



PRESIDENT GEORGE L. CROSS
" . . . We Have Been Concerned"

. . . Beginning with 1850 and ending with 1950, the general population of our country increased only six times, but the enrollment in our colleges and universities increased 200 times. It has been said that "this is perhaps the most amazing fact in a century of fantastic progress." Because of the increasing demand for higher education, universities have problems—tremendously difficult problems.

The state of Oklahoma ranks high among states in the percentage of its high school graduates who enroll in institutions of higher learning. In 1953 about 37% of all high school graduates in Oklahoma entered a college or university. By September of 1954, the percentage had increased to 42. Last fall approximately one-half of all who received high school diplomas went to college—most of them to state-supported institutions. . .

The main impact of increasing enrollments of the future will be felt by the state-supported colleges and universities. This is true because the private institutions have found ways and means of controlling their enrollments, at least to some extent, through the use of procedures of admission which attempt to select the best of the candidates who present themselves. State universities have a perplexing problem of providing educational facilities for greatly increased student bodies, and at the same time devising policies and procedures which will insure that the best qualified and most talented of our youth are given an opportunity to develop their talents to the greatest possible extent.

All who are engaged in the business of higher education know well that within the next couple of decades enrollments will increase much more rapidly than operational budgets can be expected to increase. Thus the problem of how to use, with maximum efficiency, the funds which will be available for education becomes pre-eminent.

Several Facts Are Disturbing

We have been concerned with these matters for some time at the University of Oklahoma, and a few months ago we initiated a faculty conducted self-study program in an effort to see how the institution had been meeting its responsibilities and what might be done to anticipate and meet increased responsibilities in

Educators Will Provide What Patrons Demand

Speaking before the AAUW's Tulsa Branch, Dr. Cross offered his observations of "Secondary Education and Preparation for College in Oklahoma" that appears here in abridged version.

By PRESIDENT GEORGE L. CROSS

the future. There were several facts which disturbed us. The Dean of the University College brought in evidence that less than 25% of those who enter the University of Oklahoma as freshmen receive degrees of any kind. This percentage seemed very low and indicated a need for information as to why so few freshmen were having satisfactory experiences at the school.

A study of our freshman program indicated that many youngsters had entered their first year of college work without adequate preparation. We found that the institution was teaching freshman high school mathematics to approximately 700 students each year and in addition was teaching math courses which could have been taken in high school to approximately 1,700. Some freshmen were taking pre-college English, although in far fewer numbers. Only a relatively small number of freshmen had taken a foreign language of any kind before entering the University.

No Implication for Blame

These facts were brought to the attention of the public in connection with a legislative investigation of why the University of Oklahoma proposed to limit the size of its freshman class for the 1955-56 school year. The facts were released without any suggestion or implication in regard to blame for the situation. They were stated simply as an explanation of a problem faced by the institution. It was assumed immediately that in releasing the facts the University was criticizing the elementary and secondary school system of Oklahoma, and there was considerable newspaper publicity.

At the time I made the announcement concerning the inadequate preparation of high school seniors who enter the University of Oklahoma, I did not know why the situation existed, and I am still unable to pin point an explanation. However, I believe that several factors are involved . . .

I should like to say at the outset that I do not believe the elementary and secondary schools of Oklahoma are responsible for our inadequately prepared freshmen except perhaps insofar as these schools may have been affected by influences beyond their control . . . While there is always room for improvement, I believe that our schools are, generally speaking, as good as any to

be found in the country. The elementary and secondary schools have many problems which are not fully understood by their patrons. A very few examples will illustrate what I mean.

Boys and girls are required by law to attend school until they are 18 years of age. Funds are inadequate usually to provide special education for unusual students; it is customary in most schools for all youngsters to attend class together, regardless of their abilities and the personal problems which affect the quality of their work.

Because in our over-crowded classrooms, it is almost mandatory that students in a given age group be kept together, schools have almost no alternative but to promote from grade to grade regardless of accomplishment. Thus the youngster with little ability is not promoted according to his knowledge of subject matter, but according to his effort and ability to learn. The disturbed child from a home with incompatible parents may fail to learn, but he is likely to be promoted with the rest because to fail him would only add to his frustration. The child who has no interest in solid academic subjects is enrolled in something that will interest him and give him a sense of mastery because the law requires that he receive formal education until he is 18 years old. All of this happens because the schools simply do not have the finances and personnel to deal with special cases.

But upon graduation from high school the entire group is likely to develop a sudden urge to attend college, and in Oklahoma the colleges, as a matter of policy, accept the graduates of all accredited high schools. Due to the excellent economic conditions now prevalent and because of the situation just described, it is not surprising that many freshmen arrive at the University of Oklahoma better equipped financially than academically.

