

The President Speaks

BY DR. GEORGE L. CROSS

What are the student attitudes? What affect have they played in shaping University life? Are the veterans making any contribution? These questions and more are discussed with clarity and frankness.

Following is a speech delivered by President Cross at the 26th Annual Conference of College Unions at Colorado Springs, Colorado, April 27, 1949.

Because it presents the student's past, present and future problems as well as the problems of the University in a like period, we believe it to be one of the best mental portraits of a student body and a University yet to be evolved.

If anything is ever a "must," this most assuredly is one for any person interested in the University and its students.

David A. Burr, Editor
Sooner Magazine

My invitation to appear before you this evening was accompanied by the suggestion that my topic might well be "What is Determining Student Attitudes Today," i.e., mixed student body, the war effort, returned GI's, the married GI's, feelings of futility, etc. After accepting the topic, I realized that I could have spoken much more successfully on student attitudes, rather than upon factors which cause student attitudes. One is never quite sure about factors which affect attitudes or movements. Often they can be determined only by studies made in retrospect. However, of one thing we can be very sure. The students of today do have attitudes, and since there are many more students than ever before, there are correspondingly many more attitudes to contend with.

I suppose that each of the more than 1,700 colleges and universities in the United States went through about the same experience as that of the University during the summer and fall of 1946. In the spring of 1946, we had an enrolment of less than 5,000, and that fall something in excess of 15,000 were knocking at our doors. By extending every possible resource of housing and instructional facilities we finally managed to admit just a few over 10,000. The process involved something of a convulsion, especially in view of the fact that our best prewar enrolment had been about 6,500.

There were all manners of problems to be faced, of course. Of the 10,000, approximately 6,000 were veterans. To our dismay it turned out that 40 percent of the veterans were married. Fifty percent of the married veterans had children, ranging in number from one to six. Of the 50 percent who did not have children, it seemed reasonable obvious that one half would have children before the end of the school year and the possibilities, of course, were much greater than this. This meant that the University and perhaps every other institution in our country, faced responsibilities other than academic on a scale which no one had thought possible, or even thought of.

Housing for married students on an extensive scale was something new. We did not, however, realize immediately that we would need to establish pre-schools, kindergartens, public health nur-

sing, educational programs for the wives of the students, pre-clinical medical service for expectant mothers and, on certain occasions, obstetrical service. Such things had simply not been a part of the University life in the past, or thought to be properly a part of University life.

The provision of academic facilities, including classrooms and the recruitment of the faculty, likewise presented problems. Fortunately, the existence of two naval bases almost immediately adjacent to our campus solved the housing problems and, under the circumstances, we did a reasonable good job of finding an instructional staff. But with our very best efforts, conditions at the University were not ideal, neither from the point of view of the students nor the faculty.

Our Student Union, of which we had been so proud before the war, made a noble effort to meet the needs but, of course, could not quite succeed. I soon learned to avoid going through the Union between classes. I started through one day with a freshly shined pair of shoes and smoking a much treasured pipe that had been given to me by the graduate students of the Department of Plant Sciences, where I had served previous to my wartime retooling for the Presidency, and came out of the building with all traces of the shine removed, and instead of the pipe, I found myself with a partially smoked cigarette stained with lipstick.

I am happy to say that we are now about to begin an expansion program which will triple the size of our Union Building. I am happy about this because student attitudes, like the attitudes of everyone else, are determined by their experiences and their environment. Students do not do well and will not have good attitudes unless they have well balanced facilities for all of their activities—social and recreational, as well as academic. The Student Union, of course, being the nerve center of student activities on the campus, is the most important non-academic agency or facility on the campus.

But what about the attitude of postwar students, consisting so largely of veterans? I wondered about this question myself before the veterans returned. I remembered hearing wild stories about the behavior of the veterans of World War I—how they would go downtown in Norman and take over an eating establishment and supply themselves with free hotdogs, hamburgers, coffee and candy bars. I remembered stories of how President Brooks would spend many weeks raising money to pay for the damage done by these celebrating youngsters.

I wasn't particularly reassured by the fact that one of the first veterans to arrive on our campus got drunk and landed in jail the first Saturday night he was here. When the Chief of Police phoned many things ran through my mind, including the number of counselors that would be needed by our Dean of Students when 5,000, rather than one,



had arrived on the campus. But I need not have worried. The young man involved in that misadventure is the only veteran at the University who got into conduct difficulties sufficiently important to have him brought to my attention.

