

Backlog

TOMORROW'S ALUMNI WILL DEMAND MORE THAN THE CLASSNOTES

The classnotes, an application of that old newspaper cliché about "names making news," used to be almost all there was to the college alumni magazine. For the sake of variety, most issues would also contain several appeals for money, assorted baby pictures, the latest sports results (two months old) and an even dozen photographs of the college president shaking hands and accepting checks. In appearance the magazine was a cross between the *Old Farmer's Almanac* and the classified section of the *Sunday Oklahoman*.

Then about 10 years ago a few alumni editors, including the *Sooner Magazine's* David Burr, decided that alumni magazines had more to say than most of them were saying. They elected to become the spokesmen for their institutions, to give their readers something to think about in the way of feature articles, to inform them of the progress of the alma mater without the traditional hard-sell, to treat their readers like college graduates with educated tastes. These editors began dressing up their publications with good photography and streamlined makeup. They

started looking to their faculty members for articles of general interest that commercial magazines were buying at good prices. The best of the alumni magazines began to compare favorably with the national magazines, and most colleges began to hire professional full-time editors.

Many members of this original group of alumni editors have moved on to bigger jobs, but the trend which they started with their publications shows no sign of slowing down. Alumni magazines are going to continue to stress the thought pieces bylined by authorities in the field, both on campus and off. Don't be surprised if the classnotes disappear from the alumni magazine in future years to reappear in auxiliary publications patterned after the *Sooner News-Makers*, which can deal with personality stories in more detail at less expense. Such publications will be sent exclusively to alumni, while the magazines will begin to include other audiences as well.

The alumni magazine is destined to become a university magazine of interest to anyone who is concerned with that uni-

versity, whether he is an alumnus or not. The initial investment in publishing a magazine is considerable, and universities are going to insist on getting greater mileage from this investment by using the publications as the chief avenue of communication with a variety of reading publics. The alumni body will continue to be the basis of circulation but magazines will also be sent to governmental officials, professional and educational groups, students, parents and supporters of higher education.

If the university magazines of the future are to be successful in telling the story of their institutions, they must never become mere mouthpieces. The editors should present the university honestly, allowing the readers to draw their own conclusions about the merit of the institution's programs.

This is the alumni magazine grown up. For most colleges it may not appear in this form next year or in the next five years; in some colleges it will never appear at all. But in institutions with a realistic attitude toward public relations, such a future for the magazine seems inevitable. In the meantime, please don't forget to send us your classnotes.

—CJR

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