

STUDENT LIFE AT OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

Our activities at Oakland University are in some ways different than one finds at other colleges and universities. The distinctions we have made are conscious and calculated, and based, we feel, on valid criteria of what the contemporary college experience should be.

Today's college student is not the Joe College of twenty-five years ago. The raccoon coat, the beany, the banner, and other affectations have been exchanged for a sense of responsibility, an awareness of world problems, and, in some cases, acute attacks of existentialism. He is no longer insomniac worrying about who is going to win tomorrow's game or whether or not he will be accepted by the prestige fraternity. But he does stay up studying for and worrying about tomorrow's exam.

The reasons for this transmutation in the psyche of the college student are multifarious and complex but certainly tension from the world situation, the growth in national prosperity, and television have been important factors. Significant also has been the increased enlightenment of the middle class parent, who wants junior to have the education he didn't get and who has gradually developed a concept of parental authority which is free and, in some cases, totally permissive.

One consequence of this parental attitude has been that you yourselves as public school administrators have worked out a new concept of student responsibility, encouraging him to be aware of and to implement social policies and organizations, and various forms of student government. It was not so very long ago that such "extra curricular" activities were left to the colleges, but now the entering freshman is an experienced hand at social and governmental organizations, and often wishes to leave these experiences behind him as teen-age and even adolescent memories. This has placed many institutions in a quandary as to whither activities. The junior prom with the big name band does not pay for itself anymore; the fraternity house is getting dusty and, in some places is being abolished; while people like Malcomb Boyd and Norman Cousins are packing them in and library statistics are reaching new all time highs every month.

We at Oakland are fortunate in that we are beginning simultaneously with this nationwide transition in the personality of the college student; we do not have to shift the heavy, ponderous gears of conventionalism and massiveness; we can immediately create and develop a college life which is harmonious and commensurate with the character of this new species.

Thus, we place heavy emphasis on co-curricular and cultural activities, e.g., please see the Calendar of Cultural Events for the winter semester and the concert-lecture series listings for the fall and winter semesters. Finding ourselves in this rather ideal position, we have also let the students determine for themselves the kinds of activities which interest them. The results have been interesting and tend to corroborate some of the things I have just proposed. For instance, they tried a student government which lasted for over a year but which finally died because of lack of interested participants. We now have a Student-Faculty University Council which seems to satisfy most of the students' requirements and desires. We have also noticed that, although dancing is available Friday and Saturday nights in the Oakland Center, only a few students have taken advantage of it and that dances in general are met with moderate enthusiasm. We have also observed that co-curricular activities

seem to be more attractive than the conventional games and dances programs. For example, the Fine Arts Festival which took place a few weeks ago was an immense success. Incidentally, this project was created, developed, and produced by the students themselves with minimal staff assistance. Similarly, the Dramatic Arts Film Society has been a student effort from its inception and has been incredibly successful to the point of making a substantial profit for itself.

But one should not misinterpret the co-curricular emphasis; we are not a university of egg-heads and grinds. We realize that ours is a university of many bright, normal youngsters who enjoy and need rich social experiences, and we also realize that approximately 200 of these young people live on campus. We are aware, too, that this campus is semi-rural and that we therefore must be autonomous and self-sufficient socially as well as culturally. Thus, there are many other clubs and organizations which emphasize social interchange, e.g., please see the list of clubs and organizations. One of the most important of these groups is the Student Activities Council which is a coordinating body for all student activities. Incidentally, we soon discovered that our student groups like to conceptualize and to participate in the production of activities but that they left something to be desired when it came to promoting and publicizing. For this reason we established a promotion council, which is made up of representatives of the various organizations who contribute a few hours a week to the council and who work on events as they occur. This has worked out rather well.

Mentioning these organizations suggests a topic which is somewhat relevant--student attitude towards organization and organized events. There are those who prefer to operate as free agents, unaffiliated with specific groups, but interested in activities. Very often, such students wish to produce events which are, or appear to be, spontaneous and improvisational. This of course means that we in turn must be flexible and adaptable not only in attitude but, mechanically as well. Such a philosophy requires that the student union managerial staff be willing to stretch rules to fit the situation. We have been fortunate in having cooperative people in key positions.

I mentioned a moment ago that 200 students or one-sixth of our student body live on campus. We are now building our third dormitory which means that next fall approximately 300 students will be in residence halls. Each dormitory is small, consisting of two wings with 48 in each wing and 24 on each floor. Each floor has a student assistant who is considered a member of the staff and who answers directly to the head resident of the dormitory. The latter person is and in most cases will continue to be a faculty person so that the learning experience may continue even in the living unit. It should be added that while the small dormitory concept tends to be somewhat expensive to staff, it does accomplish many of the positive features of fraternities and sororities while eliminating many of the negative aspects. We find, for instance, that the floors are beginning to group together in social endeavors and intramural athletics.

Finally, our new athletic building, the new ski slope and tow, and the tennis courts, are proving to be great boons in enriching student activities.

Basically then, if our assumptions and philosophies are valid, and we believe them to be, and with our new excellent facilities, there is every reason to believe that student life at Oakland University is becoming as rich and as meaningful as at any institution in the country.