

Backlog

O.U. IS SELLING EDUCATION, BUT
THE PUBLIC IS BUYING FRILLS

HERE comes a time when even the most ardent promoter must face facts. Some commodities are just easier to sell than others. It's easier to sell the trivial than it is to sell the important, easier to sell the superficial than the essential. Lasting value has very little influence on the market.

A television program will outdraw a good book any time, and Caroline Kennedy's antics make much more entertaining reading than her father's economic program. Elizabeth Taylor's health could keep juvenile delinquency, mental health and better schools off the front pages indefinitely. Why? Because TV and Caroline and Liz are more vital to our way of life? Let's hope not. More likely it's the same reason that more people eat hamburgers than tuna fish.

The same problem exists in promoting interest in higher education. Of course, the University does have its moments. Football, for instance, has kept the public stirred up for years. Try mentioning the N.C.A.A. probation or losing Bud Wilkinson and you have a fight on your hands. Then there was the suggestion a few weeks ago that O.U. sororities and fraternities abolish rush week. Furor reigned supreme around here for a time. The students came roaring out of their lethargy; the newsmen played it big, then stood back to watch—and the alumni were quick to voice their protest. On this issue, at least, the University was not being ignored.

But what happens when this same University faces academic rather than social or athletic peril? When inadequate financing threatens the quality of higher education in Oklahoma, is the same response forthcoming? Hardly. Somehow the concern is not quite so acute among the bright-eyed students and the mass media and the interested alumni.

Early this month some state legislators were asked about the battle for higher education and the amount of grassroots support they were receiving. Their answers ranged from "very little" to "none."

Higher education is a dull topic. As such, it offers little entertainment value. You can't see the results of a successful program in an intercollegiate academic contest. Universities build no stadiums to display the prowess of their scholars. No won-lost record can be kept on the potential accomplishments of their graduates. There are no figures on the number of lives their doctors will save or the number of mysteries their scientists will solve. No one knows

how many worthwhile persons are a little more worthwhile because of their college educations. No tally sheet lists the better homes they will establish or the children they will educate.

All that a University can say is this:

"We would like to open a few doors for your children. We would like to teach them how to think. We would like to help them find a few answers. Your children face a world complicated by snowballing technical advances. Now before the situation gets out of hand, let us show them how to deal with the problems you have created. If they can make some sense out of this life, perhaps they will be able to live it a little better than you have. This is our purpose. It may not be as exciting or glamorous as football and fraternities, but it is our only reason for existence. We think it is reason enough."

If you get a bang out of the football team—fine, that's why O.U. has one. If you profited from the Greek system, the friends you made and the social life you enjoyed—good, that's why such a system was created. But the frills have no meaning without a vigorous academic program and a superior faculty, adequately financed and enthusiastically supported.

No college professor or administrator in the country can sell higher education to a legislator if that legislator knows that the people back home aren't buying. On most matters affecting the University, the sincerely interested alumnus may feel that he lacks a forum. He is right. But when the future of higher education in Oklahoma is being decided in the state capitol this spring, the forum is available. All that is lacking is the time and concern that it takes to write a letter or pick up a telephone.

—CJR

IMAGE IS NOT AVAILABLE
ONLINE DUE TO COPYRIGHT
RESTRICTIONS.

A paper copy of this
issue is available at
call number LH 1 .06S6
in Bizzell Memorial
Library.

TREAT YOURSELF TO



Potato Chips