

University Faces a BIG Issue

The enrolment boom is on. Running ahead of expectations, the O.U. enrolment for 1954-1955 passed the 10,000 mark—an increase of 10% over 1953-1954. With the "War Baby" crop still in elementary and secondary schools and not represented in the current increase, the enrolment picture for the University is one of rapid expansion. To discuss the needs of an expanding student body, President George L. Cross and University College Dean Glenn C. Couch were invited to an informal, tape-recorded interview with the editor of the Sooner Magazine. The educators' statements make provocative and essential reading.

DAVID BURR: What do you anticipate enrolment will be by 1960?

PRESIDENT CROSS: Well, of course, that's a difficult question. I would say that the tendency, though, for an increased enrolment continues during the next decade. During the next ten years the number of citizens of college age will double over what it is today. There has been for several years an increase in the percentage of the high school graduates who attend college. Now with this increasing percentage of those who attend, plus the fact that we know from birth statistics that the number of college age students will double during the next ten years, it follows inevitably, I think, that there will be a tremendous increase in the college population.

DEAN COUCH: I think that's right. You see, the thing that I'd like to emphasize is the tremendous backlog of people that could go to college. Now, Oklahoma is one of the very highest in the United States and only 30% of our high school graduates go to college. There is 70% that don't go. Even if the birth rate stays the same, increased social pressure, economic pressure, and so on are causing more and more of this 70% that are staying home to go. There is always a tremendous backlog that could hit you at any one time. Now, with the birth rate doubled, the outlook for college enrolment, as has been said, is tremendous.

CROSS: In the history of the last 100 years, when you compare the increase of

population as a whole with the increase in college population, you will find that while the population of the country has increased six times, the college population has increased 200 times. That trend is not likely to be reversed during the next ten years, I think. It will continue because of the increasing demands for educated people, technically educated people in the extremely technological world that we live in now. There doesn't seem to be any possibility in my mind but that college and university attendance will certainly increase.

BURR: Roughly, our increase in enrolment this year was 10%.

CROSS: It's just about right, might be ten minus . . .

BURR: Do you think that this indicates a trend? Is a 10% yearly increase anticipated?

CROSS: Well, I don't know what Glenn has thought about it, but this fall I had thought of a 5% increase because it seemed to me from what I knew about the birth rate, etc., we might have anticipated a 10% increase for '55, about a year ahead of my planning and thinking. Is that . . .

COUCH: That's right. I think there again is evidence that the greater percentage of high school graduates that are going to college. That's the thing that worries me because there is that tremendous backlog that could start.

BURR: Let me ask you a question about this 30%. If there are 30% of the high school graduates attending college now, what percentage do you think that represents of all the high school graduates who are capable of doing college work?

COUCH: Every survey that I know about that has ever been made shows that there are just about as many staying home who could profit by going to a university or college as come.

BURR: I think that's a good point to bring out and one which we often overlook.

COUCH: I think so, too, and that, of course, is mostly economic but not entirely. Part of it is environmental. If a child grows up in a home environment where none of

the family has gone to college, they live in a situation that doesn't demand a college education. Even though they have the capacity, the children probably just aren't motivated to go to school. But, you see, with a higher percentage of our people going to college education, there is less and less that going to happen.

CROSS: The G. I. Bill was a big factor there. Many youngsters had an opportunity to go to college. They changed the home environment. They went back home and wanted their younger brothers and sisters to go to school.

COUCH: We saw that all the time, know, after World War II. A boy in a family had this G. I. Bill available. So he went to college and then encouraged a younger sister or brother to come that would not have come had the older brother not broken the ice.

BURR: I think there is another thing which is pretty generally misunderstood about the college graduate. I have heard expressed this way: one alumnus who is very prominent in University affairs says that what we should really be interested in is cutting down the college enrolment, because we have already reached a point where we have too many highly skilled people in various professional lines . . .

CROSS: What lines?

BURR: Such as too many engineers, too many lawyers and too many journalists.

COUCH: Well, David, there may be too many engineers, but I don't think so. Companies just line up here to hire them every spring, so . . .

CROSS: We haven't met the demand for several years for engineers. Maybe we have for lawyers, but not for engineers.

COUCH: Now, I think this. I think that there are probably engineers out of a job that less-trained people could do. I think we may not be using our trained people to our best advantage. Maybe we have people with college degrees doing tasks that could be performed by people without college degrees. I think we should use more educated people as the world gets more complicated. The thing that worries me about it is that our operation is not

The problem is simple: Soon there will be too many students for existing facilities. By 1960, the University's enrolment may be 15,000. President Cross and Dean Couch explain in this informal interview what is being done, what can be done, and what will be necessary to provide for an increasing student enrolment.

efficient. We start with so many and graduate so few—that worries me, because I just don't think it is a good way to operate.

CROSS: Of course, those that don't graduate receive benefits here, Glenn. It isn't a waste of money or time entirely.

COUCH: No, but I think we could graduate more than we do. I don't mean that the ones that don't graduate have been a total loss by any means. It just worries me that we don't get them all the way through. In some professions, unless you complete the whole program you simply can't practice at a profession.

