

VIEW I: paul ruggiers

*Anticipating the Class of '84 through emerging patterns
in American higher education today*

With this interview Sooner Magazine introduces a regular feature, View, which will examine a variety of subjects with members of the OU community—professors, students, administrators and alumni.

Sooner: What will college be like in '84?

Ruggiers: We won't recognize it. Physically, of course, the changes will be striking. There will be great complexes of buildings. At OU we're contemplating the integration of math, chemistry and physics. This will be a reality in 1984. There will be a fine arts complex, a humanities complex, a continuing education complex. And the changes will not be entirely physical. The student in the Class of '84 will enter a vastly different institution, not only in degree but in kind. Many, if not most, of the methods we now use will be antiquated. At least I hope so.

Sooner: Why should we be concerned about the Class of '84?

Ruggiers: Very simply, the sheer rise of population threatens rather than challenges. If California is correct in its estimates, it must double the size of all its institutions and add 1,000 new ones

—with average enrollments of 2,500—before the next decade is over. In addition to the weight of numbers, it has become obvious that students will have to be given instruction more intensively, in a shorter span of time.

At the same time universities will have to continue to satisfy the demands of industry and government for the services of its teaching and research staff. Oklahoma will experience the same situation. We are in fact living through it. And our ability to solve today's problems will have a lot to do with the kind of education the Class of '84 receives. I feel that we have no alternative except to change, adapt, experiment with caution but with boldness, and our primary objective must be to preserve and to strengthen the teacher-student dialogue.

Sooner: What major difficulties do you see in the way of change?

Ruggiers: The usual one in the course of human affairs: mainly human apathy, clinging to the procedures of the present, a fear of change. We have become so hypnotized by numbers that we measure everything by length of time, numbers of hours, credits, semesters,

years, degrees. We shall have to learn not to surrender to numbers as the only possible means of measuring growth of human minds.

From the teacher's point of view, there comes a time when, as he looks back over a long stretch of teaching time, he has a feeling of revulsion against the failure that is built into the teaching experience. This is a healthy revulsion and indicates what we are coming to recognize more and more: that there are dead spots in conventional methods, depersonalizing routines that ought to be given up, rote-learning expectations that reveal our own insecurities, and unwillingness in the face of rising enrollments to give back the responsibility for learning to the student. Here the teacher's healthy revulsion should overcome his own reluctance to seek more fruitful methods.

Sooner: What changes can be expected?

Ruggiers: Nothing is particularly sacred in matters of external form. There is no reason why we have to teach in 50-minute units. Some of us have been experimenting in various programs with gifted adults with both longer and shorter periods. The materials dictate



The student must become involved in his own education. We must make him more responsible for it by giving much of the responsibility back to him.



The students themselves have been hypnotized into thinking that the learning experience is merely the receiving of a stimulating lecture.



Colleagues who teach sections of 250 students and more tell me that standing on a platform no longer makes you a teacher—you're a performer.

the length of time. Three-hour courses used to be the rule, but now there are 1-hour, 2-hour, 4-hour courses. We are being forced to think in terms of something more than a 2-semester year, and we are certainly being forced to think in terms other than the four-year degree. These are, of course, only the machinery. More important changes will have to come about in curricula, adjusting our ideas about the courses we teach, trying to decide whether they are merely sets of data or something more—methods by which a constantly changing subject can be explored. New disciplines are coming into existence; lines between departments are less rigidly drawn, as in biochemistry, the history and philosophy of science. There is a swing back toward recognizing our responsibility to the student in generalist terms. That is to say, we have come to admit that human knowledge does have a cohesion and a pattern beyond the scope of our own specialty and that in some way we have the obligation to see that the student discovers, through our effort and his, this fact.

One sign of health has been the astonishing proliferation of honors programs all over the country in the past 35 years. It indicates a restlessness with regard to the older routinized method, with the same classroom techniques and the same old materials. What the honors programs have done is to aid in the shift to a subject matter more pertinent to the student's capacity and needs.

The only reason that I can see for changing curricula and course content is to increase the amount and kind of participation of the student in his own education. When we look over the glazed eyes of the students sitting too comfortably in the usual classroom experience, taking lazy notes which they will give back on quizzes, getting by with the minimum of work, and thinking in their hearts that this is education, we have a sense of failure. The antidote is to get the student involved in his own education, make him more responsible for it by giving much of the responsibility back to him, by finding ways in which to give relevance of the materials to his own experience, by refusing to shirk our share of the blame

DR. PAUL RUGGIERS is a David Ross Boyd professor of English and director of the College of Arts and Sciences' Honors Program.

for what is happening by hiding behind research or committee assignments or extracurricular commitments.