Responsibility Lies With Citizens

Another problem faced by the high schools involves the type of courses which are offered and taken by the students. In response to popular demand during the last decade, increasing emphasis has been placed upon trade courses and vocational work. In many instances, parents have insisted on so-called "practical" work being made available for their youngsters, not realizing that in the global technological age ahead, the most "practical" courses possible for many would be courses in English, mathematics, science and modern languages. It is unreasonable to expect the schools to resist local influence. Inevitably they will meet the demands of their patrons.

Everyone appreciates the great value of vocational work in our high schools, but still the unwise pressure for trade courses to the exclusion of solid academic material often results in poor preparation for entrance to college. Our Oklahoma schools have continued to offer traditional college preparatory subjects, however, and the students have been free to enroll in them and have been urged to do so. I believe it is safe to say that most Oklahoma high schools provide offerings which would enable any youngster to prepare adequately for college.

The problem here lies in the fact that so few talented youngsters select the right courses and, with crowded conditions and inadequate finance, it has been impossible for many Oklahoma high schools to provide the counseling service necessary to find the best youngsters and encourage them to make proper preparation for college. If this situation is to be improved, local money must be found to finance an adequate counseling and guidance service at each high school; a service designed to identify the potential college students as early as possible and encourage them to enroll in solid subjects such as mathematics, science, English, history, foreign language, etc.

Most school administrators are very anxious and eager to

supply a counseling service. They have been unable to do so because of a shortage of funds and a shortage of adequately trained teachers. The responsibility here lies with the citizens of each community. A counseling and advising service is a must for each school system, and it should be kept in mind that the problem will increase as the numbers of youngsters in our schools continue to increase during the next decade.

Occasionally, perhaps even frequently, gifted youngsters with college potential find themselves enrolled in high school subjects which would prepare them adequately for entering college. But they are unable to give continuous attention to their work or make sustained effort because of the numerous extra-curricular interruptions which plague every high school in Oklahoma. For instance, many of the best youngsters are likely to be found in the high school band. The band is likely to be called into action for every event of local importance regardless of whether its performance might interfere with the school work of the young musicians. There are many other local interruptions to study caused by over-emphasized athletic programs, conventions, meetings and conferences of various kinds.

Results Are Not in Proportion

But this is only the beginning. Most of the several colleges and universities in the state sponsor each year various conventions, meets and activities which draw high school students to the campuses and, of course, interrupt high school academic programs. Thousands of high school students assemble each year on the various campuses to take part in band festivals, chorus festivals, FHA activities, FFA meetings, Hi-Y conventions, forensic meets, journalism, and so on. Because these meetings usually are attended by the best students the high schools have to offer, it is little wonder that young people of Oklahoma get through high school without adequate preparation for college.

The colleges and universities should get together and perhaps, through planning sponsored by the Office of the State Regents for Higher Education, coordinate and reduce to a minimum the scheduling of events designed to bring high school students to their campuses. The beneficial results of such trips are not in proportion to the disrupting effect on the high school students' scholastic life.

There is another factor which influences the quality of the work done in our high schools, a factor for which the administration of each institution does have a measure of responsibility, although here again community pressures are involved to a very great extent. I refer to the excessive program of activities which will be found in practically every high school in Oklahoma. There will be student council activities. There will be class plays. There will be clubs of various kinds, some associated with high school activities and others purely social. In some schools there will be fraternities and sororities. There will be homecoming activities, band, chorus, picture taking, etc., many of which actually take students out of class and all of which reduce the time available for study in event the student feels inclined to study.

Often the emotional effects of such activities interfere seriously, not only with the student's thinking and studying, but even with his health. I do not mean to imply that *all* activities should be eliminated from high school life. I believe that there should be carefully planned activities in every school system, but I believe most sincerely that the average high school has far too many.

Most high school administrators are well aware of this problem. They feel helpless to make improvements because the conditions which I have described are nationwide, and no single person or school could make much headway in attempting to

Continued page 29

Dick: I agree with them. I think I'm more or less of an example of what they are talking about. I studied quite a bit my freshman and sophomore years and made a pretty good grade average and then started on activities after that. I was just wondering, if I had it to do over again, if maybe I'd start activities sooner, but I think I'll take it from them because I am certainly enjoying this year.

Engineers Pick Queen; Name Keeley St. Pat

For weeks, fresh-cheeked students cultivated and cursed. Older and wiser students trimmed and shaved. The engineers' annual beard growing contest was making a shambles of student appearance.

The first stubble to appear presaged the coming of Engineers Week. The race for Engineers Queen confirmed the rumor. Then in a burst of green and activity, Engineers Week came to the campus March 12-17.

As has been the custom for many years, the campus newspaper blossomed out in green paper. Campus lights gave off an

erie green glow. And to nobody's surprise, a lawyer was hanged in effigy in front of the Engineering Building.

