides the badge, which must be worn in plain view, the escorts on duty wear specially designed T-shirts and carry flashlights. When in use by the Escort Service, the OUPD car can be identified at a glance from the magnetic sign on the door as well as by the OU emblem.

The Escort Service was organized four years ago by a student residence hall advisor, Charles Neal, after the rape of a woman student who lived in Walker Tower. Neal enlisted the help of the men of Walker 8 (eighth floor), and for two years they operated the service themselves. Initially they averaged one or two calls per night.

"There was resistance at first," the assistant vice president for Student Affairs, Dr. David Schrage, recalls. "Most students are naive. They don't realize the dangers which exist. A campus is like any other community with a potential for crime."

However, the awareness that such dangers do exist is growing. In the two years since the Escort Service was taken over by the Housing Center Association, the nightly number of calls has increased from 5 or 6 last year to 12 or 15 this fall. Operational funding from the OU Student Association has made possible some advertising, while super-

visory help from Student Affairs and the assistance of OUPD, and the departments of parking and traffic and telecommunications have made the system more workable.

Lashenick reports that he still hears comments such as, "It's so embarrassing for me to call you" or "I didn't want to bother you guys," which is ironic since the volunteers are unhappy only when they aren't busy. Kendall Ross, the Muldrow sophomore who is this year's Escort Service chairman, insists that "we don't hear a complaint from them if they are running constantly."

Although identified most closely with the dormitories, which supply most of the escorts, one of four calls to

People at other schools and even escort service users are amazed at the number of volunteers . . . "They ask us, 'Why do you do it?' They can't believe we don't get paid."

the service comes from the Greek housing area, which is more remote and not so well lighted. Improving campus lighting has been a priority item as a deterrent to crimes of all sorts in the past few years, and dramatic progress has been made in areas around academic buildings.

"Lighting in the housing areas is still a problem," Schrage says. "It's expensive, and the budget limits what can be done; that makes the Escort Service even more important."

This fall HCA won a regional housing associations award for its campus security program, the central feature being the Escort Service. "People at other schools are amazed that we can get all these volunteers," says Chicago junior Lisa Grigsby, who is the director of the HCA.

Last year's Escort Service chairman, Eric Vanderwolk, a Muskogee sophomore, adds that the people the volunteers escort are amazed as well. "They'll ask us, 'Why do you do it?'" he says. "They can't believe we don't get paid."

Recruiting escorts and dispatchers is an ongoing task for the student di-

rectors of the program, since class schedules change from semester to semester, and interest wanes. Ross would like to have 45 escorts to schedule five per shift instead of the present three, cutting down the response time during peak demand.

There are some fringe benefits to being a volunteer. Escorts can study at the phone center between calls, and sometimes they pop corn or bring in a TV while they wait. When funding is available, HCA plans to make the phone center do double duty with the addition of typewriters and computer terminals for dorm residents.

"We tell prospective escorts that it's a great way to meet girls," Grigsby jokes, "and we tell the dispatchers that there are always a couple of nice guys around the phone center."

Ross recalls that the first girl he escorted was Jennifer Horn, the featured twirler with the Pride of Oklahoma marching band. "I was just a freshman, and I was really impressed that I had gotten to escort Jennifer Horn!"

Most of the escorting is pretty routine, but some requests are more imaginative than others. One girl wanted an escort to go jogging. "We wouldn't expect an escort to do that," Ross says, "but we had one guy who likes to jog, so he said, 'Sure.'"

One of the escorts volunteered to go along with the girls from Cate Center dormitories to canvass local neighborhoods for donated canned goods for the Norman Christmas Store. During political campaigns, calls have been received to accompany workers distributing campaign literature door-to-door.

Even though the service closes officially at 1 a.m., it is not unusual for students to be out even later. The fine arts practice buildings and the architecture labs, for instance, are open 24 hours a day, while engineers are still waiting to gain access to the computers in the early morning hours. Frequent users of the Escort Service often can find escorts who also are studying late on a given night who volunteer to see them safely home.

"When we tell people that we are still up at 1 a.m., they can't believe it," Grigsby admits, "but that's the way college students operate. We just urge them not to walk alone." 