

# A Forester Is First A Man\*

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For a decade the School of Forestry at Oregon State College has been examining the worth of its program by checking the performance of graduates and undergraduates on the job. One or more staff members spend a part of each summer in making this annual survey. The findings show that Oregon State foresters are acceptable as technicians; there have been no dismissals for technical incompetence. Citizenship is more difficult to measure. No examples of conspicuously bad citizenship have been discovered and the finding that a large number of the men are unselfishly active in civic affairs indicates at least a passable level of citizenship.

Personal competence is something else again. In general, the reasons for unsatisfactory progress, dismissal, or discontent seem to arise out of personal inadequacy. On this evidence the School of Forestry has re-stated its aims and revised its program. Its purpose now is to assist the self-development of its men as individuals, citizens, and technicians, *in that order*. There is no virtue in graduating a straight A scholar so maladjusted socially that he cannot hold a job.

In an attempt to achieve its purpose, the school complements the curricular program with a vigorous personnel program. The curriculum is also examined continuously and changed when adequate evidence shows a need. The purpose of the personnel program is to enable every student to make of

himself the best possible man within the limits of his abilities.

There is no one best way to aid the self-development of men. Some of the methods used by Oregon State College follow.

## STAFF

1. An educational program will succeed only if the men behind it intend to make it succeed. For this reason every staff member is expected to be sympathetic with the program, and to participate in it. Willingness and ability to contribute to student development are made conditions of staff employment. It is understood that the interest of the student is the first responsibility of the faculty.

2. If an instructor is sincerely concerned in students as individuals, if he is honest in his relationships with them, if he is competent in his own field, then he need not be a counseling expert in order to contribute effectively to a forestry personnel program. There are psychological and clinical experts on almost every campus who are equipped to deal with subtle deficiencies beyond the province of the layman. The forestry instructor needs to recognize only his own inability to deal with psychological difficulties, and where to refer the student for help.

3. A basic requirement of the staff member is that he be respected professionally. Respect is essential if he is to provide leadership for his students. The school is active in forestry on a state-wide basis, which gives staff members opportunities to work on advisory boards, technical committees, and

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other professional groups. Parallel to this, the instructors are urged to seek outside employment in forestry during the summers to enable them to keep their course work up-to-date and to bring fresh view-points back to the campus. Such staff contacts help to maintain good relations with prospective employers of foresters.

4. By their conduct, staff members exert great influence on students, especially in exemplifying good citizenship. At Oregon State, forestry instructors make an honest effort to be democratic, to share advantage and adversity equally with the student, to give each student a square deal. Because it is natural for young men to pattern their behavior after that of older men with whom they are closely associated, the instructors try to live in accord with high ideals of personal and civic behavior.

5. A final consideration of the staff man's place in the personnel program concerns his method of teaching. It is not necessary that a technical subject be narrow; it can be as liberal in outlook as a liberal arts subject. The important thing is that a course be not an end in itself, but a means of developing a man. Thus, courses become personnel processes as well as information dispensers, and help integrate the curricula and personnel program of the school.

#### KNOWLEDGE OF THE MEN

1. It is not reasonable to expect a young man to behave like a mature man if he is addressed as a boy and treated as one. The school puts emphasis on a *man's* conduct, a *man's* professional responsibilities, and a *man's* place in the world.

2. The personnel program begins the first day a student enters the school. In addition to the usual routine of New Student Week, he is taken on a tour of the forest properties so that he can begin to feel like a forester. The tour winds up at the forestry club cabin on the school forest. Cooperating with the staff, student leaders conduct

a program of introduction and information for new students.

3. Early in his first term each new student is given a friendly personal interview and welcome. He is informed of the school's traditions, standards, and requirements. His background is explored as well as his reasons for attending. He is encouraged to reveal his hopes and ambitions, and when he leaves the interview he knows that the school will do all it can to help him attain his goals.

4. To enable the faculty to become acquainted with the new students they are given an orientation course. At one general meeting a week outside speakers are brought in to explain career opportunities in forestry. The purpose is to help the men to make reasoned decisions on suitable careers. At a second weekly session, staff members meet for informal round-table discussions with small groups of freshmen. In these groups career opportunities are developed, and the men are encouraged to ask for information, personal as well as professional. As part of the orientation they are required to write out (1) their career objectives and reasons for them; and (2) a self-analysis, stating their personal assets and liabilities. From these statements, from the personnel records which students provide at registration, from the interview, and from the orientation discussion groups, it is possible to know the men fairly well.

5. All these data plus the college aptitude and interest scores help staff advisors to become acquainted with the individual student at least once a term, and efforts are made to detect and to help overcome personal deficiencies. Similarly the student's strengths are evaluated and he is aided in making the most of them.

6. Obviously, it is easier to obtain the confidence of friends than of strangers. For this reason a first name relationship prevails between students and staff in the school, as it so often does, in forestry, on the job. The effect sought is that of a group of men work-

ing in friendly association toward a common objective, the development of competent foresters. There is no deification of staff, no subservience of student, but an atmosphere of mutual respect.