One solution will be to reduce the size of colleges and give them a greater degree of autonomy. We need to get colleges down to a size where administrations have contact with the faculty and where the faculty can identify their roles more completely and experiment more freely. The colleges must give back to the student his individuality and his voice.

A good educational system costs money, and the ultimate responsibility rests with the citizens. If they do not support education then we will not be able to give an adequate education to them and their children. If we are going to think in terms of 20 years from now, if we anticipate a well educated Class of '84, we must pay for a good system now, today.

Sooner: What have universities been doing about rising enrollments?

Ruggiers: It has become clear since about 1956 when we first saw the crisis in the most realistic terms that the immediate problem was to handle more students than we had faculty and buildings to accommodate them. The immediate reaction across the country was to commit the universities to a rather hectic building program, thinking at least the one thing we could do would be to provide adequate space for the students when they enrolled.

Now almost ten years after the crisis was first fully confronted and now that the population explosion is in fact a fact, we've begun to see that maybe we've been conditioned by the past into thinking that what we have always done, we must continue to do. If we've required students to accumulate 124 credit hours in four nine-month years, then this must be the way to do it in the future. Not so. Now people are experimenting with new methods and new programs to meet new situations.

Sooner: What's different about today's universities? What do you mean by "new situation"?

Ruggiers: We are oriented to a classroom method of teaching—what in the old days we called the conference method. There was a great deal of give and take in the classroom. As the classes have increased in size, and I recall each jump—first from 8 to 10 in a class to 15 and 20. We teachers really complained at 25, then came 28, 32. Now

we have exhausted the classroom capacity. If there are 40 seats in a room, then we have 40 students. If there are 60 spaces, we fill them with 60 students.

Conditioned as we are to the classroom method, we have felt that the only thing to do is to provide more and more classrooms, that by doing this we are purely and simply solving the increasing responsibilities. But we find that this is not true, that as the classroom size increases, the teaching method very subtly changes. You get to the place where you're no longer inviting give and take, you're no longer letting the student verbalize his own learning, you're no longer giving the student the opportunity to raise the right questions. There isn't time to allow the variety of questions that would arise, so the teacher surrenders to a very subtle pressure from within himself and from the conditioned response of his audience. He does nothing but lecture. I've asked some of my colleagues who have been teaching sections containing more than 250 students. And these people say that standing on the platform makes you a performer; it no longer makes you a teacher.

We're being forced to evaluate whether what we are doing is what we want to continue doing. We're beginning to have the feeling perhaps that maybe we're short-changing ourselves as teachers and the students as students. So here at OU we have adopted a number of salvaging ploys like the Scholars Program, the President's Leadership Class and the Honors Program. These programs are spreading now to the colleges outside the College of Arts and Sciences.

Sooner: These programs are only directed toward the high-achieving students, aren't they?

Ruggiers: Indeed. And it has been a solution, although not a total one. And maybe one of the emerging patterns in education is going to be to follow the models set by whatever we're pioneering in honors programs. This means abandoning many of the pet procedures that have been convenient like the requirement of residence credit, like tabulating the student's progress by the number of class hours he accumulates. This kind of thing, called by many people the "lockstep method" is the first thing to come under severe attack.

What the solution is, is very difficult

Continued on the next page

During his senior year a student would enter the world of self-reliance, performing independent study

to say. You've got to exert some controls over the student. You've got to know where he is in his progress. For the superior student we've been entertaining a number of notions here. One is to take full advantage of any advanced standing procedures. There's a national organization, for example, that will let students take examinations in English, chemistry, mathematics, biology, Latin, modern languages. If these students acquire a certain level of skill which they demonstrate on the national examinations, then the schools to which they apply will admit these students with college credits already tucked under their belts. This represents a tremendous saving. In a sense what some have done is to eliminate their freshman year. Some can get into their graduate study or out of college a whole year earlier. This is a mixed blessing.