BURR: Back to the enrolment question. The 1954 enrolment increase is possibly a trend, by 1960 there is a good possibility that we may have 15,000 students here on the campus.

CROSS: There is a possibility that 15,000 could want to be here.

BURR: That is the question. Do you foresee ways of providing for that many students by 1960? What would it take?

CROSS: Well, I think that's a good question because there is a general misunderstanding about a need for facilities at the University of Oklahoma. Practically everywhere I go I find people thinking that this last building program, when we constructed some 26 new buildings or major additions to buildings, was a program designed to meet the needs of the future. It wasn't such a program at all. It was a program designed to catch up with the past. After this building program was completed two or three years ago, we had enough square footage of classroom and laboratory space to take care of a student body of approximately 9,000. We now have more than 10,000 students. In other words, that building program which was so needed, and of which we were so proud, did not meet the needs of the future at all. To meet the needs for 15,000 students would require an increase of slightly more than 50% in classroom and laboratory space. This isn't mere speculation. We have the figures of the accrediting agency to back us up. The North Central Association specifies that there should be, must be, 120 square feet

of class and laboratory space available for every student. We don't have that now. This fall for our students we have less, considerably less, than 120 square feet, but we utilize temporary facilities on the North Campus, of course, for some of our activities and we are, therefore, in no trouble with the accrediting agency. But it is inconvenient and it's temporary and the future must show an improvement of some kind. I don't know, but before we can accommodate 15,000 students here, we must increase our physical plant by at least 50% and our faculty by more than 50%.

COUCH: Dave, the thing that has always interested me is that the great majority of parents, when they go to buy their child something, will buy them the best they can afford. They'll buy them the best shoes they can afford—the best clothes they can afford. The one permanent thing they could buy for them is an education, the one thing that will really last. In that situation the psychology seems to change drastically. The trend seems to be, "Let's get it as cheap as we can. Let's cut down the school programs. Let's hire teachers with the least salary. Let's get by with the minimum buildings. Let's get by with the minimum laboratory space, books in the library, etc." Education is the only thing they can really buy for their children that can be kept. The rest of the things they either outwear or outgrow or something happens to them. I don't know what the psychology of that is, but our problem, it seems to me, as educators in this state, is to somehow alert the people in the state to the problem before it happens. We have got time right now, but it's escaping us rapidly.

BURR: Actually, there isn't much time.

COUCH: There really isn't much time. Take the teaching personnel for example. We ought to be able right now to be recruiting a staff and holding them here although they might not be delivering to the fullest extent of what they could teach in the way of class load. We ought to be accumulating them here, because the people that are potential teachers, university teachers, are going into industry and just

escaping education. Now, when that happens to us, even if we have the buildings, if we don't have the personnel to teach these students we're stuck again.

CROSS: Well, Oklahoma is a young state and hasn't yet completely appreciated the value of education in the economy of the state. I think the people are beginning to appreciate the value of an education—of an educational system, but in the older states I think you will find that most of them went through similar stages and finally did come to understand the relationship between higher education and the welfare of the state. Illinois, for instance, appreciates higher education to the extent that it provides a budget of some 72 millions of dollars for its university. Here in Oklahoma we operate on a budget just a fraction of that, but, nevertheless, in the last ten years I think the people have shown evidence of increasing appreciation of education, and the legislature has supported the program better, in my opinion, each session. In time if we . . . the point, though, is that we really don't have the time, but there isn't any question in my mind but that ultimately here in Oklahoma there will be sufficient support to meet the needs.

COUCH: I think that's our problem. In a young state like this, we have to shorten the time that the population becomes aware of the educational problem. Older states were able to move along during this period when university educations were not considered so important. We have come along in the latter part of that period and we have to catch up more rapidly.

BURR: It seems to me, that even if all things were favorable and the legislature could, in some way, provide the buildings and you could get the faculty here that during this period of adjustment to increasing enrolments, that there is some likelihood that the people who should be in college (by that I mean the ones who are equipped intellectually for college) may get lost in the shuffle. Since we are a state university, we take all people who are

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Nor is there anyone who gets such prices for his work, nor anyone who has had the number of shows—more than a thousand! Woody is this matter-of-fact in his estimates of everyone, especially himself.

And characteristically when he walks over to a covered drawing board and pulls back the cloth and shows you the pencilled sketch of an Indian painting he tells you will be the most important ever done, it's like mentioning the eggs were good at breakfast.

(This painting will depict the funeral of Spotted Wolf, a Sioux who died during World War II at Luxembourg. In a letter to his family written shortly before he was killed, Spotted Wolf asked, should he be killed, that the family hold a traditional funeral for him at home. He asked that an unbroken stallion be led in a victory parade.

Hal Muldrow, Jr.

'28

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48

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He promised that his spirit would mount the horse and be with them. As it is shown in oils, the horse ascends from a raised pyre to the sky with the warrior's spirit astride. Grouped around the base are relatives, medicine men and all that accompanies that tribe's ceremony.)

