A surprising number of that specialized group of attorneys versed in the intricacies of foreign law have also been grounded in the commercial code of Oklahoma. A significant portion of them, though their practices are generally centered in the major cities of the world—New York, Paris, Geneva, Tokyo, Washington, Cairo, Buenos Aires—are also familiar with such exotic places as Atoka, Gotebo, Marietta, Guymon, and Poteau. If you hum Boola Boola to them, not a few will respond with the words to Boomer Sooner. Which is to say a goodly representation of those trained in international law hail from Oklahoma, and specifically from the OU College of Law.

The University's law school has a notable record in the number of its graduates who have entered the field of international law. It ranks among the nation's leaders in this department. Says Dr. R. Dale Vliet, David Ross Boyd professor of law and champion of the cause at OU: "A professor at one of the schools which have special programs in this area told me that in recent years we have sent more students on to graduate study in international law than any other state university law school."

Don't be misled into picturing hordes of law graduates leaving Oklahoma and enrolling in the post-graduate training that is required. The flow is far from torrential, but it has been steady and respectable. An average of from one to two OU law graduates each year for the past ten has chosen careers in international law, which is quite an impressive figure for this very selective field. It's particularly interesting and perhaps paradoxical to some that such a significant number of native sons from a state as inland (and some would say as provincial) as Oklahoma should choose such cosmopolitan careers. Dr. Vliet believes that the state's geographical insulation may in fact contribute to the appeal. Some may be attracted for the same reasons an unusually high percentage of Nebraska youths join the Navy. "Being landlocked, I think, actually has made us more aware and intrigued with the world outside," he says.

Probably the question of whether a state has a coastline is academic in this day and age. A dramatically shrinking world is perhaps an even more compelling factor. "The rapid expansion of travel and the relatively easy accessibility of one country with another have also inspired an interest in foreign law," Dr. Vliet says.

The reasons, of course, vary with each individual. Four years ago in preparing an address that he delivered at the Parker School of Comparative and Foreign Law at Columbia University, Dr. Vliet polled several of his former students about their decisions to enter the field. Answered one: "I'm sure there were several reasons which prompted me to pursue graduate study in comparative law (an aspect of international law), and I doubt I can identify the most predominant. Travel? Yes. Travel had whetted my appetite and was a contributing factor though it was not among the most important. . . . An inborn desire to see the world in a larger perspective? I don't know whether the desire was inborn, but this was one of the most important factors. At least I thought so. I had worked in an Oklahoma City law firm for several months as a student and felt that helping an oilman save on his taxes was not among the highest callings for a young man, especially in our troubled world. This 'lager perspective' rationale was the stock explanation I used when asked why I was studying useless foreign law.

"Some other motivation? I'm sure there were several. Before graduating from law school, I was not certain I was heading for a meaningful life. I was dissatisfied with the values I encountered in my environment, lacked confidence in my own fuzzy values, and felt I had to escape from my environment to find oxygen. . . . In a sense the necessarily drab subject matter of some law courses had a reverse effect and impelled me to escape, somehow, from a life where the latest Oklahoma Supreme Court decision, say, mortgages was supposed to be important to me. I don't mean that the
courses at OU were dull or poorly taught. I mean I either wanted to leave a world of dull, workaday matters or achieve a deeper understanding of that world so that I could live meaningfully in it. Comparative law offered this possibility."

Whatever the reasons, Dr. Vliet is delighted, if somewhat mystified, by the showing OU has made. A portly, distinguished gentleman and an outstanding teacher, as his Boyd professorship attests, Dr. Vliet advocates a strong program in the international field at OU. At present he teaches the sole course offered in the curriculum, a two-hour introduction in comparative law, and his is the manner of a gardener nurturing a delicate and beloved plant. The seed was first placed in the soil eight years ago, and since then, through Dr. Vliet’s efforts, a modest library has been collected. Much more is needed. “If we could get $10,000, we could have a sound library of English language books in the field. Last summer I was in Europe and continually came across many valuable volumes which we need so very much. I felt like a child in a candy store with no money.” Unfortunately, this is often the case; international law goes begging in many institutions.

