

1968-81
"WANTED: A LIVING ROOM FOR OUR CAMPUS"

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Dedication of Atwood Memorial College Center
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The origin of "the college union" is rooted in the student debating societies that flourished at Oxford and Cambridge universities in the early part of the last century. When American universities adopted these societies the emphasis gradually became less formal with more focus on the social life of members. Today, the college union has progressed from a men's club to a community center, in the belief that study and leisure are both important factors in education.

A student union is more than a place for students to meet between classes. At its most purposeful, it serves as the community center of college life, not only for students, but also for faculty, administration, guests and alumni. It offers an opportunity for members of the college community to enjoy a richer and more meaningful campus life.

The Atwood Memorial College Center which we dedicate today has already proven itself to be a community center in the broadest sense. It was put into use on September 20, 1966 - a little more than a year ago. Since that time, the activities carried on within its walls have served virtually every imaginable purpose of an intellectual, social, recreational, and cultural nature for student, faculty, and community groups.

In addition to being a triumph of aesthetic and functional architecture, this building is a living, working example of the student union creed. Actually, development of a basic philosophy governing the role of student unions has been a slower process than one might think.

Although college unions date back to academic life in England more than a century and a half ago, the first building in this country to be erected explicitly for union purposes was Houston Hall at the University of Pennsylvania in 1896.

The history of the Association of College Unions reports that:

"The growth and development of college unions was not greatly encouraged nor did they flourish before the first World War. The patriotic fervor of that great adventure into international affairs led thousands of American college alumni to pour money into war memorials, many of which took the form of buildings to house college unions. In many cases the functions of these memorial unions were worked out after the structures were completed."

The definitive proclamation of a basic philosophy of the student union movement is a 4-point statement of purpose entitled: "The Role of the College Union." First adopted by the Association of College Unions in 1956, it was reaffirmed, after lengthy study and an extensive survey of the membership, in 1963.

1. The union is the community center of the college, for all the members of the college family -- students, faculty, administration, alumni and guests. It is not just a building; it is also an organization and a program. Together they represent a well-considered plan for the community life of the college.
2. As the "living room" or the "hearthstone" of the college, the union provides the services, conveniences, and amenities the members of the college family need in their daily life on the campus and for getting to know and understand one another through informal association outside the classroom.

3. The union is part of the educational program of the college.

As the center of college community life, it serves as a laboratory of citizenship, training students in social responsibility and for leadership in our democracy.

Through its various boards, committees, and staff, it provides a cultural, social, and recreational program, aiming to make free time activity a cooperative factor with study in the education of the people who make use of its facilities.

In all its processes it encourages self-directed activity, giving maximum opportunity for self-realization and for growth in individual social competency and group effectiveness. Its goal is the development of persons as well as intellects.

4. The union serves as a unifying force in the life of the college, cultivating enduring regard for and loyalty to the college.

In a publication called "College Unions: Laboratories for Learning," the American Council on Education's Student Personnel Study Series is quoted as saying: "If (out of class) life can assist students in their orientation into college life and at the same time provide them with opportunities for learning to control their own lives and affairs; if it can instruct them in the intelligent use of time, whether by means of a Brahms recording or a discussion of the meaning of democracy; if it can make them aware of the vast educational resources and facilities of their institution, rather than its social resources alone; if it can quickly destroy false conceptions of college life; if it can instill in its participants the knowledge that personal responsibility goes with the privilege of higher education, it will have succeeded in many of its major aims. If it can likewise contribute to the development of loyalty to the college and can bring the majority of its participants

to understand and evaluate with tolerable speed the purposes for which they have come to college, it will fully have justified its existence. "

How appropriate, also, is Alfred North Whitehead's concept of a university's purpose: "Youth is imaginative, and if the imagination can be strengthened by discipline, this energy of imagination can in great measure be preserved through life. The tragedy of the world is that those who are imaginative have but slight experience, and those who are experienced have feeble imaginations. Fools act on imagination without knowledge; pedants act on knowledge without imagination. The task of a university is to weld together imagination and experience. "

