



Shopping sleuths from Franklin Williams's marketing research class watch while two gas station attendants service their automobile. They made notes after they left. A community survey calls for many service station stops to determine the quality of service.

A Unique Plan

An experiment in education and business service is paying rich dividends for the College of Business Administration. It is also reaping a harvest of good will from state business men.

Unaware that he was being watched, the gas station attendant let the tank fill until gasoline spilled down over a tire which was deflated to the danger point. He not only overfilled the gas tank—he completely ignored the sagging tire. The several pairs of eyes watching him were cataloging his movements; they belonged to people who had deliberately deflated the tire before their car pulled into the service station.

A few weeks later the daily newspaper in the town in which the service station is located announced in a front page headline: FILLING STATION SERVICE IN

CITY STINKS. The story under the headline also pointed out that the community's sales people were friendly, but that they didn't know their merchandise. The proof of the pudding was available for anyone who wanted it. The business districts of the town had been dissected, and its shortcomings were recorded in pictures, charts and graphs.

Youngish, friendly Franklin Williams, director of the O.U. Business Extension Service, and his sleuthing student assistants had "shopped" the town.

To understand what went on in the town

is to understand Williams and his experiment in education and business service. At a national conference at the University of Michigan last summer on "How Universities Can Serve Businessmen Through Conferences and Counseling," the *Oklahoma Plan* was presented. A representative of the U. S. Department of Commerce commented after the meeting that "the University of Oklahoma is making a most constructive and unique contribution to the small businessmen through one of the best programs in the country." The student shopping service is part of that program.

And the plan is indeed unique. This is the way the student phase of the service operates. A research package, prepared by the Business Extension Service, is taken into a town which the local business men wish to have "shopped." Assisted by such organizations as the local newspaper and chamber of commerce, Williams and student assistants, gleaned from his University courses in market research, move in without their arrival being announced to the general public. They start observing what goes on in the business community. The research package is the skeletal structure on which the survey takes form. It includes personnel shopping sheets, display analysis sheets and other forms which each worker checks as he shops.

A research shopper, strangely enough, is one who goes from one business house to another, just like any housewife who flits here and there, observing merchandise displays and talking with clerks. But unlike the housewife, this type of shopper has his eye peeled for breaches of good merchandising. He catalogs what he observes, and the report goes to the owner or manager of the business which has been shopped.

When Williams and his sleuths complete their observations, they return to Norman and start compiling statistics. The completed report for the whole city goes back to the community newspaper, the chamber of commerce and other interested groups.

Although the Business Extension Service wasn't created until last September, the work which it is doing began almost a year ago. Last February Williams attended a small business conference in McAlester. The O.U. professor observed that the majority of the businessmen present were hearing the same generalizations which had been tossed to them any number of times by out-of-town experts. "People in McAlester need local information on their merchandising problems," Williams thought. And he decided to do something about it.

What he did was to bring students from his marketing research class into McAlester where they conducted a business survey. The merchants were pleased with the work, and Williams was launched on what he terms an "experiment in education and business service."

"It wasn't until we were asked to come to Seminole that we really got started," Williams recalls. Milt Phillips, '22, publisher of the Seminole newspaper, gave the service a badly needed shot in the arm. He published several hundred column inches



Before starting off on a survey in a new community, Williams (wearing hat) briefs some of his students. During the survey the shoppers will walk several hundred miles while they observe marketing practices. But it is work with fun attached.

of publicity, and the response was encouraging.

Coupled with the business conference which follows, the student surveys caught on. The McAlester chamber of commerce manager had become so enthusiastic that he wrote to the chamber manager at Shawnee:

"It isn't often that a chamber manager feels he has something so good that he absolutely has to pass it along to a fellow chamber manager, but I can assure you we had something here recently that everyone should take advantage of.

"When Professor Franklin Williams first contacted us about a small businessmen's conference, we weren't too enthusiastic. But the more we heard about it and as plans shaped up we began to see that it had possibilities. Immediately after the session we realized just how important the meeting was. I recommend his program without any reservation."

The word had spread about the Extension Division's survey and the conferences which follow it. Williams had led his sleuthing students through Lawton, Seminole, Cherokee, Henryetta and Okmulgee before Shawnee became the target.

That the student assistants work on their trips is shown by the 16,800 miles they walked during the Shawnee survey. Appropriately, Williams refers to "student miles traveled" in his statistical reports.

