

Motto and Emblem

September 10, 1962

**To:** Class Ring Committee  
Faculty Senate Steering Committee  
Administrative Group

**From:** Emblem Committee

**Subject:** Proposed University Motto and Emblem

Following are explanatory statements written by Howard Clarke who provided the proposed motto and John Galloway who provided the proposed emblem and colors:

"The MOTTO chosen by the Committee, *SEGUIR VIRTUTE E CANOSCENZA*, has a very distinguished provenience, Canto XXVI, 1. 120, of Dante's *Inferno*. These are the final words of Ulysses' great speech to his men urging them to sail on and on in pursuit of knowledge and experience of the world -- even beyond the pillars of Hercules, traditionally the frontier and limit of legitimate exploration.

This is the three-line stanza:

Considerate la vostra semenza  
Fatti non foste a viver come bruti  
Ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.

Consider your birth (or "origin")  
You were not made to live like brutes  
But to follow courage and knowledge (or "virtue and wisdom," or "fortitude and learning").

The Committee felt that this motto has distinct advantages. It comes from among the most memorable lines of one of the world's greatest writers. These words are spoken by Ulysses, traditionally the man who combined curiosity, daring, fidelity, and practical wisdom. His position in the *Inferno* is ambiguous: he is Dante's admonition to the medieval world of the dangers of unchecked speculation, and he embodies Dante's own passion for knowledge; he is a kind of proto-Renaissance figure, with his words uniting Greek intellectualism and heroics with Roman bravery and tenacity. It is also important to remember that although Dante has Ulysses positioned among the sinners, he is being punished for what he did during the Trojan War and not for this exhortation -- perhaps a hint of Dante's own sympathy for the sentiments of Ulysses' speech. Thus this motto, and its setting, seem appropriate for a university, since its words are both a call to learning and a challenge to the learner. As spoken by the heroic Ulysses, they remind us that the quest for knowledge also requires courage of the quester and entails both risks and

responsibilities. But, as this stanza also tells us, the pursuit of courage and knowledge is one of the things that separate man from the rest of creation; it is radically humanistic.

The suggestiveness of the words in Italian is witnessed by the variety of possible translations. "Courage" is perhaps closest to *virtute*, but the Italian word also has the suggestion of "virtue", the virtue of the hero who is too proud and self-reliant to be cowardly or deceitful or vicious, and without any hint of the modern reductive meaning of "virginity." It is fortunate, too, that the words of this motto cannot acquire new, and possibly odious, meanings, since the modern Italian forms of the three words are *seguire*, *virtu*, and *conoscenza*.

It seemed unlikely to the Committee that anyone associated with, or affected by, MSUO could quarrel with the message of this motto. Moreover, it has the advantage of not being a "made" motto, in which a modern slogan is given the questionable prestige of translation into a learned language. The Italian language also seemed to have a special fitness. It is one of the world's great languages and yet it does not have any partisans at MSUO. In comparison, Greek seems unreadable, Latin old-hat, English too changeable, German burdened in our time with sad historical associations, French unpronounceable, Spanish too special, and Russian politically catastrophic.

### THE EMBLEM

"My reasons for designing the MSUO emblem and selecting colors recently approved by the Emblem Committee have already been set forth at length in a memorandum to Dean O'Dowd of August 28. If the following resume should not by any chance answer all questions which may be raised, please refer the askers to my longer memorandum and its attachment.

I was asked last March by the Emblem Committee, which was formed by Chancellor Varner with yourself as chairman, to make rough sketches of a university emblem and to select appropriate university colors. I made use of several of the designs which had been submitted previously by MSUO students, some of which contained quite excellent parts I thought, but none of which in totality seemed to me to be adequate. I met with a student committee last year and discussed with them the problem of arriving at a satisfactory symbol; I offered to meet with them again, though no second meeting was called by them, at least not with myself present. Their ideas seemed to me to be good. I have taken them into account and have also asked a good many students as well as faculty persons for suggestions. I have followed no single suggestion literally.

The emblem and colors approved by the Emblem Committee were selected by me from some 100 preliminary sketches and perhaps thirty or more combinations of various colors. I did this work during the past three months. The emblem itself is based upon the motif of a sail, a generalized sail of a type which has been used for centuries. Its symbolism relates to searchingness or pursuit; it is connected directly with the chosen motto of MSUO, "Seguir Virtute e Canoscenza."

It is intended to suggest, not what MSUO in its infancy of three years has achieved, but what it is after; there is no suggestion of complacency or of self-congratulation.

In choosing gold as one of our colors I did not ignore the fact that students once favored it. However, gold has long commanded admiration as a heraldic and religious color; its presence in older paintings connoted sacredness and light. It has almost no negative connotations. Black, while in itself suggestive of certain sinister values, combines with white to denote purity and hope; moreover, it is at once one of the most striking and reposeful of all colors. It is forceful yet dignified. White, of course, is invariably affiliated with the idea of virtue. I say without intending to be either pragmatic or funny that the grouping of gold, black and white presents printers with little enough problem, a fact which we at slender-budgeted MSUO should well bear in mind. White is the most widely used of stationer's or publisher's papers; black is the tone which printing presses are commonly set up to handle; and gold is thus the only special one of the three colors, commercially speaking.

May I conclude by saying two things: first, that sails will be used by men, especially those of the heroic mould of Homer's Odysseus, long after people will have become bored by our settling of new planets in outer space; secondly, the seal or crest which ever satisfied the wishes of all persons in a nation or a family has yet to be created.

By no means all persons will be fully pleased by this one.

Loren Pope

cc:

Chancellor D.B Varner

Dean Donald D. O'Dowd