7. During an annual rating conference, the entire staff carefully appraises every student in the school. Inevitably, instructors will know some students better than others. The joint rating session helps to make all students better known to the staff as a whole. Families of the top students are sent letters explaining that they are outstanding students. The student who apparently is not fitted for a successful career in forestry receives a letter telling him so; and the resources of the school are offered to help him transfer to a more suitable field, or to work out a terminal, nondegree program.

#### STANDARDS

1. No man develops the ability to overcome adversity if he never encounters rigorous working conditions. Consequently, course work and field trips are made reasonably, or even at times unreasonably, demanding.

2. Instructors keep alert to new developments in the field and to the requirements of employers. Thus they are better able to demand student work which will meet these requirements. Since employers expect men to maintain high standards on the job, it is reasonable to expect students to maintain high standards while in school. There would be less complaint about the low quality work of college graduates if they had been compelled to produce high quality work in the college.

3. The school intends to be realistic in its approach to professional employment. On reviewing some of its personnel work recently, the manager of a large industrial organization said he thought perhaps some elements of the program were a little tough. Staff members were glad to have this assurance that the school is not too "soft."

4. As one means of making the program realistic, students must satisfy both employer and school with at least six months of forestry experience prior to graduation. A request for a work report is sent to every seasonal employer, and the contents of the report are used to develop the man. Where he shows special aptitude he is encouraged and assisted to develop that talent, and where he shows deficiencies he is helped to overcome them before the next season. If a report is very bad it is investigated. Where injustice has been done, the student gets the full backing of the school in correcting the record. If a report is right, if the student is intolerably wrong, and if his prior actions question whether he should remain forestry, two alternatives are open: (1) he can be placed on professional probation for a year, with the understanding that if his conduct falls below the standards expected of foresters, the school will recommend to the college that he be dismissed; or (2) if the facts warrant immediate action, a recommendation can be made that he be dismissed at once.

5. Because foresters need to be familiar with good English usage, specific attention is given to this subject. The forestry staff tries to uphold the standards of the English staff. All students, transfers as well as freshmen, are required to take a comprehensive examination in English. To the extent that anyone who does not make a satisfactory showing is required further work. By arrangement with the English department special remedial courses are provided for foresters. This increases the work load for students, but also increases their knowledge and proficiency in the written and spoken word.

#### MORALE

1. The school takes the position that beginning with his first day, the student has committed himself to a professional career. He is not merely attending class, or reading texts, he is preparing to become a professional man with all the obligations which

that condition entails. He is made to recognize that the school regards professional attitude very highly, and is proud of the performance of its graduates. Working under this principle, a casual high school youngster is early transformed into an earnest professional forester. By upholding the professional accomplishments of graduates and staff, the students develop a sense of pride in belonging to such economy.

The intent of the school is to have every man so well prepared that he can meet normal competition, up to the limits of his own abilities. He is made aware that high standards of performance are expected because he is a graduate of the school. This attitude can't be beat as a morale builder.

2. One of the best ways to build morale and to develop men is in encouraging students to participate to a reasonable degree in the conduct of the organization. The more mature men in the school have good ideas about its effectiveness. In senior seminars, students are asked to cooperate in an annual appraisal of the school program. Their criticisms of curriculum and instruction are often helpful. They also collaborate on staff projects (this paper for example).

To give the seniors a feeling that they are colleagues in the educational process, and to heighten their awareness of the importance of personal relationships, they are requested to act as freshman advisers.

3. Another joint project with the upperclassmen is attendance at regional and local meetings of the Forest Product Research Society, The Society of American Foresters, and the logging congresses. Class schedules are adjusted, and in some cases staff or school transportation is provided in order to facilitate attendance of the men—as participating members, not just as student visitors. (This effort eventually stimulates membership in professional societies.)

4. The men know that they always have the backing of the school. Action on seasonal work reports has been mentioned. The

same attention is given to graduate work reports. These are sent out to employers one, three, and five years after graduation. At the end of the first year following graduation the man himself gets a letter from the school inquiring as to his progress, his plans for self-development, his satisfaction with his work, and his needs, if any. This close attention to the graduate is not locking the barn door after the horse is stolen. Far from it. This school makes no claim to educate a complete forester in four years. Its greatest responsibilities commence after commencement day, when its product, the graduate, is put into use. That's when he may need guidance and friendly counsel as he never did before; and that's when a sound personnel program will provide means to help him.

5. For the benefit of prospective employers and employees, the school keeps informed on the current employment and opportunities. When employer needs are carefully analyzed and competently filled, favorable employment contacts are built up. Graduates know that they are welcome to ask the school for information, and have confidence that it will be correct. This relationship maintains morale and develops the kind of support which will bring in more jobs in the future.

*To summarize:* The School of Forestry at Oregon State College makes its personnel program an integral part of the academic process. The aim is to graduate men who will be personally as well as professionally competent, to ensure that regardless of grades every man who leaves is a better man than when he entered.

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*Whoever is satisfied with what he does has reached his culminating point. He will progress no more. Mans destiny is to be, not satisfied, but forever unsatisfied.*

F. W. Robertson