

Backlog

HERE IS A MAN WHO CARES ABOUT STUDENTS—AND VICE VERSA

LAST spring the *Sooner Magazine* needed a University official to contribute the academic view to the special issue on today's college student. Nearly everyone I asked suggested the same name—Glenn Couch. "Couch," I was told, "cares more about the students as individuals than any other man on the staff."

As dean of University College since 1945, Glenn Couch certainly knows more students than anyone at O.U. Every Sooner student is under the University College jurisdiction until he has completed his freshman year and the entrance requirements of his major college. By the time he reaches this major college, the student is pretty well screened, settled and acquainted with the campus. But Dean Couch has the student at his most troubled, most confused and most baffling period.

The dean's office will keep a constant check on the files of the more than 4,500 in University College this year. At least half of them will find their way to the dean's private office. They will bring him problems ranging from emotional adjustments to advice on dating. Many of the questions they ask are trivial; most could be answered by his secretaries, but the large percentage want to see the dean in person. On the Sunday preceding the opening of fall classes, Dean Couch seldom leaves his home telephone. Most of the new students on the other end of the line want to know how to find their classes on the following morning. Fortunately for the students, Glenn Couch has been blessed with the patience to understand that to a bewildered freshman at this moment nothing is more important.

Many of the problems are more grave, however. Dean Couch finds the most serious difficulties among the students who are enrolled because of pressure from family, teachers or community—those with no real interest in college. "Students have to believe that college is important or it will eventually trip them up," he contends. "If they are being forced into college by the social situation, we can usually detect it at enrolment. From then on it's a problem of helping the student find a solution that will satisfy him and his family."

A large percentage of the students who come to the dean for advice are simply searching for a major. These students are sincere in their desire for a college education but as yet have not found the field best suited to their abilities. More than half of the entering freshmen will change majors before completing their college work. Many

come to college to duplicate the career of someone they admire, then find they are not suited to the preparation necessary for the profession. Today engineering is the big draw; a few years ago it was medicine.

Although it cuts into an already overcrowded schedule, Dean Couch has continued to teach a course in beginning botany, the job which brought him to O.U. in 1932. "I need to constantly remind myself," he explains, "of the difficulties that students are having in their classes and of the problems that the faculty face."

Of course Dean Couch spends a good deal of time combating that age-old freshman malady — homesickness. Hardly a freshman escapes this disease, although some are more difficult to cure than others. One young man from the East Coast was so anxious to come to O.U. this fall that he arrived a week early, enrolled, paid his fees, then decided to go home. A talk with the dean failed to change the young man's mind, but after 24 hours at home, college didn't look nearly so bad. He was back in Norman the next day asking Dean Couch to re-enrol him.

There are many cases which do not turn out so well, however. The most difficult duty Dean Couch must perform is the termination of a student's enrolment. "You can't operate a university without rules, of course," he explains, "but it's awfully hard for me to tell a student that he hasn't made the grade. I must be certain that he understood the rules and that he had ample warning, but then I must have some positive suggestion that the student can fall back on and some evidence that my suggestion is a good one for him."

Dean Couch admits that there is a question of ego involved in handling such cases, both for the student and his parents, and he feels a certain responsibility in protecting them on that score. "If possible you must talk the situation over with the parents and decide with them what sort of a person their child is and where he is likely to succeed," the dean says. "Many times what the student really needs is a little bit of success. I try never to terminate an enrolment at mid-year. You can't just send a student home in the middle of the school year to face all those questions."

One of Couch's fellow deans is fond of telling about the particularly delicate cases which he refers to Couch. "When I get one that requires a lot of tact and diplomacy, I just send the people to Glenn," he says. "He's good at that sort of thing." —CJR

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