Woody, before this painting was completed, had turned his main interest to etching, which he feels is "less associated with sign painting and more to art." He has produced several of his most popular silkscreens in the new medium, because he feels that now more people want original works, not mere prints, and through etching they can have them—at a good price but one they can afford.

But when people pay their money they get the goods. Crumbo is listed as one of the foremost authorities on Indians. He has visited and studied at every reservation in the country, and every line in every one of his paintings is authentic and carries out some part of Indian tradition. He is prominent in the Who's Who of the Indian culture.

Yet Crumbo, who looks Indian, knows the Indian as father, mother, and brother, has only one-fourth Indian blood.

He is three-fourths French!

(Editor's Note: The Crumbo paintings that illustrate this article and many others are available as silk-screen reproductions, done by the artist himself, at the University of Oklahoma Book Exchange. A letter to the Book Exchange will provide additional information.)

University's Big Problem . . .

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graduates of Oklahoma high schools. Well, how are we going to be able to sort out those people who are best equipped and be sure that they have their chance for an education?

CROSS: Well, that is a real problem and

there is no question but that in the stress of the future, the marginal students will have a tendency to squeeze out the superior students, especially when economics enter the picture. The marginal student will perhaps occupy space which should be filled by a superior student, and that, I think, is perhaps the most important educational problem of the next decade, aside from the matter of providing funds to meet our increasing needs. I would say that we should increase and improve our advisory service to the high school graduate and attempt to find out about the qualifications of our high school graduates early, perhaps during their senior year, and then offer them advice as to where they might find the most effective education in keeping with their aptitude and interest. While we would not refuse them admission to the University, in many instances the advisor might find for them a

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place to go that is more suited to their talents and abilities, and might steer toward the University the students who could better profit from experience here. I think that is absolutely a must and I think it should be a statewide advisory system. Couch, we have been talking about this for a half-dozen years, and it's probably a responsibility which should be assumed by the Regents for Higher Education—the development of a testing and a counselling system for high school seniors.

COUCH: Yes, I think that a counselling system at the high school level is much more effective than at the university for this reason. If you think about a student who pulls up stakes at home and moves to the University campus, it is a very awkward situation for him to change afterwards, because he has to explain to his friends why he has decided to do something else. Now, if it can be done early, say in his senior year, or even his junior year . . .

CROSS: In high school . . .

COUCH: In high school. Then, you see, the move is a natural one and he fits and saves him the later trouble of having to explain why he is no longer at the University. On the other hand, I look at the young people in this country as a national resource, and I think there is just as much danger in letting people learn a skill or hand skill or trade or something who should have been in medicine or electronics or physics or something else. We have got to encourage everybody who has the capacity to learn a highly academic profession to do so, it seems to me, and not just worry about the ones who shouldn't do it. It's a two-edged sword.

CROSS: It certainly is in the best interests of the state to insure that in some way every student, every youngster, will be able to develop the maximum potential that he has.

BURR: This is not particularly a problem that the University can solve by itself.

CROSS and COUCH: No, no.

COUCH: From a scholarship standpoint, we do not have the resources.

CROSS: There should be a uniform plan for all institutions of higher learning; therefore, the agency which should assume responsibility for developing this inevitably is the Regents for Higher Education, in my opinion.

BURR: Don't you think that that one thing would do more than perhaps anything else to increase the ratio between the number of students graduating from college as compared to the number of students entering, not only here, but in all colleges?

COUCH: I think that's right, and I think that if such a system can be put into

effect, there will have to be developed with it a system of scholarships so the student who has the capacity, but not the money, can be sure to get an education. That's a national resource that we just must not waste.

BURR: Also, we would be having a greater number, percentage-wise, of people who are capable of doing college work going to college.

COUCH: That's right.

CROSS: That's right. We need to strengthen our two-year colleges, our community colleges that are sometimes called junior colleges, to the point where an increasing number of high school graduates may go there for a couple of years with the idea of ultimately going to one of the four-year institutions.

COUCH: I think the four-year institutions in this state could work out a very good working relationship with the two-year colleges so that a student who wants to attend the four-year college could be advised to go to the junior college and build up his background and broaden himself, with the idea, you see, of coming here.

BURR: That would all be part of a unification of objectives for greater efficiency in higher education.

CROSS and COUCH: That's right.

COUCH: It is hard to put people into categories, but I think, generally speaking, our high school graduates would fall into three categories. First of all, those that are clearly capable of and motivated to get the highest type of academic degree, let's say in any of the professional areas. In contrast to that there is a group who clearly would be much more well adjusted and more successful if they learned hand skills, things that use hands more than the head. And then there's the middle group in which you can't tell. We just don't have measurements accurate enough to tell. Now, it seems to me that group could well go to the junior colleges and not hit the tough hurdles of a professional university degree until they are a little more mature, get a little better educational background and then start in.

CROSS: Make some checks at the end of the two-year period, you see . . .

COUCH: That's right. To see how they're going, and somewhere in that two-year period make the final decision, to either go for engineering, medicine, and so on, or else turn to a less academic kind of training. Now that's going to involve for some people more than four years to get a college degree because they're going to have to spend a little more time bringing themselves up to the place where they can compete; but I think we're moving that way anyway.