Perhaps there is one exception to this statement. A young veteran whose father apparently had supplied him with a rather too liberal allowance decided one day that he simply couldn't observe the parking regulations for students at the University. He next sent the editor of the student paper an open letter addressed to the President of the University in which he proposed that, in view of the fact that he would henceforth be violating our parking rules each day and therefore, of course, would receive a fine each day, he be allowed to pay his fines on a monthly basis and, in view of the volume of his business, he thought he should be entitled to a discount from the regular rates. I explained to the young man that his proposal was not satisfactory and that four violations meant his suspension from school, and everything worked out all right.

But I feel that with only two veterans coming to my office on cases of misconduct, the record of veterans as a group at O.U. is excellent, which of course speaks well for their attitude toward correct social practices. I haven't checked our records recently, but during our first year of large veteran enrolment, the percentage of veterans which visited our Counselor's offices to discuss personal conduct was three percent less than the percentage of non-veterans.

This comparatively good attitude on the part of veterans toward matters pertaining to personal conduct perhaps has been conditioned by the fact that the veterans of World War II saw much more service than those of World War I. The extended length and seriousness of this second world conflict appears to have had a sobering influence on most of those who served with our armed forces, and the young men came out of service much more mature, it seems to me, than non-veterans of the same age.

The attitude of the entire student body toward matters concerning personal conduct, however, has been excellent at the University since the war, and I have heard similar reports from a great many other institutions. Perhaps this is due to the fact that a large proportion of the student body in our institutions of higher learning consist of veterans with their stabilizing influences. At the University we like to think that our preparation for the post-war problems have had something to do with this attitude. We like to think that our carefully organized Department of Student Affairs, with the co-operation of the faculty, has managed to create a situation in which the students want to do the right thing.

But what about the attitude of modern students toward courses and curricula? Perhaps I should say first of all that my personal experiences lead me to believe that students of today are a bit more serious than those of the pre-war years. In my own Institution, the veterans in the student body have been making grades approximately six percent higher than the non-veterans. Apparently this is true in at least some other institutions, as evidenced by the story which came out of Stanford University to the effect that the non-veterans a year or two ago were referring to the veterans as DAR's. Some curious faculty member found out that this did not mean "Daughters of the American Revolution" but "Damned Average Raisers." We found it necessary to segregate somewhat in our classes (and I'm not referring to racial problems) and we've been able to do this pretty well through the use of achievement tests which indicate the proper level for a freshman to begin work at the University.

The postwar students at O.U. have not been inclined to find fault with curricular patterns or with course content, but they have at times been quite critical in regard to the procedures utilized in conducting courses. In the spring of 1946 I was visited by a committee of about a half dozen veterans who wanted to discuss teaching methods with me. They complained about the fact that many of our instructors would spend an entire 50-minute class period in lecturing the students. They expressed disapproval of the lecture method and suggested that it would be more profitable if the students could be allowed to participate in the classroom activities.

One of the young men who came in was even bright enough to suggest that the lecture method is more in keeping with authoritative and totalitarian forms of government such as Nazism or Fascism, where the people are expected to listen carefully and believe what they are told, than it is with our democratic way of doing things.

This is in keeping with student attitudes elsewhere, as reported by John McPortland in *Life*, March 28, 1949: "They are a different breed," said a middle-aged history instructor at an ivy league university. "They're polite enough and sometimes they stammer a little the way young men are supposed to, but they all have this mockery behind their eyes when they listen to me, especially when I'm making a positive statement. When I ask a question—it has to be an open question whose possible answers have intrinsic values—the mockery goes away and they're interested."

Some veterans seem to have emerged from the war with an assumed arrogance which sometimes takes the form of cynicism. They seem to know the answers—but this itself is belied by their obvious attempt to search for answers, as did the group which came to my office. From the experience of war they have learned to be watchful and alert. This has been evidenced, on our own campus, by a strong and renewed interest in student elections and the problems of the student senate.

Often their criticisms may, to us, seem to be unfounded and the result of inexperience in educational administration. More often, however, their opinions are the voiced fear of static situations over which they have no control. They distrust arrangements which seem to force them into a regimented life. They are not by nature rebellious—only cautious. An attempt to meet them half way and listen to their opinions gains their trust and dispels their fear of being managed against their will.

One of the students suggested that in a democracy the student has a right to be heard. I suppose

he developed this attitude from the fact that he had participated actively in many enterprises during his four years of service with our armed forces and found it irksome to sit passively and listen to someone talk. This is just another case of past experience determining attitude.

