The Cover

Front of the Art Building at night.

Articles

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Not Practical Enough?

A prominent alumnus of the University, back on the campus for commencement events, was asked what he believed to be the most important one thing that needs to be done to give the people of Oklahoma a better understanding of their state university.

"Your main difficulty is that the people—particularly the business men—believe that most of the university courses are too theoretical and that you do not teach enough practical things," said this alumnus, who is a successful business man himself.

Then he added: "I think personally that this impression is unfair to the University, but it exists and the removal of that viewpoint on the part of business men and the general public is the most important thing that could be done to improve the institution's relations with the public."

Here is something that alumni ought to be thinking about.

The financing of higher education has become increasingly difficult. As President Bizzell says, everyone wants to come to college, but no one wants to pay the bill. And the general public of Oklahoma is never going to be very enthusiastic about paying the bill until it is convinced that the University's services are a good investment.

Certainly many phases of the University's instruction are practical in every sense of the word. Petroleum engineering students working in grease-stained overalls on a model refinery that is actually producing gasoline are getting practical training and experience. The girls studying nutrition or dress manufacture in home economics laboratories are learning things that will be of practical value for a lifetime.

The law student trying a case in the practice courtroom, the pharmacy student working in a laboratory and a model drug store, the journalism student working on the Oklahoma Daily and in photographic darkrooms, the geologist working on actual rock samples and visiting nature's laboratory in the Arbuckle mountains, the business administration student learning to operate modern business machines and solve intricate problems in business accounting—surely all these are learning something of practical value.

Of course the University also gives instruction in the physical and social sciences and in cultural subjects, and these courses are, by their very nature, somewhat theoretical. They are theoretical in the sense that they sum up man's best available knowledge in these fields of study.

The universities are responsible for advancing the frontiers of knowledge. In order to do this, they must work at times in the so-called theoretical fields, and not devote all of their attention to instruction that has an immediate practical application.

This two-fold function of a university—utilitarian work along with practical instruction—is one not well understood by the public. Anything that alumni of O. U. can do to explain it more clearly to the people of Oklahoma is a distinctly valuable service to the University.