The queen's race was a carnival—Gay booths, handouts of coffee and cookies, contestants putting their best teeth forward—all in an attempt to convince the engineering student that the individual girl was the best choice for queen. Paula Deavenport, Duncan sophomore, won out in the milling.

She was crowned at the dance March 16 by newly elected St. Pat, Jack Keeley, engineering senior from Norman. Keeley is chairman of the Engineers show slated for April, is a member of the Engineers Club, St. Pat's Council and the American Society of Civil Engineers. He is a former student senator and was chairman of the Who's Who in American Colleges committee at O.U. this year.

As St. Pat, dressed in traditional green formal attire with green topper, he officially crowned Miss Deavenport.

As a windup to Engineers Week, students, faculty and guests attended a banquet in Union Ballroom. Miss Deavenport

conducted the queenly duties of knighting, by substituting slide rule for sword, 16 outstanding engineers as Knights of St. Pat.

Winners were named in the beard contest; keys were awarded to outstanding staff members of the *Sooner Shamrock*, and Old Trusty boomed out its annual end to another Engineers Week.

Jim Williams, president of the Engineers Club, could breathe a sigh of relief. The club had been responsible for preparation and conduct of the week-long program.

By Monday, March 19, the campus lights were once again amber, the newspaper was once again printed on white stock and the lawyer had been cut down.

The University of Oklahoma has few traditions. Many would argue that traditions aren't necessary. But the Engineers crowd tradition upon tradition in their short week of revelry and seem to enjoy them.

Even the lawyers, traditional enemies of the engineers, observed their annual tradition. In coffeeshop and on the campus, it was easy to identify the fledgling lawyer. He was sporting his black, string tie.

Educators Will Provide . . .

Continued from page 7

combat such an overwhelming situation. However, the patrons of the school, together with the cooperation of the school administration and faculty, should be able to bring about improvement, even though any change would meet with vigorous opposition from the students.

There is a psychological factor involved in all of this which is difficult to describe. The tremendous industrial progress which has been made in our country, and the steadily improving economic conditions of the past few years, have in many ways had an unhappy effect on the citizenry of our country. It is so very easy here to establish a reasonably high economic level and standard of living that our people have developed the impression that a great deal should be received with very little effort. A five-day week for the working man, and the prospect of a four-day week, cannot but have an effect on the minds of children and young people. The

great amount of leisure now available to the average working family as a result of very efficient industrial methods, and the way in which heads of families use this leisure has influenced the thinking of young people. Automobiles, radio, television, etc., provide attractive ways of using leisure, and it is not surprising that people of high school age should greatly prefer a life of lessened effort with plenty of time for enticing after-school activities. As a result, homework in high school is virtually passé. I remember that my own son was horrified at the suggestion of home study and told me that "These things just simply aren't done any more."

This is a most difficult situation, and I do not see a good remedy. But I do know that, while a four or five-day industrial week may be feasible and desirable in times of peace, we cannot have a shortened intellectual week if we are to cope successfully with the problems which are ahead of us during the next half century.

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Another factor in the difficulty confronting secondary education is the increasing tendency on the part of parents to shift to the schools responsibility for nearly every phase of the child's development. The influence of the family as a social and educational unit seems to be diminishing. Each individual in a modern family is so busy with his or her own personal activities—activities not related to the family group—that family life as it was known a few decades ago has virtually disappeared. Modern parents find a multitude of interests which have no relation to the activities of the family as a whole, with the result that children are neglected. The children enter school with no background upon which education can be built. They enter undisciplined, unmotivated and often rebellious . . . Perhaps the situation has been exaggerated somewhat, but I do feel that the lack of discipline and lack of favorable educational experiences in the modern home have affected formal education adversely . . .

It is easy to describe problems and offer criticism concerning education, but difficult to offer constructive suggestions which may lead to improvement. I must admit that I do not have a "cure all" in mind, but I have some suggestions which may be worth some serious study.

First of all, I should like to say that I do not believe there is need for additional regulation of high school curricula at the state level. I think that any attempt to prescribe additional required courses would be unwise. The law requires that each young Oklahoman must attend school until he is 18 years old. This means that our schools are filled with young people of diverse abilities, interests, and educational potentials. Any attempt to require each young person to take all of a prescribed set of college preparatory courses would certainly fail, and the standards in these courses would be lowered as a result of such requirements. I think that

the present state-wide requirements are satisfactory and perhaps the best that could be expected in view of the wide range of abilities and interests of high school students. However, there are certain standards which I think our schools should meet.

