

# PASSAGES OF THE COLLEGE STUDENT

By DOROTHY FOSTER

**W**e all are familiar with some of the phases of childhood development. The common struggle of the "terrible twos" to attain a measure of independence and control has become so well known that very few parents of today are surprised when that behavior appears in their child. Fewer people are aware of the research of Levinson into normal adult development or the work of Chickering and others on the development of young adults in college.

For many persons graduation from high school is a passage from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to independence. However, over half of Oklahoma's high school graduates go on to college, which provides a four-year transition during which there are many changes and challenges.

We will consider some of those changes by listening in on some phone calls that might have been made by typical OU students.

*I want to make a collect call.  
I'm Melanie Minter.*

*Hi, Dad. It's me again. How  
are things at home?*

*Gee, that's great. Is Mom  
there?*

*Hi, Mom. Is Dad upset about  
something?*

*I know I've been calling collect  
a lot, but I'm trying not to go over*

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** As director of the University Counseling Center since 1972, Dorothy Foster heads a staff of trained psychologists and professional counselors who annually provide individual assistance for approximately 650 students, faculty and staff. A native of Ann Arbor with three degrees from the University of Michigan, Dr. Foster came to OU in 1968 and has held faculty positions in both psychology and education.

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*the allowance you're giving me for incidentals. And this is very important. I've got to make a decision right away about my major. There is enrollment for spring semester classes next week, and I don't know what I should take. If I knew my major, I could just follow their requirements for graduation and not have to worry about anything.*

*I know I've only been here two months, but a lot of freshmen know what they want to major in before they come to college. You used to say I would make a good nurse, but to go into nursing you have to take chemistry and anatomy, and everyone says that those are terribly difficult courses.*

*Oh, business won't work at all. They require calculus, and I'd never get through that. What would you think about interior*

decorating? You know I've always liked to redecorate my room, and everyone has always commented on how great it looks.

Jobs? Oh, I don't know about that. Doesn't Mrs. Jarvis call herself an interior decorator? She's worked for Hanley Furniture for years.

I'm so glad you think it's okay. I'll be home Friday afternoon for the weekend. My blue dress got a little tear on the back of the skirt when it got caught on a rough board. I'm sure you can mend it; I would just hate to lose that dress. Also I need Daddy to look at my car. It sounds funny when I start it.

Homework? Oh, I have a paper in sociology, but that's not due until after Thanksgiving. Besides, everyone else in the dorm goes out on Saturday night, and I just would hate to be the only one here who doesn't have a date.

Bye now. It always makes me feel better to talk to you.

Our mythical freshman, Melanie, is an example of a highly dependent young woman. She still feels that she needs her parents to take care of her, and probably doesn't even see any reason to change. However, in college, particularly in a dormitory living situation, she will be in contact with many students who are more independent, some who are completely on their own both financially and emotionally. At some point she is likely to question her dependency, begin to make some of her own decisions and take some steps to take care of her problems without relying on her parents.

Some young adults who have been trying to establish their independence by being rebellious think that they have resolved the dependency issue. However, students who always do the opposite of what they think their parents want are not making choices based on their own interests and attitudes any more than if they always followed the wishes of their parents.

Autonomy develops throughout childhood and adolescence as the child tries new things and gains confidence. Taking risks, learning how to manage time and money by yourself, finding

out what your limits are, finding out how to get up and get going again when you've goofed up are part of that growing independence. Going to college is a culturally recognized benchmark that the student is making significant progress towards self-reliance.

Liz? I was just going to call you. Did you see her? Have you ever seen anything like it? I'd seen pictures in magazines, but I never thought I'd see it in Oklahoma.

My mother would have kittens if I did anything like that. She used to get on to me if I put a color rinse on my hair. How many colors was her hair dyed? The

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front was green; there was some purple on one side; and it was bleached on the other side. I can't imagine why anyone would want to look like that.

Well, she certainly was successful if attention was what she wanted. Everyone was looking at her. If the hairdo wasn't enough, those shiny purple, skin-tight pants, and the blouse on backwards and the weird shoes.

Susie talked to her?! I'd be afraid to get near her. What'd she say?

She's from Marlow. Oklahoma? That's incredible.

I guess it makes sense that she's a drama major. They tend to be unusual. I wonder if she likes to shock people?

Lonely? What made Susie think she's lonely? Besides if you go around dressed up like a freak, it's not too surprising if you're lonely.

I don't know if I want to talk to her. If people saw me with her they might think I was weird too.

I don't understand Susie. She gets interested in the most unusual people. Last semester it was that woman from South America.

I agree, she turned out to be a neat person, and I'm glad Susie got us all together. I'm much more aware of what's happening in Central America, and how complex the situation there really is. Okay, where are we going to meet Susie and this punk lady?

Be there in 20 minutes. Maybe I'll wear my mantilla.