The problem, it seems to me is, is there any advantage to the state and to the nation, first of all, if we get a student out of college a year earlier? The answer is yes and no. First of all it gets a student into a specialty much faster. By eliminating a lot of the baby step work of the freshman year, we have hastened the student's entry into his major discipline. We've turned him out a specialist a whole year faster, so his utility to the nation or to the state is increased. Yet we recognize that this is not always good for the individual—to make a person into a specialist before he has had sufficient time to mature psychologically, socially and most important, humanistically—before he knows what values his society holds, before he knows what values his society ought to maintain as ideals.

Sooner: What can a university do to see that a student gets an education rather than a training?

Ruggiers: We can solve this problem by refurbishing the curriculum, by assuring the student has some kind of specialized advisory procedures which assure him a certain number of courses to

balance out his specialty.

One of the things I would like to see tried here is a system of relieving a student in his last year from the necessity of going to college in the normal, usual, routinized manner. Instead of letting him take 15-20 hours a semester for two semesters of what would normally be his senior year, I'd like to see us take a pilot group who would take a large percentage of work only in special projects.

This would be a kind of capstone year in which the student for the first time would be released, so to speak, into the enormities of responsibility and self-reliance. We would put them into the hands of a committee. The committee would be chosen from the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, and we would, in consultation with the student, find out what his principle interests are, let him do a number of projects in his major field and then ask him to go on and do projects in the areas outside his field and see that some of the projects would be interdisciplinary in scope. I feel that this would be a wonderful way of giving the student an opportunity to pull together the kind of knowledge he has while at the same time he deepens and intensifies his experience in research techniques.

Sooner: Many people are concerned because we are not producing enough PhD's, the accepted ticket to teach, to meet the demand our universities have for them. How crucial is this problem?

Ruggiers: The PhD program in the U.S. has produced special problems of its own. If you're reading the papers these days, you can see that there's a protest arising all over the nation. There was a professor at Yale, you remember, who was denied tenure, a professor at Berkeley has been denied tenure because he has not published. The PhD program is a specialist's program, and it's a program designed to do what the old PhD program of Europe did—

which was to produce a publishing scholar. Here the situation is quite different, but we don't seem to have realized that the PhD program and demands of education in the U.S. have been going on along separate lines. And the problem now has been crystalized when we're faced with so many students who are clamoring for education. They're not clamoring for professional training. All they want is exposure.

I have just come back from a grading session with the testing service at Princeton, N.J., a national organization. There were 500 people there doing the grading and only a third of them had PhD's. These are fully committed people on both high school and college level. I came away much impressed with the high caliber of teaching of a non-professional nature. I don't want to give the wrong impression there. By non-professional I mean people who are not preparing others to go to the PhD, who are not teaching PhD candidates.

A recent column in the Saturday Review emphasized the fact that a great many people are coming out of the graduate schools clearly intending not to teach. They will have to earn their salaries by going through the motions of teaching, but their first goal is research. Their long-range goal is a very light teaching schedule—6 hours—in some school where they will be prestige figures in a laboratory or prestige figures in a research study, not committed to the classroom experience. This is disastrous with the great number of students we have because what we need is the old country doctor. We need the specialists, to be sure, but we need the person who is the general practitioner, who knows what he thinks, who thinks that the life of the teacher is a good life and that he is not selling himself short by setting this kind of goal for himself.

Sooner: Several recent articles in national magazines have hit upon the distance between the faculty "stars" in prestige universities and the students. Many of the students never come into contact with the great scholars of an institution. Is there such a situation here?

Ruggiers: As I read these pieces in the National Observer and Time and national educational journals, I get the distinct feeling that they are not talking about the University of Oklahoma. As I look over the teaching in my own department, history, government, biology, geography, geology, well, all the major

departments in the College of Arts and Sciences, I'm struck by the fact that our people are not holding back in the classroom. They're teaching full loads—9 and 12 hours—and they are taking on additional teaching assignments. They are functioning in other programs like the Bachelor of Liberal Studies. They're giving their time unstintingly to guest lectures for the President's Leadership Class, to the Scholars. All this kind of thing makes a tremendous demand on teacher energies. Not only this, but these people are going on and maintaining research. They go on and they publish. I think of Gil Fite, for example. Dave Kitts who is away for a year at Princeton. Pat Sutherland in geology, Don Berthrong in history, David French, Roy Male, Calvin Thayer in English. All these people have maintained consistent research programs and have garnered national reputations for themselves. In addition, these people are performing full-time advising duties, running graduate programs within their departments, advising students on all levels of undergraduate and graduate work, serving on all kinds of committees. I think OU has been rather unique in that it demands a kind of triple- or quadruple-threat man who has a lot of energy, who loves teaching, who loves research, who loves students and who is accessible to students at all times. I've never known at any time in the history of OU when professors have been not merely available to students by appointment but available anytime students wanted to see them.