Insure Gifted an Opportunity

I think that each accredited high school should offer sufficient solid courses to prepare a senior for admission to college. The list of such courses should be developed through cooperation of the Office of the State Regents for Higher Education and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Because not every student enrolled in high school will take the courses designed to prepare students for college entrance, it should be necessary for an accredited high school to maintain a counseling and guidance program with the specific responsibility of studying the potentials of the students and of counseling them in regard to their enrollment. It is especially important that the counselors locate students with college potentials and advise them to take the courses which will prepare them for college entrance.

The community and the school administration should work cooperatively in an effort to insure that extracurricular activities and community influences do not interrupt study and prevent effective learning. If this problem could be attacked vigorously in each community by the local P-TA, beneficial results might be brought about despite the apparent hopelessness of the situation.

The state colleges, working together through the Office of the State Regents for Higher Education, should study carefully the programs which they have been sponsoring on their various campuses designed to bring high school students to their institutions. These institutions, through some reasonable self-imposed restrictions, could eliminate many interruptions to high school study and relieve high school administrators and teachers of a considerable

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amount of frustration and annoyance. I expect to bring this matter to the attention of the presidents of the various colleges and universities the next time we get together to consider mutual problems.

Several newspaper stories recently have included the suggestion that colleges might control the quality of their freshman classes through admission requirements and thereby provide an incentive to parents, high school students and high schools to plan pre-college programs with greater care. This idea is being tried in several states, and many state institutions, including those in the California System, the Universities of Michigan, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota and most state colleges in the east already have policies of selective admissions based on performance in high school or on tests of various kinds. The University of Texas will initiate a plan for selective admissions this fall. There seems to be a lack of uniformity in regard to the policies of these institutions—some attempt to screen non-residents only, and others apply the screening process to all who apply for admission as freshmen.

In some states, the publicly-supported colleges are required by law to accept any graduate of a state accredited high school. In a third group of states, which includes Oklahoma, it is traditional policy that practically all graduates from accredited high schools shall be admitted to the tax-supported colleges and universities.

I am sure that all of us would agree that any high school senior in Oklahoma should have an opportunity to attempt college-level work, regardless of when his decision may have been made or whether he has taken in high school the courses commonly regarded as necessary for preparation for college. But many of us might doubt the advisability of permitting a poorly prepared student, or one with small college potential, to enter a university for professional study if, by his presence, he would prevent the enrollment of a well prepared student with high potential. In other

words, if a state university cannot possibly accept all who present themselves for enrollment, is it not wise to develop a plan which will insure that the most gifted are granted an opportunity to develop their talents? . . .

Oklahoma Must Develop Plan

I believe that Oklahoma must develop some plan for selective admissions to its institutions of higher learning very soon. The planning should be done very carefully and in such a way as to insure that any young man or woman who is willing to study will have an opportunity to attempt college work in some institution. But the plan should include the provision that those who wish to enter institutions where the work is primarily professional and costs of instruction high, such as the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma A. and M. College, should be prepared to begin work at college level when they present themselves for admission.

There is no reason why the University or A. and M. College should give high school work to any student. These institutions should devote all of their resources to the development of their professional schools and their graduate program. High school instruction can be given much more economically elsewhere—as post-graduate work in the high schools or, if necessary, in the junior colleges of the state.

In Oklahoma the responsibility for approving curricula in institutions of higher learning and for allocating state funds to the colleges and universities is vested in the State Board of Regents for Higher Education. Perhaps the State Regents for Higher Education, working in close cooperation with representatives from our colleges and universities, might accept the responsibility of establishing criteria of selection for admission to the institutions here. Possibly the standards for admission to the two larger and primarily professional institutions might be somewhat different than the requirements for admission to the four-year colleges and the junior colleges. Thus a young man or woman who may wish very much to attend college, but who for some reason does not have an adequate background in basic subjects, such as English, mathematics, etc., might attend a junior college for a year or two and then transfer to one of the larger institutions where the professional programs are available.

The State Regents for Higher Education might also accept the responsibility of testing and counseling high school seniors in cooperation with the high school faculties and administrative officials. It should be possible for the State Board to administer a program of tests and examinations and make the results available to the several colleges and universities. The results of these tests could be made available also to the high school counselors, who in turn could advise the college-bound seniors as to whether a year or so in a junior college would be advisable before attempting to enter O.U. or A. and M.

I believe that a plan of this kind might well provide an incentive for the public schools to improve their standards and for the high school students to work more diligently in preparation for college. The plan might result in some curricular and instructional improvements in secondary schools . . .

The problem of providing effective education for our youth is overwhelmingly difficult. But what has been called "the tidal wave" of students now in our elementary and secondary schools and headed toward our colleges and universities, gives an opportunity and establishes a need for serious study and the best planning of which we are capable. The problems cannot be left to the professional educators for solution. The public, and especially the parents of students, must participate. The professional educators will provide precisely the type of education the patrons demand—no better and no worse.

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