Some law schools are forced to look upon offerings in international law as a luxury. Often it is difficult, as at OU, for budgetary reasons, to convince the powers-that-be that a law college has the need for a professor whose specialty lies in that field. It is also difficult to attract such a person. There is simply not a bountiful supply of qualified teachers, because industry quickly snaps up such persons at larger salaries than most schools are prepared to pay. “Our faculty was conscious of the need for adding some offering in this area to our curriculum, but to do so meant retreading some old warhorse, and I was he,” says Dr. Vliet.

The “retreaded old warhorse” was not without qualifications. He was an authority in the conflict of laws, which is in many ways related to the field of comparative law. He was widely traveled, and his interest in international law began during his days as a student in the OU College of Law. He was the second student in the nation to be chosen for graduate study in foreign law on a fellowship program established in the late 30’s by a wealthy, believe it or not, plumbing magnate. The first recipient today is America’s leading authority in Soviet law. Dr. Vliet, for reasons which he now feels were inadequate, declined. He has, however, been active among the field’s coterie of professors and has been recognized for his work in teaching comparative and foreign law. In 1961-62 he was a Fulbright professor of law at the University of Helsinki. He is presently a member of the International Faculty of Comparative Law of the International University of Comparative Science at Luxenbourg, where he taught last summer. He is a member of the committee representing the United States at the Congress of Comparative Law at Upsala, Sweden, and was a delegate to the S3rd Congress of International Law at Helsinki last year.

The importance of having a suitable program in comparative and foreign law seems

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Those who have studied international law at the graduate level and who are pursuing careers in the field include the following: R. Lee Jenkins, ’52 ba, ’56 Law, NYU; Jack H. Gardner, ’52 bus, ’56 Law, NYU; Tom Koen, ’53 ba, ’58 Law, NYU; now practicing in Oklahoma City; Max N. Berry, ’58 ba, ’60 Law, Georgetown; Vincent Nathan, ’59 ba, ’61 Law, Indiana; Wayne Gallop, ’59 Law, NYU; Richard Lee Bohanon, ’60 Law, NYU; Robert Coleman Copeland, ’61 bus, ’63 Law, California at Berkeley; Joseph Crosby, ’61 ba, ’63 Law, George Washington; Milton Andrews, ’63 Law, George Washington; Mont Hoyt, ’44 Law, Chicago; Bill Little, ’65 Law, NYU; Duane Wall, ’65 Law, NYU; and Dale O. Johnson, ’65 Law, Texas. This list is restricted to the past ten years and thus does not include a number of OU graduates who are specialists in the field.
There are numerous examples which can be used to illustrate the scope and complexity of international law. The four which follow serve to illustrate the differences among the legal systems of the world, a comparative study of the law the student must face.

1—The employee of an American corporation doing business in Saudi Arabia is killed by a car driven by a drunken American. The corporation must determine its rights under the law of that country.

2—An Oklahoman buys a ticket from a local travel bureau to fly to France on a French airliner. The plane crashes during landing in Paris due to the negligence of a French control tower operator, killing the Oklahoman. The customary rule of law is the law of the country or area.

3—You are president of an Oklahoma corporation which manufactures a handy little apparatus called the Squidget, which you wish to sell in Japan. Since it is an item you have copied from the Japanese and can make cheaper and smaller than they can, you feel there will be a strong market. How do you go about determining the steps to do business in that country? What about licenses? Tax law? Labor law? Do you subject yourself to jurisdiction of Japanese courts if suits arise there or elsewhere?

4—Rich, eccentric Aunt Sterna, who has resided in Italy for the last twenty years, has died and made you sole heir to her fortune, bless her heart. What steps do you take to receive your inheritance? Is probate of the will necessary under the law of that country? Are you or are you not held liable for any debts Aunt Sterna might have?

Of Squidgets and Aunt Sterna