At OU we are still hiring people mainly to teach. I know of only two or three instances in our history in which people were hired principally because they were published scholars. The publishing professors we have are doing it purely out of their own energy and drive. It's a very healthy attitude.

Sooner: What makes a good teacher?

Ruggiers: I've heard it said many times that the good teacher and the good scholar are really the same person, that a person must be a good scholar in order to be a good teacher. There is a sense in which this is true. Being a good scholar does not necessarily mean being a publishing scholar. It does mean a person who stays intellectually alive, who stays up with what is being done in his field, who even if he doesn't do any publication maintains an open mind

in the discussion of the major issues of his field and who brings the fruits of these discussions to the classroom. And who in fact invites the student into the discussion of the major issues.

One of the criticisms I have to lodge against the graduate schools is that their function has been to turn out specialists in a particular field. And a functioning specialist means someone who will publish, who knows the materials of his field, who knows what research is being done, who wants to make his contribution to the fund of knowledge that we have. But they have neglected the purely pedagogical function of the teacher. They have turned out not a teacher at all but a scholar or a potential scholar, and what we need is a great body of people who will be functioning teachers. So the problem of every young person who comes out of the graduate mill and is precipitated into teaching is to find out what teaching means to him, what **significant** teaching means to him and whether he can adjust the goals of a good teacher to the goals of a good scholar.

Sooner: What do students expect?

Ruggiers: The students themselves have been hypnotized into thinking that a significant learning experience is merely the receiving of a stimulating lecture. That's only a very small part to me of a significant learning experience. It's all well and good to be stimulated and excited by ideas, but an idea that's lodged in a head and not made use of in some immediate way is only a partial experience. The student learns most in my view when he not merely is provoked and excited but when the excitement generates spontaneous talk and discussion in which he argues from his own frames of reference, in which he tries with every means at his beck and call to increase the dimensions of his frames of reference, when he goes to the trouble of digging up material on his own, when he is provided with the opportunity to argue personally with his teacher. The student must be given the opportunity to verbalize what he thinks he's thinking, because what he thinks he knows and what he really knows are quite different things.

Sooner: Even with changing teaching methods, what must we preserve?

Ruggiers: We notice that students here tend to gravitate toward synoptic disciplines. A great many students flock in-

to the Dante course although it's not a requirement simply because here is one time they can see a great many fields of knowledge integrated in one work. It gives them an opportunity to look at cosmology and cosmogeny, at economic theory, philosophy and theology, psychology, attitudes toward morality, aesthetics.

And we notice that students go into fields like the history of philosophy or the history of science which are fields which give them an integrative view of the progress of western culture. Today knowledge has become tremendously fragmented, and this has had a kind of melancholy effect upon students. With the very sad decline of family life in the U.S., which was one of the integrative forces in culture, and with the concomitant decline in deep piety and religiosity, students have been left largely with material values. In the past the way people found themselves was largely through examination of the eternal values, the universal values. You didn't live only for the moment. You didn't live only for the day. You didn't live merely to realize professional goals. You also had long range goals. You believed that there was another life and that you were preparing yourself for not only the immediate social role of the citizen but you were also preparing yourself for eternal salvation, and this made a difference in the way people thought. I know this is a terribly old-fashioned way to talk, but it gave stability to people's lives because it forced them to get some balance between what you do in terms of short range goals and what you do in terms of long range goals.

So in our time students don't have these stabilizing forces in their lives or at least it seems that a great many students who come to me do not—and they turn quite naturally to education. Education has become the fountainhead of the values by which people can integrate their lives. If we shorten the educational process, we also truncate that necessary development of student's personality over a period of time, a period which we have said would be four years. And we're very much afraid that it's not going to happen in three years, and it would be even more disastrous if we cut this down to even less as some schools are suggesting.

