



Both sorority and non-sorority girls are well represented in campus affairs handled through Associated Women Students. Three executives, shown above, are Dorothy McMillan, president of residential halls council; Emily Ann Moore, president of rooming house council, Ruth Stith, president of Panhellenic council

Sorority Girl--To Be or Not To Be?

By Margaret Stephenson

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SORORITIES are on the firing line. Recently we have been reading indictments and defenses of the sorority and fraternity system in such popular magazines as the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Liberty*. It is significant that these magazines found enough reader interest to justify using so much space on such articles as "Many Are Called," "—And Some Are Chosen," and the story "Goon Castle."

It seems an appropriate time to encourage a better understanding of the sorority situation at the University of Oklahoma.

Of the two thousand girls enrolled in the University, one fourth are members of twelve national sororities, all of which have their own houses. If we are to have a successful sorority system and so justify its existence on our campus, we must have a membership set-up that will accomplish two things: (1) At the end of fall rush there should be enough girls in each house so that it can function on sound financial and social principles and yet not be overcrowded; (2) There must be enough sororities to accommodate the girls who want to belong and are able to afford it.

If we do not have enough sororities to accomplish this we need to add more chapters. If we have too large membership in some groups and too small in others, we must do what we can to equalize them or the entire system will suffer.

Only as we have a Panhellenic viewpoint and look at the situation as a whole can we judge and try to solve the problems.

Sororities have definite functions. They provide closely knit living units where

members have an opportunity to govern themselves. Each house elects its own officers and looks after its own finances, conducts its own social affairs and problems of group living. It is a student co-operative on a de luxe basis.

Sorority chapters take a special interest in developing all-round girls and giving some of them social experience which they might not otherwise have. Loyalties and friendships of lasting value are formed. Sorority life has many advantages for those who can afford it, but the increased cost of membership over dormitory living makes it definitely a luxury.

A frequent criticism of sororities—often justified—is that their social self-sufficiency and undemocratic practices bring about class distinctions between affiliated and non-affiliated.

However, those who think that an individual's social problem is settled automatically when sorority ribbons are pinned on are sadly mistaken. The distinction between the girls who date a great deal and receive a big rush as compared to the not-so-popular girls is even greater within a sorority house than the distinction between sorority girls in general and those who are unaffiliated.

Serious efforts are being made on the O. U. campus by student leaders and advisers to break down the barriers between various groups and bring about a spirit of co-operation.

Panhellenic is a very active organization. There is a friendly spirit among its members, though we cannot fool ourselves that this same unselfish spirit prevails throughout individual chapters.

Through exchange dinners and other joint activities, Panhellenic is attempting to acquaint girls with those in other chapters and to foster the idea of co-operation rather than competition. Panhellenic and House Presidents' Council (presidents of all rooming houses), and the Dormitory Council are constantly working on projects to better the relationship and acquaint the affiliated and unaffiliated girls.

It is my belief that today there is not the stigma attached to non-membership in a group that there was formerly. Of course, there are many who cannot pledge because of lack of money. There is also an increasing number of students, including campus leaders, who deliberately choose to remain unaffiliated. It is a healthy situation when girls can "take it or leave it" as far as sororities go and find that they can have a happy college life either with or without pledging.

Fraternity chapters are not so quick to exhibit an official frown when a chapter member dates an independent girl, and non-fraternity men date sorority girls often enough to prove that there is no barrier there that cannot be broken when students have a sufficiently broad and democratic viewpoint.

Too often heartbreak has come on pledge day because a girl has been brought up with the idea that, in order to be a social success in life, she must make a particular group. Parents often through over-emphasis on the importance of pledging are responsible for this disappointment. They could do much to alleviate the problem—if they would—by not placing sorority membership above

(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 31)

Sorority Girl

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

college career. It is not uncommon for a parent whose daughter failed to make the sorority of her first choice to allow her to withdraw from the University and so accept defeat instead of facing her problem and working it out.

If all girls insist on belonging to one of a few groups we would have huge chapters, snobbishness would be running riot, and the system would be so vicious that it would eventually be its own undoing.

Last fall a girl came weeping into my office. She had received three bids, but failed to receive the one on which she had set her heart. After a talk, she decided that she could make friends and find happiness in one of the groups to which she had been bid, but her mother then appeared on the scene. Her mother burst forth, "My pride is hurt!" Her pride—because a member of her bridge club was a member of the coveted group to which her daughter had not received a bid! It was her pride that kept the girl from accepting one of her invitations, and that was responsible for the girl's dropping out of school a few months later.

A few parents have even been known to send their daughters to other schools because they were afraid that the fact that sororities on this campus limit the number of their members might be discriminatory.

A few facts concerning the limitation system should dispel the fears. By the fall of 1940 sororities will be limited to 55 members, not counting married students, those doing graduate work, unaffiliated transfers, and girls who have lived in Norman for one calendar year. It became necessary to limit membership in order to combat overcrowding in sorority houses. Aside from this difficulty, it is the opinion of National Panhellenic Council that sororities become unwieldy with too large a membership. They then defeat their chief aim of closely knit unity and can no longer "exercise fraternity."

The effect of the limitation system has not been drastic, though uninformed persons sometimes think it has. Only four girls who went through rush last fall failed to receive bids and only nine girls were excluded from the groups they wanted because of the limitation system. This is far better than in most colleges. Few girls who come here with good recommendations and a desire to pledge fail to have an opportunity.

Another point concerning the limitation system is that the only time of the year when it really makes a difference is during September rush. By October there are always vacancies left by those who have dropped out of school because of ill-

ness, marriage, or some other reason. There is not a single sorority on the campus that has not been adding pledges this winter to fill up membership.

An active list is kept in our office of girls who are interested in pledging. We learn these names from persons interested in the girls or from the girls themselves. This list is frequently consulted by groups desiring members. Thus, if a girl can afford it, makes her grades, and is personable, she can very likely belong to a group if she wants to, unless perhaps she has set her heart on belonging to "Alpha Alpha or nothing."

Economic conditions have made working part-time customary for girls at O. U. I know of no group, sorority or non-sorority, where there is any distinction made because a girl is working all or part of her way through college. Campus styles in clothes taboo anything but sports wear. There are few eyes experienced enough to distinguish between a \$15 sweater and a \$1.98 one. Even formals of the \$5.98 variety differ little from the more expensive ones when seen on a pretty girl who is dancing under ballroom lights. Thus there is no particular handicap in dress for the girl who has little to spend.

Social opportunities for all students are gradually expanding, though not as rapidly as we would like. The best approach is being made in all-school activities such as those planned by the Student Union, Associated Women Students, the Y. M. C. A. and the Y. W. C. A.

The Union's Pine Room provides club room facilities for all students, that are comparable to fraternity and sorority house clubrooms. The all-University dances sponsored by the Union are steadily drawing a more representative cross-section from the whole student body.

A growing number of activities are planned especially for the independent students by House Presidents' Council, Dormitory Council, and the Independent Men's and Independent Women's Associations. The Y. M. C. A. sponsors many social affairs open to all students.

If we could remove the remnants of class feeling between sorority and non-sorority members, we would solve the big problem of University life. We are making some progress, but before we can move very fast we must first educate parents and girls who are growing up that "belonging" or "not belonging" is not nearly so important as whether a girl can adjust herself with the group with which she lives—be it in a dormitory, sorority, or rooming house.

She should be emotionally stable, able to make compromises and find interests outside of herself and classwork. Then she can see sorority life in its proper perspective, as an interesting—but not dominating—part of the University picture.

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