

A plan for improving fraternity scholarship

BY FREDERICK B. OWEN

THERE is no greater need for improvement in scholarship among members of the fraternities and sororities than among other members of the general student body but the "plan" herein discussed is one necessarily limited to those or similar organizations because it requires autonomous groups living in the chapter houses.

The bulk of college "casualties" occur the first year. When they do occur later in college life, it is usually found that the student involved was below the average scholarship on the campus in his first year.

One of the causes for this situation is that the gap between high school and college is a serious mental hazard to the freshman. For too many it is a yawning abyss. Many are swallowed up in it. In high school days there is supervision at the home; the student is on familiar ground and among old friends and guiding relatives. His school work is largely planned and supervised for him. There is a minimum of original work and research. The change to college puts the student suddenly on his own—on his own among strangers in a new world. He is constantly in the hour of decision. There must of necessity under our present system be little direct and personal guidance and supervision. Too often merely because of the lack of sympathetic personal guidance the freshman is unable to satisfactorily adjust himself to this world of new freedom and new responsibilities.

The English universities have long recognized the value of close personal guidance of the student through the maze of university pathways and in the evaluation of the vast array of mental pabulum available to those enrolled. Hence the system of dons, tutors or advisers whereunder every student is assigned to some one such person who is altogether familiar with that portion of the curriculum which his "mental ward" is expected to master, and who draws his compensation from the university though not a faculty member.

He is indeed the "guide, philosopher and friend" of each student assigned to

him and is able by frequent personal contacts to know which of the usual difficulties are being encountered and by experience what is needed to meet and overcome them, all before an accumulation thereof results in discouragement or the development of an inferiority complex. He is able to help the student "find himself" and to choose wisely his course from the viewpoint of his life purpose, not forgetting the problem of mental and cultural development. For many good reasons the English system cannot be used by our colleges and universities.

The fraternity home, housing and banding together as it does thirty-five or more members for common purposes, seems to afford an ideal laboratory for an experiment in scholarship and college life suggested by the English system, an experiment looking to bridging this gap between high school and college.

Actuated by these reflections and in the hope of devising a plan which would greatly increase the probability that college students participating therein would conquer their curriculum assignments in a thoroughly creditable manner, the writer and two other alumni members of a certain fraternity having a chapter at the University of Oklahoma, in the summer of 1926 held a conference with President Bizzell and certain available faculty members before whom in considerable detail they outlined their proposal. Their reception was most cordial and at the close of the conference they received assurance of hearty faculty co-operation and the willingness of the university to create a scholarship to be awarded to the individual who might be appointed to carry on the proposed educational experiment, which was then a novelty in American college work. The active chapter chosen, on being consulted responded whole-heartedly to the idea and the spirit of the plan; it agreed as its contribution to the support of the adviser, to contribute room and table board on condition that the alumni would furnish the agreed monetary stipend included in the adviser's remuneration.

Fraternities are recognizing increasingly their responsibilities as educational aids, rather than as purely social organizations. One of the most successful of these new plans is that sponsored by Phi Gamma Delta at Norman, which is being adopted nationally by that fraternity, as well as by other social fraternities. The plan was originated by Judge Frederick B. Owen of the law firm of Snyder, Owen & Lybrand of Oklahoma City and at the request of the editors Judge Owen has described this most-worthwhile project

By the time school was ready to open the necessary guaranty of alumni contributions had been received; the appointment was made and the adviser immediately began work, the first appointee being a graduate student who was working for a master's degree in pedagogy and as the result of his work during that first year was made the basis of his master's thesis which is now on file in the library at the university.

A marked improvement in the scholarship of the chapter in question was made during the first year and the experience gained by the first adviser was of much value to his successors. Almost continuously since 1926 the place had been filled. Usually the appointee has been a graduate of some other college or university; with the exception of the first appointee the adviser has always been a member of some other chapter of the same fraternity.

The results have been so gratifying that the plan has been adopted with variations by at least four other chapters of the same national organization and has been officially endorsed by the national convention, as well as by chapters of several other national fraternities; one of which fraternities has offered certain financial aid to each of its chapters which will adopt it.

The following may be said to be the essentials of the plan as finally developed:

1. A fixed determination by the active chapter to have the advantage of a chapter adviser and to sustain a reasonable proportion of the necessary expense;
2. Reasonable monetary support from the alumni and assistance in choosing the appointee;
3. Encouragement and co-operation by the faculty;
4. Appointment of a capable man.

After all, a successful administration

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