So what I propose is something that will enable us to turn out students

Continued on the next page

What happened at Berkeley is handwriting on the wall for all large universities

if not faster at least in a way which would salvage the integrative function of education. It's worth a try, at any rate. We've got to do something. If you don't adopt solutions, if you don't sit down and use every bit of your intelligence to think through what the major problems are, solutions will be forced upon you, and the solutions that are forced upon you are usually simply stop-gap solutions. Everybody knows from his own life that if he doesn't think ahead with every bit of forethought, when the time comes, he's going to have to make a desperation move and more often than not it's not the wisest one. One of the difficulties we've had here is that we've just stayed one step ahead of the wolf that's been nipping at our heels.

There are a lot of problems we have that are not going to go away. We have solved some for the bright students, but what are we going to do with the rank and file?

What can we do with the rank and file? Here I must confess that my mind balks. I think that by raising the general level in these other operations for superior students, we will raise the whole level because we're sharpening our teaching, we're forcing teachers to think through their own teaching methods. This is the great thing that's come out of the colloquial method where we have more than one teacher teaching a very small group of students and the classes in general honors courses where we have a teacher with a small group of students in the class. The question he has to decide for himself is how much responsibility he can delegate to the student.

Sooner: The bigness, the impersonal nature of higher education was one of the chief causes of the Berkeley revolt and the unrest evident at a number of large institutions. What can be done to diminish or to solve this problem?

Ruggiers: Universities and colleges have always had built into them ways of al-

lowing a student to identify himself with groups. The Greek system is a system of identification for the student. We've noticed in the Scholars Program, the Honors Program, the Presidents Leadership Class and the honorary societies that students take great joy and pride in being identified with them. This, however, does not solve the problem, because we're not increasing the number of honor societies, we're not increasing the number of student groups, we're not increasing the number of fraternities and sororities.

The system is growing more and more impersonal. If the ratio of students to teachers increases, the teachers are simply going to have less time to give to individual students. Students often will come to a teacher simply because it's one way in which he can feel important enough to be talked to. A student feels when he comes away from home in his freshman year that he's slipping into a great melting pot and that he's losing his identity. We often find students performing maverick acts, acting in antisocial ways, resorting to vandalism, to thievery, to wild behavior, not merely to experiment, although experimenting is a part of it, but because he wants attention to be drawn to himself. And a great deal of the wild behavior that went on at Cal is at bottom a plea for attention, a plea to the colleges to realize that students are more than simply information recipients. They are persons with opinions, values. They are in fact right now citizens who have opinions on Vietnam and on civil rights and who have religious views.

This is a problem that the universities are going to have to face and solve. Are students simply free to learn? Is that their only freedom when they come to college? Or do they have a freedom also to function as citizens of the community? That's a problem that's going to grow and grow and grow and what has happened at Berkeley is handwriting on the wall for all major universi-

ties that are passing the 15,000 mark.

Sooner: Some teachers in the humanities believe that our social, moral and aesthetic development lag behind our material advance. Science and engineering have received prodigious amounts of support from business and industry, government and foundations and the humanities end up with very little and often second-rate support.

Ruggiers: This seems to be changing fortunately, but it's been a long time in coming. Some things can be explained exclusively in terms of history. Sputnik changed the world. The fact that the Russians put up the first orbiting satellite produced a spasm of fear in the country that perhaps we had neglected our technological training. This is a great irony because the fact of the matter is that we've always been technologically oriented. So what we have done is pour in a great deal of money increasing technology. The force of that whole movement is just now beginning to wear itself out.

Sooner: How would you characterize the student of the 60's?

Ruggiers: The personalities of students when you think about them collectively change from year to year, from week to week even, depending on what new stimuli there are in the social, cultural milieu. The students here are as heterogeneous a group as I've ever seen. They're like any other cross section of the population, running the gamut from very serious to very frivolous. The ones I come into contact with tend to be very serious people, a little shaken, bolstered by a great deal of optimism and hope which is built into youth but at the same time quite shaken by the fact that a great many things are going on in politics and science which they do not fully understand. They have the impression that things are flying apart, and they're turning to education to find some kind of stability within a very hectic, fragmented, chaotic world.

I've had the very gratifying experience in my classes of seeing students groping for values and arriving at fairly stable ones in the course of my acquaintance with them, becoming very substantial citizens.

The next 20 years will be fascinating years of challenge for higher education. We have an opportunity to build great universities if we can meet the problems with imagination and intelligence and purpose.

END