

Sooner Scene

“ABOUT every 20 years I find that my life becomes re-oriented. I am confronted with new interests, the need for different kinds of information to meet new problems and to take advantage of new opportunities.” This was an idea expressed to me by the late Dr. Caswell Ellis, who, after several retirements, was at the University of Texas in 1938 as consultant on adult education at the age of 90.

The new independent study program developed by a faculty committee at the University of Oklahoma as a part of the University's new continuing education program presents a unique opportunity for adults who are interested in taking advantage of what Dr. Ellis calls “successive mental youths.”

According to Dean Thurman White, who is responsible for developing the continuing education program at O.U., “this new program represents a courageous break with traditional patterns and reflects a profound appreciation for the quality intellects in our adult population.”

The program is further identified as the Bachelor of Liberal Studies Degree program. The first students to enroll are beginning their work this week. This strikes me as being of particular significance to alumni, because while this is a program designed primarily for adults who do not have a college education, I think that ultimately it will appeal even more to the college graduate who, because of his interest in intellectual approach to problems of the day, will look to this program as a guide for continuing study.

What can a person expect to gain from this study? The faculty committee report states in the introduction: “As a program designed for mature adults, the goal of the BLS program is the broadening and rational integration of knowledge designed to improve the ability of the mature adult, to give wise direction and meaning to his own life and to grow in sensitivity towards socially responsible behavior.”

The student enrolled in this program can expect to obtain a better understanding of himself, other individuals and groups. He will improve his knowledge of contemporary cultures, he will gain a better view of man's development historically, socially, intellectually, scientifically and religiously. He will increase his appreciation for some of the literary, scientific and artistic works of man. This course will affect his ability to read, interpret, and evaluate the works of scholars, to understand methods of investigation and to compare relationships among broad areas of knowledge. In general, the program is divided into four areas—the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and finally the “study in depth” of inter-area relationships.

The Bachelor of Liberal Studies is different from traditional programs in that independent study is emphasized. There will be no residence requirements in the usual sense, nor are credit hours accumulated. The faculty committee has selected 120 books to form the basis of independent study.

“The BLS book guide is no Great Book List,” emphasized Dr. J. E. Burkett, coordinator of the College of Continuing Education. “Our books were chosen to follow the curriculum outlines prepared by the faculty committee for the BLS program. For every book on the list there are two or three others equally

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as good, and when a better one comes along, it will replace the one on the list."

By the way, if you would like to have a copy of this book list, you may secure one by merely writing the Alumni Office.

Steps in the program include 1) admission and placement, 2) independent study, 3) area comprehensives, 4) area residential seminars, 5) study in depth, 6) inter-area residential seminar, 7) comprehensive examination and the awarding of the Degree of Bachelor of Liberal Studies.

Applicants for the course will be given a series of tests which will determine the level of study at which each student will commence. Individual programs of study will vary depending on the prior learning and study of each student. When the student and his faculty advisers feel that he is adequately prepared, he may take a comprehensive examination in the area he has been studying and upon successful performance will be admitted to a three-week seminar along with other students who have attained the same status.

The seminars will be conducted at the Oklahoma Center for Continuing Education, and during these sessions the student will devote full time to three weeks of intensive study under faculty supervision.

After the completion of this sequence in the three areas—humanities, social studies and natural sciences—a period will be devoted to what the faculty committee calls "study in depth." This will involve preparing a paper on a limited problem or topic, or preparing some form of creative expression. The final seminar will be on the integration of learning from all three broad areas of knowledge. The final step towards attainment of the degree is satisfactory completion of a comprehensive examination.

Any adult with the intelligence and the drive can attain a college education in Oklahoma. O.U. is pointing the way in this new concept of learning.

—R. BOYD GUNNING

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