In a history of the State University of Iowa Union, president Virgil M. Hancher said "It seems to me that the union, if it is to be justified on a college or university campus, should be thought of as a part of the total educational enterprise, as an integral part of the institution, as contributing a supplementary form of education outside the classroom in one sense, but certainly not unrelated to it. "

Eight years after that statement was made the Iowa Supreme Court, in a ruling favoring further development of the union facilities, said: "A modern university is not just a number of classrooms where students may learn all they need to know from professors. It must be an inspiration to greater knowledge. It must, through research, explore the unknown. It must learn what others are doing. It must contribute to the general welfare. It must disseminate knowledge beyond the student body through the extension division and the department of continuing education. For these purposes it must invite individuals and groups to the campus. Food, housing, and entertainment are necessary incidents. "

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt said: "You must educate not only the mind but the heart and the spirit." Prime Minister Nehru said: "The most important thing in the world is to know and to understand other people."

Former Minnesota Governor Elmer Anderson said at the dedication of the University of Minnesota's Coffman Memorial Union: "The earlier the individual begins to develop as an individual with a sense of responsibility, a desire to participate and a desire to achieve -- the better off we will be. This is what has built this country, and there is no better place to learn it than in college."

These are some of the philosophies behind the organization, and the building which houses its activities, and which we dedicate today. But are they true? Do these theories really prove out?

Governor Anderson backed up his remarks with the results of a study of "Employer Interest in Student Extra-Curricular Activities" by an administrative fellow, Miss Meta Maneks. She sent questionnaires to 250 successful businessmen and got a 96.4 percent response. Eighty-seven percent said they had taken part in extra-curricular activities while they were in college, 86% felt the activities were an aid to success and 90 percent said they were worth the time devoted to them while in college. Only 6% indicated they did not regret their lack of extra-curricular participation.

Another study, this one by Anne Minahan of the Wisconsin Union, found that over a period of 27 years a sample of union board and committee chairmen not only had broader participation in campus activities over a control group selected from the campus at large, but they continued with greater civic and political participation after graduation. More than half ranked their union experience as of considerable importance to shaping their community participation following graduation. A similar percentage rated it high in contributing to their job effectiveness.

Both of these particular studies date back some 5 or 10 years but who can doubt that the participation and success percentages have not increased markedly since then? The increasing complexity of life in modern America is not likely to reduce the social and "extra-curricular" demands on its citizens, nor or in the years ahead.

It is no coincidence that at this exact moment in all of recorded history man is attaining his highest levels of both material and social capability. Recently I heard Jack Overman, student union director at Kansas State College of Pittsburg, say that "Proper use of leisure time is a determining factor in the progress of the world. Long before there was such a thing as positive education, "leisure" was the school of mankind."

This of course is not saying that all the leisure time man has possessed and enjoyed has been put to constructive use for no doubt some of it has been sadly wasted. But it is to say that there has been provided the means for turning leisure time to significant uses. Perhaps it will be possible for students, as they ponder their formal studies and discuss their hopes and doubts, their faiths and fears, to hammer out their social commitments, their religious creed, their philosophies, their political beliefs, their own road to freedom.

Right now, in modern America, we stand at a pinnacle of civilization. Nonetheless, while we are mastering technological challenges on every hand, our social efforts still bear the burden of deep-seated problems dating back hundreds of years. This building and the programs sponsored within it can have a role in meeting these challenges.

There is a poem by R. L. Sharpe that reads:

"Isn't it strange that princes and kings,
And clowns that caper in sawdust rings,
And common folks like you and me,
Are Builders of eternity?
To each is given a bag of tools, --
A shapeless mass and a book of rules;
And each must make, ere life is flown,
A stumbling-block or a stepping-stone."

It seems to me that this building is dedicated to the proposition that it is important to know people as well as things - to work together toward goals jointly determined and mutually respected.

I want to thank the administration, faculty, and students for giving me the opportunity to take part in the ceremonies here today. This project has been close to my heart for many years and it will remain so - always.