

Backlog

THAT FRESHMAN YEAR OF COLLEGE IS A TRYING TIME FOR PARENTS

ASK any college administrator. If anyone has more questions about college than a prospective freshman—or a better right to ask them—it is his parents. Unfortunately in the past few years the methods of dealing with the parental questions have been somewhat inadequate. Now the University is coming up with some new thinking on orientation that could help to establish a meeting ground between the institution, the new freshman and his parents.

The idea of orienting parents grew out of a concern last year among O.U. officials over the sketchy orientation being offered new students. The administrators involved went into action on this problem and the results of their planning will be evident to the freshmen entering the University this fall. In addition to the summer pre-enrollment of new students with its brief introduction to college life, the new student will be enrolled in a required orientation class meeting one hour a week for six weeks. A regular faculty member will be on hand to supervise each class but the actual group leader will be a member of last year's President's Leadership Class, who, as a sophomore with an inside knowledge of the workings of the University, will be best able to understand and inform the new freshmen.

But getting the parents off to a good start is nearly as important as fostering the right attitudes in the students. Parents are generally apprehensive about their son's or daughter's ability to make the grade in college—yet most of his feelings of insecurity comes from not knowing how the college operates and what the college expects of its students. The University owes them some answers to their questions.

Thus far the program has consisted of question and answer sessions which parents may attend while the new Sooners are pre-enrolling. Nearly 1,000 parents accepted the University's invitation to accompany the pre-enrollees to the campus during June and July. Each day for 24 days a new group of parents met for coffee and an informal exchange of information with representatives of the two University offices chiefly responsible for freshmen. Usually in charge were University College Dean Glenn C. Couch and Dean of Students Clifford Craven with help from Dr. Stanley Coffman, associate dean of University College, Dr. Jodie Smith, the new director of housing who was then associate

dean of students, General Counselor Earlene B. Smith and Financial Aids Director Ronald K. Green.

Throughout the sessions the University officials tried to stress one general theme in all their answers: Your children are leaving home now; you can no longer make their decisions for them. They will have to make their own choices every day; some of the choices will be good ones and some will be bad, but whatever they decide to do the decision must be theirs. So far as the standards of student conduct are concerned, the parents simply were told that the rules of good citizenship prevail at O.U. as they do anywhere else and if their children abided by these general rules, they would have no trouble with the many specifics that govern their lives as students. As for the academic life, the University College dean made one point clear: O.U. has a responsibility to society as well as to the student. Since the University cannot graduate a student who fails to meet the standards of performance demanded by society, the individual student must begin meeting these standards from his first day in college.

With this philosophy as a basis for discussion the parents were encouraged to fire away with any question they had in mind. They were concerned primarily with housing and the health service and financial arrangements, but they directed many more questions toward the academics of college than toward the frills. Their questions were practical—and amazingly predictable.

If the orientation sessions achieved nothing else with the parents, at least they helped to dispel misunderstanding about the goals of O.U. and why the rules must exist as they do. The parents were reassured to learn that the University is well acquainted with the problems confronting the individual student. And it was reassuring to be with other parents who have the same problems, the same worries about their own children. Most of the parents left with the University a more personal, more human place to deposit their sons and daughters.

The parents who have taken part in the program to date are, of course, only a small percentage of the parents of next year's freshman class. The pre-enrollees are not all the freshmen by any means and not even all of them brought their parents along to the campus. Those parents who did not participate in the pre-enrollment orientation are being invited to attend a similar session on Saturday, September 15, and to stay for freshman convocation that night. (Class starts the following Monday.) Unfortunately this session cannot be an informal or personal as the smaller summer groups, but much of the same purpose can be achieved.

O.U. has never tried the direct approach to the parents before and there is no real way of knowing what the immediate results will be. Perhaps this early liaison between the University and the parents will eliminate many of the questions and misunderstanding that are always present between parents of a freshman and the institution responsible for his education. On the other hand, by starting the year on a more personal basis, the program may open the door to even more questions from parents who now "know somebody there at O.U." Either result will be an improvement; both would be desirable. —CJR

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