The service officially came into existence last September with Williams—now on a half-time teaching schedule—as its director. Since then he has planned and directed numerous adventures in small business research. The Service has only a few employes, including Williams, his secretary, an assistant director and a small clerical staff. The students in market research classes do the leg work, and that is where the "experiment in education" part of the project comes in.

Those who participate in the surveys are advanced students in the School of Business Administration. The benefits gained from their work are of a reciprocal nature because they apply the techniques they learn in the classroom and at the same time compile worthwhile marketing data for the businesses they survey.

Each worker carries a card which identifies his status in the service program. Probably the greatest thrill in store for any of the students is surveying their hometown. It offers them an opportunity to contribute something worthwhile to the home folks.

In some communities senior highschool students have been invited to assist the University students in their work; an aspect of the program which carries the experiment in education beyond the University.

The work which the student phase of the service performs has snowballed since

it began with an investigation of brands, prices and advertising. With every survey which has been conducted, Williams has found more things to add to each report. The survey usually shows that merchandising problems center on two points: (1) not handling personnel right, and (2) not displaying merchandise properly.

Williams believes that the self-taught small businessman needs help in marketing his merchandise. And he has set out to give that help when it's requested. Letters which he receives from his "clients" show that his service is making progress.

An insurance agent recently told Williams that the survey had pointed out his office staff was not up to par. "I'm now holding a school for my staff," the agent said.

After the conference which follows the student-conducted survey, a 2-week short course in salesmanship for business personnel is available if requested. The conference and short course, conducted by Service staff members, attempt to iron out merchandising problems which have been discovered through the survey.

After the conference which followed the survey in McAlester, a businessman wrote: "Just wanted to let you know how very much I appreciated the help and discussion given during your recent small business conference. I think you have done an excellent job in compiling the data concerning McAlester, and I know that the businessmen who attended gained as much from the various discussions as I did."

In every community which has been sur-

veyed by the service similar letters have been written. "The response has been amazing," says Williams. "In several towns merchants who did not register for personal counseling later expressed the feeling that they had been left out of a good thing."

Williams' long-range plan is to survey all major towns in the state. A good start in that direction has been made. From September 18 to November 28 last year, Williams and his students clocked over 4200 hours of work, the time it took to study 270 business firms.

While they are pushing ahead into new communities, they are also seriously considering returning to some towns for rechecks to observe improvements. "On the day after the conference which followed the survey in Shawnee, we could see the face of the business district changing," Williams recalls.

The changes which were taking place in Shawnee were direct results of the small business conference and sales clinic which followed the survey. In a future issue of *Sooner Magazine* we will show how the conference and other phases of the Business Extension Service operate.

— ASSOCIATION —

Three Club Reports

With the Christmas and New Year holidays, organized club meetings during December and the early January were necessarily limited. In their stead, there was the gigantic alumni gathering in New Orleans Sugar Bowl weekend.

As the organizational program of state clubs moves into high gear once more, three December club meetings remain unreported.

The New York alumni club met at the Princeton Club in New York City December 1 for a cocktail party and business meeting to elect officers. More than 100 alumni of the area attended.

Jane Douglas White, sophisticated song stylist and composer who sang with the Theta trio at O.U., entertained with selections of her own songs. Then the club watched the Texas-O.U. football film.

Newly elected officers include Bill Schubert, '47, president, Dr. Sterling Brown, vice president, and Moris T. Haggard, '46-'47, re-elected secretary-treasurer.

Seattle Alumni Clubbers gathered December 9 at the home of Dr. Ray Ballard, '32m.ed, '39med, and Mrs. Ballard. About 40 members were reported present by Mary Myers, '32-'33, club secretary. From Miss Myers report: "We enjoyed the film of the 1949 Texas-O.U. game. . . . After the film we were entertained by Peggy Ballard who sang for us and then we all sang carols.

Ottawa County Alumni Club held a pre-Christmas dinner December 14 in the Hotel Miami. George Cummings, '49bus, assistant alumni secretary, met with the club and narrated the O.U.-Texas film.

New Officers were elected at the meeting. Tom Bomford, '48bus, was named president; Jess Heck, '48journ, was chosen vice president, and Mrs. Helen Chambers Neal, '45bus, was elected secretary-treasurer.



New officers were elected at the December New York club meeting. They are pictured above with outgoing officers. Those shown are Moris T. Haggard, '46-'47, re-elected secretary-treasurer; Allen C. Duncan, '21geol, past vice president; Dr. Sterling Brown, new veep; Russell Black, '42ba, past president; Elmer Million, '35Law, and Bill Shubert, '47, newly elected president of the club.