During the same interview, or conference, several of the young men complained of the fact that the same lectures were being given by certain instructors year after year without revision. This, they said, was obvious in many ways—even from the frayed and yellowed condition of the notes that were used by the professors in question. One earnest young man suggested in all seriousness that the professors be required to revise their notes each year or, if this should prove to be impossible, that the professors be provided with adequate secretarial service so that the old notes could be re-typed each year and thus avoid the dog-eared appearance of the notes being used by one of his own instructors. The group was unanimous in its opinion that more visual education should be employed.

From all of this I got the impression that the modern student body has a most refreshing and aggressive attitude concerning the need for and the possibility of improving classroom instruction. This experience and others leads me to believe that our student body today is demanding a vitalized type of teaching which may be somewhat foreign to the traditional lecture method. It seems clear that they want to participate in the learning process. They are demanding that every modern teaching aid be utilized in the classroom.

They are especially aware of the possibilities of visual education—the use of models, mockups, motion pictures and so forth. It seems clear to me also that this attitude is due to the presence of so many veterans, many of whom have had experience with

the best of modern teaching aids and methods—teaching aids and methods conceived by college professors in the service not handicapped by a lack of funds. The ultimate effect of this attitude will, of course, be improved teaching in our colleges and universities, but the process by which this improved teaching is brought about may be a bit painful in some cases. I do not mean to imply by this that modern students are unreasonable or harshly critical or cruel in any way. They are inclined to be mildly derisive at times, but in my experience never cruel.

Postwar students, in contrast to prewar students, are I believe inclined to be philosophical about matters which cannot be helped at the moment. This may be due, at least in part, to the sobering effect of the war. I believe that veterans have shown a tendency to be a bit impatient with many of the traditional time-honored requirements and procedures in the universities and colleges. Many students, especially veterans, today see no sense, for instance, in rigid entrance requirements to college if, through their varied experiences, they have arrived at achievement levels which will enable them to carry on university work. Many of them believe, with considerable justification I suspect, that the ability to pass university and college courses is sufficient reason to justify admission.

They are likewise critical of formal prerequisites for courses. They feel that they should be allowed to enter any course which they are able to handle, regardless of whether they have had the course in the sequence leading to the one of their interest. Many of them seem to sense what the graduate records examination reveal, namely, that there is little correlation between the courses a student has taken and his knowledge of the subject involved in these courses.

I suspect that a great many students are begin-



Caught at the April 2 luncheon of the Oklahoma Association of College History Professors meeting at the University are Savoie Lottinville, '29ba, director, University Press; C. C. Bush, Jr., '23ba, '32ma, Max L. Moorhead, '37ba, '38ma, W. E. Hollon, all assistant professors of history; Dr. Laurence H. Snyder, dean of graduate college; Dr. A. B. Sears, chairman of department of history; Dr. M. L. Wardell, '19ba, David Ross Boyd professor of history; Clarence S. Paine, director of Carnegie Library, Oklahoma City; Harold McCleave and M. E. Lowe, Tulsa University; W. S. Harmon, '47ma, instructor in history; B. B. Chapman, Oklahoma A.&M. College, and Dr. E. E. Dale, '11ba, research professor of history.

ning to question the wisdom of requiring of all students essentially the same length of time spent in college for graduation. Several have indicated to me that they feel they should receive a degree when they have acquired the required amount of information, regardless of whether they have taken all of the formal courses prescribed in the curriculum, and whether they have gone to the University for any definite number of years. I have heard many compliments of the Chicago plan, whereby a student may receive his degree from the college at any time when he is able to pass the carefully prepared and rigorous examinations. Our modern students, and especially the veterans, indicate that they want to receive their training in the shortest possible period. Yet there is nothing to indicate that the majority want to hurry to the extent that they will miss normal college life. This, I think, is especially true of those who attended college in the prewar years. Shortly after the close of the war, a veteran stood in the foyer of Hamilton Hall at Columbia University and said, "God, I've been thinking of this sight and this smell for a year."

Social life on the college campus has been due for some revision and, in my opinion, will be due for some more. I have been interested especially in the impact of the veteran on fraternity life at the University. The fraternities, in my opinion, face a real challenge there. Group loyalty is, of course, a characteristic of life in the armed forces as well as elsewhere, but the group in the armed forces changes constantly in regard to personnel. Common friends leave and the men become accustomed to frequent changes. They became accustomed also to evaluating their associates on a basis of merit. Therefore, the idea of belonging to a more or less constant fraternal group, regardless of the quality and attractiveness of the people making up the association, is not, I believe, appealing as strongly to returning servicemen as to others. The trivial aspects of fraternity life have received derisive comment on many campuses.

