

Your Letters

"Imagine a university — giving me an award under those circumstances. It spoke volumes about where the real heart of the university was. And I'll never forget it."

Scholars Walk Explored

I was very pleased to read about the creation of Scholars Walk in "A Tribute to Academic All-Stars." However, I was also surprised and disappointed to see that the Danforth Graduate Fellowships were not included in the list of "the most prestigious national and international academic scholarships" since OU's founding. The Danforth Graduate Fellowship program, created by the William Danforth Foundation of St. Louis, awarded some 3600 fellowships for graduate study between 1952 and 1980. The creation of the Danforth Fellowships antedated that of all the fellowship programs on the Scholars Walk list except the Rhodes and Fulbright. The program was designed to assist male students who aspired to earn a Ph.D. and become college teachers and scholars, and a high percentage of recipients completed their graduate programs and went on to hold academic positions. Early on the Foundation also created the Graduate Fellowships for Women program.

The Danforth Fellowships were indeed among the most prestigious scholarship programs in the U.S., with recipients selected by a highly competitive process. Approximately 100 Danforths were awarded nationally each year, from nominations limited to no more than three from a single institution. In 1959 all three of us nominated by OU were selected, which put the university in a tie with Harvard for the most Danforth Fellows in the nation. At the time it was announced that the three OU students had received the award, it certainly seemed like a "big deal" for the university as well as for us personally. Obviously I write as a former Danforth Fellow, but I do so with no personal need for recognition; over a 49-year career I've received all the recognition I could ever have wished for. My purpose is rather the wider one of wanting to rectify an omission; to urge that the Danforth Fellowships be

added to the list of recognized scholarships from which to select honorees to be included among the "scholars" on Scholars Walk.

*James Woelfel
'59 ba letters*

*Professor of Philosophy and of Humanities & Western Civilization
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS*

"We Need to Talk"

It was written as part of the excellent *Postscript* that Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher once admitted to the OU Law School was segregated from the other students

McLaurin who was roped off from other students and had to endure separate eating and study facilities. The U.S. Supreme Court said that "once admitted students need to be treated like all others." Both the Sipuel and McLaurin cases which pivoted upon the OU campus were important and ground breaking cases which I believe, along with Sweatt v Painter (University of Texas) eventually led to the landmark Brown v. Topeka Board of Education.

I wrote my dissertation at the OU Political Science Department on the desegregation of Oklahoma public schools. I actually had the honor of meeting and knowing Ms. Sipuel, and Mr. McLaurin and Mr. Sweatt. They were all great civil rights icons and I write this just to sort out some details from a wonderful and important *Postscript*.

*Allan Saxe
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'69 phd, poly sci
Arlington, TX*



Editor's note: In "The Sooner Story," there is a quote from Mrs. Fisher stating, "In the lunch room, there were several tables with chains around them but some of the other students would get their food and step over the chains to sit with us." Sooner Magazine was in error about the chains in Mrs. Fisher's

by odious means. Much acclaim should go to Ms. Sipuel-Fisher as the "first black law student admitted to the OU School of Law." But the description of what she endured after admittance was really about McLaurin who was admitted to the School of Education. It was

classroom. In her autobiography, "A Matter of Black and White," Mrs. Fisher describes sitting in chair behind a rail at the back of the classroom. On that chair was a pole to which a sign reading, "Colored" had been attached, but no chains.

In 1948, a group of students, of which I was a part, felt that because the politicians in the state were saying they were trying “to protect our kids down in Norman from integration,” it would be important for the “kids down in Norman” to express that we were receptive to the admission of Miss Sipuel and any other blacks who applied. So we had a major effort on the campus, mostly by representatives of religious organizations. As we developed plans, we cleared it with Thurgood Marshall and Walter White, who was head of the NAACP at that time, because we wanted to be sure we were not impairing the ongoing legal effort.

We also didn’t want to go to jail. I called upon a friend of mine, OU Vice President Royden Dangerfield, and said, “I want you to know we’re going to have a demonstration on the South Oval, and I’m going to be asked to make a speech. We’ll have a copy of the 14th Amendment, burn it, put it into a can, and mail it to President Truman, with a declaration saying that the State Regents have destroyed the 14th Amendment in Oklahoma. I don’t want to go to jail – we don’t have a permit for this demonstration!”

Royden looked at me and said, ‘I’m like the three monkeys: I see no evil, I hear no evil, and I certainly speak no evil. Get out of my office.’ During the demonstration, this wonderful man came walking out of the administration building, got into his car and drove off as his way of providing silent support for what we were doing.

Our actions got national and international attention. There were fan letters, and there were letters from people who called me every kind of thing you can imagine. My fraternity brothers provided a bodyguard unit for me for the next two to three days, but I didn’t really need it because the *overwhelming* feeling on campus was that we were right. The student newspaper

acclaimed what we did, the university seemed to be pleased, and when I graduated three months later I was given an award as an outstanding male graduate. Imagine a university—just having been put through the desegregation process and supposed to be resisting it—giving me an award under those circumstances. It spoke volumes about where the real heart of the university was. And I’ll never forget it.

*Howard I. Friedman
'48 ba poly sci
Encino, California*

Burrs recalled fondly

My name is Bobby Joe Altom. I was in the initial President’s Leadership Class of 1961. That is where I first met and grew to love David Burr. We were introduced to his fiancé, Carol, during our freshman year. The two of them were our surrogate parents, friends, and advisors, not only our freshman year, but in my case, throughout my days at OU. They were present at my wedding.

The older of my two is named after David. Had there been a girl in the family, her name would have been Carol.

David was instrumental in assisting me with getting a summer job with a major employer in Oklahoma. That led to a post-graduate career with that same company on my way to starting my own business 20 years later.

Carol has demonstrated her total competency over the years, and others have written of her skills better than I might. I will simply congratulate her on a successful career and wish her the very best in her retirement.

*Bobby Joe Altom
'67 bs, industrial engr
Dallas, TX*

Letters Program a ‘jewel’

The Letters Program, and Dr. Phillip J. Nolan’s leadership of it, was

a “jewel in the crown” of OU. At a university sometimes called “Paris on the prairie,” the Letters Program stressed general and wide ranging education more than programs which focused on professional preparation. Nolan’s calm, dour ways appealed to a small number of us who found the Letters Program to be a good formation for “we did not know what, exactly...” Some went into theology, [some] to medicine, others into law. I wound up in academe. Nolan’s quiet insistence that we “pick our own courses in keeping with our goals,” helped us to think about why we were spending four years at OU. My favorite anecdote was the decision to enroll in Asian Geography Seminar my senior year—no prerequisites taken. Nolan’s comment was, “Go talk to the instructor and see if you can persuade him to wave the prerequisites...” I did: he did.

By putting responsibility on us to figure our own path, Nolan epitomized what a great professor is really all about. I have proudly used “BA-Letters” since graduating in 1962.

*Prof. Willis H.A. Moore
'62 ba, letters
Honolulu, HI*

Jeff House remembered

I note with interest they are taking down my old dorm. This was the athletic dorm during the Bud Wilkinson period. He would do football game review on the third floor. I got kicked out after my first one. Heaven forbid, I was a swimmer.

The house during my stay there was known as the “ape house.” To add a little more history, my understanding was Jeff House rooms were so small to prep navel students for shipboard quarters during World War II.

*Curt Lees
'53 bs, me
Hannibal, MO*