While a woman in punk attire is a quite obvious example of something out of the ordinary, there are many other kinds of diversity on a university campus. We have students at OU from all parts of the United States and most of the countries of the world. We have most of the religions of the world represented within the student body. There are students who are totally supporting themselves through college and students who have never worked. There are students who drink and smoke and students who are repulsed by both. Part of the experience of college is meeting people who are dissimilar and finding out that, while there may be significant differences in values and attitudes, they are human beings with many of the same needs and concerns as the people you already know and care about. Students who take advantage of the diversity of the University to learn about themselves in relation to others are better prepared to interact effectively in a world which continues to grow smaller.

Hi, Dad. I got your letter. Sounds like you really took a bad fall. Are you feeling better?

That's good, but you better take it easy for awhile to make sure it heals right.

While I've got you on the phone, I want to talk some about my major. I know you've always hoped I'd go into something like medicine, and you think I have such expensive tastes that I better do something that makes a

bunch of money. But I don't think I want to go through all the chemistry and science that you have to take to get into med school. I made a low B on the chem course I took last semester and it was a real struggle.

Sure, I probably could have done better if I had tried harder. But I just wasn't interested in the subject.

No, that's part of the trouble. I don't have any other ideas of what I want to major in. I went over to the Counseling Center and took a bunch of tests that showed that I have interests in artistic and social kinds of occupations. I'm going back to talk to the counselor again about it. She suggested some people I might talk to. Part of the problem is that I haven't had much experience other than working fast food places, so I don't know what I like and what I don't like.

I know you feel like you never accomplished much because you didn't have a college degree, and I plan to get a degree sometime. But I can't see getting a degree in just anything when I don't really know what I want to do.

Hey, come on, Dad! Don't get so excited. I'm still thinking about it; I haven't made up my mind one way or the other. I have dropped my math course and added anthropology. That will count as a social science for the general Arts and Sciences College requirements so it will be useful whichever way I go.

No, I can't come home this weekend. Adding the anthropology course a week late put me a little behind there. And I want to get started on the research paper in philosophy so that everything doesn't jam up at the end of the semester. And I've got a date Saturday night with a girl I met at the student church group.

She's a sophomore too, majoring in journalism.

For goodness sake, Dad, it doesn't matter what her father does. I've only just met her. Tell mom I'm sorry I missed her. You take good care of that twisted

ankle. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone at Thanksgiving. Bye.

This young man is struggling with the important question of "what am I going to be when I grow up." Many students come to college not knowing what subject they want to major in, or they find that their early choice requires courses that they do not like. While this student is aware that his lack of direction bothers his father, he also has a strong sense that the choice, if it is to be a good one, must suit him.

In addition to finding an educational major, career selection involves a life style choice. For example, most students are aware that teachers in Oklahoma are not very well paid, so

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students who put a high value on living "well" are not apt to make teaching their career choice.

Many students want to major in a field which will have job openings when they graduate. Unfortunately the predictability of job opportunities four or five years hence is not very accurate. And while you may have a job, if you don't like the work, you probably won't stay with it very long. It is often better to get into something that you like even though you may have to find an entry level job in a related field while waiting to move into the area you really want.

Cindi, I'm so glad I caught you before you went to work. I know you haven't got much time, but I need to talk to someone. Jeff just called me, and he is so hurt and angry that I broke up with him. He doesn't understand it at all though I have tried and tried to explain it to him. He cries, and

I feel so bad and so guilty. I don't want to hurt him, but it just wouldn't work.

He thinks that there must be someone else. He can't seem to understand how I could decide that we are too different. He says that he will change anything I want; he'll stop smoking and drinking; he'll go to church with me; he'll settle down and get good grades. All I have to do is start looking at the differences, and I know I'm right, but it seems impossible to get him to see it that way.

Thanks for listening. Maybe you could talk to Bruce and get him to drop by and talk to Jeff. You know Bruce was real upset when he and Debbie broke up. Maybe his experience would help Jeff through the disappointment.

I'll see you tomorrow in class. Don't forget my book. Bye-bye.

How to get along with other people — relationships — is one of the most important things we learn as we grow and develop. College is seen by many as an appropriate time to develop a close relationship which will lead to marriage. Certainly college students are in proximity to more potential mates of appropriate age and education than at any time in their lives.

Young women used to be accused of going to college just to "catch" a man. Most women now are as concerned about career possibilities as men are, though they usually do not want to rule out marriage and a family.

Relationships become reciprocal and mutual, able to survive periods of stress and misunderstanding. Individuals develop strategies for dealing with uncomfortable emotions, like anger and fear, both in themselves and in others. They learn how to judge whether or not someone should be trusted with confidences.

College is set aside as a time for young people to grow and develop. While there is an emphasis on intellectual development, psychological growth is a significant part of what makes a college experience important. The opportunities are here. We hope students use them effectively to become the best they can be. 