We have a student body with a more mature outlook than we have ever had before. As one young man wrote to a college dean during the war, "When I left college I was confused and certain of one thing only, that my place was not in school while the country was in need of help of the most direct kind. Now I am less confused; military service is a great tempering agent. I have a much better idea now of what a college can do for a man, and I have also a much better idea of what it cannot do."

The universities and colleges have tremendous responsibilities in these most important postwar years. The magnitude of the responsibility has been expressed rather well by Sir Richard Livingstone in a speech entitled "Some Thoughts on University Education, delivered in London in October, 1947. Mr. Livingstone said, concerning universities:

"If you wished to destroy modern civilization, the most effective way to do it would be to abolish universities. They stand at its center. They create knowledge and train minds. The education which they give molds the outlook of all education men, and thus affects politics, administration, the professions, industry and commerce. Their discoveries and their thoughts penetrate almost every activity of life. The technique of the doctor and the miner, the pronouncements of the pulpit, and even of the press, the measures of government, are dictated or at least modified by these distant nerve centers of intelligence, and on their health and vigor the well being of the whole world depends. They add nothing to the amount of natural intelligence existing, but they refine and perfect what exists and fit it to serve purposes and take stresses which in its raw form it could not meet. Their influence is

increasing and will increase unless there is a collapse of modern civilization. They have an influence on our world which is almost as great as that of the church in the Middle Ages, and in many ways it is a similar influence."

It would seem that universities and colleges will need to study constantly and carefully their roles under changing world conditions. We need to study especially to a greater extent than ever before, the materials with which we work, namely, the young people. We know far too little about them, collectively and individually. We may need to make many changes in our processes and procedures. We may need to change our requirements of admission. Certainly we will need to change and improve our methods of teaching. We will need to develop new procedures for counseling. We will need to take greater responsibility for the housing, social life and financial problems of our students than ever before. We will need to improve our physical plant; our courses and our programs of studies must be renovated and vitalized. Our objective must be a complete and favorable environment in which our students can mature and educate themselves, with our help.

All of this is, I think, a consumation greatly to be desired, and perhaps long overdue.

She's a Famous Mother

Norman's oldest woman is Mrs. Ollie Owen. She's also Norman's most famous mother.

February 24 she celebrated her ninety-ninth birthday with the remark that she wants to live to be at least 100 "just to see what is going on in this troubled world," after she passes the century mark.

As the mother of four sons and one daughter, she is justly proud of her family. Three of her four sons are not only well known on the University campus but are integral segments of O.U. tradition.

They are Ted Owen, athletic trainer, William O. Owen, manager of the game room in the Union building and Ben G. Owen, professor of physical

education and director of intramural athletics, for whom Owen stadium was named. The fourth son, Arthur Owen, lives in Centralia, Washington, and a daughter, Mrs. Frank Weckly, lives in Arkansas City, Kansas.

"Everybody has a hobby, mine is sewing," Mrs. Owen said as she brought out small star pattern quilt blocks she is making for the children at the Cerebral Palsy Institute, and some novel squares she is making for a church group to send overseas.

Probably the oldest club woman in the state, Mrs. Owen belongs to a group of older women who call themselves "The Maturitates." They sew at club meetings, and Mrs. Owen is looking forward to the next meeting.

"It will be just across the street, and I can go there by myself," she smiled.

Born February 24, 1850, on Old Nassau street, New York City, she has lived to see America emerge from five wars—the Civil War, Mexican War, Spanish-American War and World Wars I and II.

Mrs. Owen attributes her longevity to keeping busy and having a strong constitution. She has survived three car wrecks—she received a broken shoulder in one of them, and almost contracted pneumonia a time or two.

"The last time the doctor came he said he knew I was well, because my voice was strong," she laughed.

Coming to Oklahoma in 1919, Mrs. Owen is small in stature, and wears her gray hair cut short. Her eyesight is good, and her hearing is remarkable and her voice is strong. She reads and sews, though cannot quilt now because of arthritis in her fingers.

She now has seven grand-children and 14 great-grandchildren for whom she keeps busy doing some kind of needlework.



Looking over birth and marriage records in the family Bible are Mrs. Ollie Owen (center) and three of her five children. Pictured are Ted Owen, athletic trainer at the University; William O. Owen, manager of the Union game room, and Ben Owen, professor of physical education.