

# Students DO Have Sense

IT has taken a blonde young woman with a pleasing personality and a very good idea of student psychology only a few months to revolutionize the attitude of the some six thousand students on the University of Oklahoma campus.

Time was when student reporters could always work up a good story on a dull day by interviewing students on how dissatisfied they were with the Union and how they didn't feel they were getting their money's worth for their Union fee paid each semester. Of course the fee was essential to pay off the bonds that made the building possible in the first place, but students weren't interested in that angle. They wanted a lot of things done for them at the Union.

This year, they say with real enthusiasm that they have been getting something for their money. Margaret Anne Gessner, who came to Norman last February as the first full-time director of Union activities, has answered most of the requests of the students and has done many popular things for them that they had never even thought of!

Coming into a new section of the country, a new position, and a new situation, she was able to view student problems on the O.U. campus in good perspective. From the start, her enthusiasm, her honest interest in student affairs, and her understanding of the student viewpoint, won the cooperation of the student body.

The program of Union activities she put into effect, made possible largely through completion of the main Lounge and other new facilities of the building, has had a most refreshing effect on the spirits of students. She has made them feel, through participation in Union affairs, that it is really *their* building.

Since Miss Gessner has won the confidence of the students so well, it is interesting to examine the somewhat unorthodox views she has formed about students as a result of her every-day contacts with them.

In the first place, she believes modern college students, on the O.U. campus and elsewhere, are not at all the radical or extremist types that many good citizens—and some faculty members—believe them to be.

"The students here are enthusiastic and respond to suggestions and workable ideas readily," she comments, "but before work can begin they usually squelch their own enthusiasm by remembering that 'after all,



Margaret Anne Gessner

it always has been done that way and probably it *can't* be changed.' It always amazes me to hear adults say that students of college age are extreme or revolutionary. I am convinced that ninety-nine out of every hundred students are far too conservative. They are afraid not to conform to custom — particularly social custom —

The director of Union activities comes forth with some kind words for today's collegians

even though in their somewhat idealistic minds they know it is for the best.

"They lack the courage and self-confidence to change or rebel, and the adults involved in social change wield the iron hand that holds youth back with their own prejudices, habits, and inhibitions. The very alumni who read this article might be the ones who are holding back the advancement and improvement of social existence for students on this campus. By 'social' I mean a wise recreational, social, and cultural program that would turn out more well-balanced intelligent citizens and parents into your state."

Miss Gessner frankly was surprised to find that instead of too much social life on the campus, there is not enough—or at least not enough of the desirable kinds. Of the 1,800 co-eds in the University, fewer than six hundred have social engagements over the weekends, which means that about two-thirds of them lack opportunities to learn good social conduct, how to get along better with people, and how to develop their own personalities.

The Union Program is designed to make possible easy social contacts for students, providing recreation for many students who otherwise might spend the potentially brightest period of their lives without any real brightness.

Another thing that surprised the newcomer on the Sooner campus this year was the lack of so-called school spirit.

"What is wrong here that the students don't feel any stronger sentiment for the University than they do?" she asks. "I am not sure why, but I *am* sure that the fraternity and sorority members as well as the student body at large, are not feeling any strong love for your University. They rather turn their loyalty to their smaller groups. This isn't right, is it?"

Miss Gessner is convinced it isn't right, and she is hopeful that the Union program has power to build closer ties between students and their University.

Twelve students now serve on a Union Board that helps guide the progress of the Union activities. Next year it is hoped that many more groups on the campus will be reached through committees—all working on a Union program that is for the *whole* student body.

"The representation on the board comes from each of the campus groups of independent and organized people as well as commuting and graduate students," Miss Gessner explains. "This hits every angle

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of campus life pretty well. Next year we hope to have two hundred students working for the common cause of a Student Union which welcomes all faculty and students into a cultural and social program. I believe it is not too optimistic to say that we can see the barriers between student groups and between faculty and students gradually disappearing."

Miss Gessner is a friend of the students in their plea for fewer set restrictions on student conduct and more student responsibility for self-government.

"Perhaps our students here are not given enough of a chance to decide for themselves what's right and wrong," she says. "I have met this problem again and again since I have been in Norman. The men and women students have told me about some rule or restriction which is—or is not—enforced here, and then proceed to tell me how absurd they think it is, and how the students do not like to cooperate with authorities who 'treat us like children'."

Miss Gessner believes that wisely guided—but not shoved—student government can do much more to guide student conduct on a sane and character-developing basis than any amount of rigid rules handed down by official decree. She is practical enough to recognize that this is not the prevailing viewpoint of a great many adults, but she is hoping that the idea of student self-government on a really responsible scale will not be squelched by lack of adult cooperation both in and out of the University.

The Union Activities program, as carried out during its first semester, hasn't been a panacea for all campus problems, but without doubt it has accomplished wonders in serving the students, enlisting their constructive cooperation, and improving faculty-student relationships.

Miss Gessner, energetic, enthusiastic, youthful, has captured the friendship and confidence of the student body, and that is the first and perhaps most difficult step to be solved in any problem connected with higher education.



**SMITH-BECKWITH:** Miss Helen Smith, '37 ex, and Charles Beckwith were married May 21. Mrs. Beckwith was a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority at the University. Mr. Beckwith received his degree from Pennsylvania State College. Both have taught for several years in the public schools at Frederick, where they will make their home.

Milton S. Brewer, '37bus, of Oklahoma City, is employed as inspector for the Oklahoma Compensation Rating Bureau.

Since January 1, Russell William Brown, '37bus, has been employed by the Oklahoma City Loan Men's Association. After his graduation from the University last spring Mr. Brown spent two months in Europe. He served as cadet officer on the *City of Newport News*.

Mangum Junior College has as its dean for next year Cletis Eskew, '37ms, former superintendent of schools at Retrop.

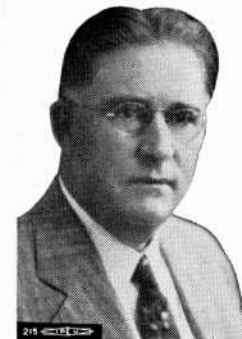


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