

Backlog

THE "600" PRESENTED A PROBLEM IN FOCUSING "ANATOMY OF EXCELLENCE"

THE local "600"—the Norman campus faculty — are normally the *Sooner Magazine's* greatest resource in reporting the various segments of the University of Oklahoma to the alumni. Among the 600 are world authorities, men and women who are accomplishing feats of true significance in their specialties. I have always felt that the more of these people we had the easier the *Sooner's* job would be. But this month, in addition to being a fount of interesting information, the faculty became a source of mild frustration.

Keep in mind that these 600 are either conducting or supervising 1,000 research projects, writing dozens of scholarly papers for scientific and technical journals, preparing hundreds of speeches for learned societies all over the world and for less specialized groups closer to home, and by year's end they will have completed approximately 35 books in a variety of fields.

The Oklahoma City campus is the same story in medical terms. The faculty there has received increasing national attention in the past few years, often in the form of grants to make a life a little longer and a great deal more comfortable.

This sort of record makes the faculty a natural place to focus the "Anatomy of Excellence" series (see page 3)—but it is difficult to focus on 600 individuals going off in all directions. If there had been only 5 or 10 or 15 truly outstanding professors among the 600, the selection for "The Mark of Distinction" would have been relatively simple. But when there are several dozen who can easily qualify as "distinguished professors," life gets a mite complicated.

We settled on the number 15 in the interest of space. To help narrow the list, faculty members spending most of their time in the administrative ranks were eliminated, even though many of them are still among the most effective classroom teachers and researchers. We decided to stick to the Norman campus, and to make the list as representative as possible.

Then we began the search through stacks of records of accomplishments, tributes from students and analyses by authorities within the field. We sought learned opinions from those who should know on the local scene—but of course no two persons came up with the same 15. Fortunately, however, the 15 in this issue reappeared

with amazing frequency in the majority of listings. You will notice that most of the 15 hold the rank of "research professor of—" and while this is certainly no requirement for distinction, it is a fairly reliable indication. Research Professor is the highest rank given to O.U. faculty members; great care and endless consideration go into the selection of the recipients. Anyone who has ever held this rank automatically deserves the "distinguished professor" label.

In several departments overall strength in teaching and research made selection of a single man difficult—in art, for instance. Dr. Nielsen is the most eminent man in O.U. physics, still the strength of that faculty as a teaching unit is a little short of phenomenal. In engineering, there is a group of comers who are rapidly outgrowing the "bright young men" category; likewise in the social sciences several of our younger professors are achieving a popularity in the classroom that is making them prime targets for outside recruiters.

Next year and in years to come, choosing 15 from the 600 will be even more complicated, but I doubt that you will hear many complaints. Abounding excellence may defy the journalist who wants to get down to specific persons—but it's the kind of problem you learn to live with. —CJR

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