Search for Purpose

By PERRY ROBINSON, '57

It's a strange condition, this lack of purpose that grips so many college students today. Purpose is the highest achievement of all, for with a recognized intent, man may take advantage of his abilities and skills to prosecute and obtain, achieving "peace of mind," and "security," and "happiness," all of which we talk and read and hear about but never seem to experience except in some fleeting form.

A senior at O.U. is surrounded by brilliant individuals, both in the teaching ranks and in his own element, the student body. He may pick from a thousand and one courses; he may choose any one of hundreds of vocations. Finally, he chooses, and he studies and "sweats" tests. He makes grades and his friends are proud and smile benignly when he comes home. They display his finely-clothed body and his stock of clever sayings, expertly shaped by psychology and philosophy courses, to relatives and friends.

He progresses satisfactorily, and in four years he is approaching graduation. And then, the present, which always before has been secure in academic progress and the parental pocketbook, is now, and it is time for him to decide how and what he is to do when he receives the piece of paper that says he has a college education. Suddenly, the reality of adulthood stirs him in the eye. And then he asks himself, "What do I want to do?" and then perhaps, "What do I want out of life?" and "Will I be happy doing that?" This agony of self-analysis is more than he can bear, for he realizes, perhaps, that he really doesn't know what he wants.

This happens to someone every day at the University of Oklahoma. More frightening than physical pain is the gnawing urge for something indefinable. College men and women are not always the blithe, sophisticated product they seem when they come home. They display his finely-clothed body and his stock of clever sayings, expertly shaped by psychology and philosophy courses, to relatives and friends, and in his own element, the student body. He may pick from a thousand and one courses; he may choose any one of hundreds of vocations. Finally, he chooses, and he studies and "sweats" tests. He makes grades and his friends are proud and smile benignly when he comes home. They display his finely-clothed body and his stock of clever sayings, expertly shaped by psychology and philosophy courses, to relatives and friends.

There are no ominous overtones to the student's lack of intent. Each person must find himself before he "finds" anything else. At times, it appears that the average student regards thinking about such personal abstractions a waste of time, a weakness, a condition to be stifled before it has a chance to break the happy sequence of each day on the campus. But one wonders, when students are alone at night, unable to stem a condition to be stifled before it has a chance to break the happy sequence of each day on the campus. But one wonders, when students are alone at night, unable to stem the shell cracks, a relentless honesty comes pouring out.

The question goes much deeper than the choice of an occupation. One must carefully discern between cause and effect. Random questioning reveals that most students are searching for security. Yet, the majority fail to examine why they want security and what will ultimately bring security. Random questioning reveals that most students are searching for security. Yet, the majority fail to examine why they want security and what will ultimately bring security. There are no ominous overtones to the student's lack of intent. Each person must find himself before he "finds" anything else. At times, it appears that the average student regards thinking about such personal abstractions a waste of time, a weakness, a condition to be stifled before it has a chance to break the happy sequence of each day on the campus. But one wonders, when students are alone at night, unable to stem the shell cracks, a relentless honesty comes pouring out.

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Today's college student lives at a pace that defies normalcy. Convention is not a word but a wall. When everyone buys pants with buckles on the back or flat, golf-type hats just because someone got it started, then convention is a real discipline.

Barefoot by the fast pace of modern living, a world of specialists, the unsettled international situation, economic pressure and a world where success is mandatory, the modern collegiate tends to dismiss all with an airy wave of the hand and attempt to forget. But he can't forget, because he knows then that the pressures are destroying his ability to understand himself.

All this and more, and young men and women will continue to graduate and live happily ever after, in vine-covered cottages or condemned tenements, whichever is their destiny. And a new generation will undergo the vagaries of maturation.