



## Student Personnel Work: Past and Future

BY LEE MANN

Dr. Katherine Mueller is a well-known leader in the field of college student personnel; so in September first-year OSPA student Lee Mann interviewed her at her home on tenth street in Bloomington.

Dr. Mueller says that she has had three careers in her life, but that basically she is a psychologist. She received her degree from the University of Chicago (in the late 1920's) in Psychology, with a specialty in the esthetics and psychology of art and music. While teaching for seven years at the University of Minnesota, she married sociologist John Mueller. When he was appointed chairman of the sociology department at Indiana University, she was offered and accepted the position of Dean of Women. This, her second career, ended in 1948 when the office of Dean of Women was abolished in administrative restructuring. As she had also been a professor in higher education, she moved to that position full-time, teaching courses in college personnel administration and retiring in 1969. During this period of time she wrote her highly acclaimed book, "Student Personnel in Higher Education."

Since her retirement, she has been pursuing a project that she had shared with her late husband; a survey of American orchestras and their repertoire that had first been done in 1951. Her update of that survey to 1970 was published in 1973. Since then she has been active as a patron of the IU Music School.

**JOURNAL:** *At the time when you were in the field, what skills were needed in college student personnel work that are needed now?*

**MUELLER:** They have changed a great deal. We had dozens of counselors in the residence halls when I was dean, the same as you have now. Only we had a different relationship, because we were in charge, and that is a different relationship now. I went to the NAWDAC convention last year and heard Pat Cross speak. She said today's students need to learn the new three "Rs": "reading, 'riting, and relationships." You need to know the psychology of human relationships, and psychology of human relationships, and basic sociology. Not even in psychology do students get into learning about interpersonal relationships--an understanding of people--until graduate school. That's saved for later. So student personnel workers have to see to it that students learn enough about relationships with people and how to manage in society. They have to know what the students are, what kind of world they are in, and how they can deal with it. Personnel workers have to know by what means they can get students into contact with other people. They have to know how to set up experiences so that the student can learn to deal with other people.

**JOURNAL:** *What changes have come about in the student personnel field in your lifetime?*

**MUELLER:** The most striking change is that nearly all faculty now will say: "Values? I don't know what student values are now, and I'm not interested."

They are just teaching technologies, theories, and histories; they are not interested in teaching values. Student personnel workers have got to learn how to get students to work within groups, how to interrelate with each other. Personnel workers have to challenge students to answer how they conceive the present world and how they want to change it; and how they conceive their own identity and what they want themselves to be in that world they conceive.

If we had the good of students at heart we would try to teach them to understand themselves and what they



want to be. You don't get this in class today, and I think it is terribly important. Student personnel workers have to assume responsibility for the better personal development of the students they are supposed to be dealing with.

**JOURNAL:** *In other words, you advocate the teaching of character as well as of knowledge.*

**MUELLER:** Yes, that's a very good word. There are certain elegancies, certain qualities, and each person has to choose what these are. You have to ask students "Do you admit a world in which some tastes are better than others?". There are excellencies in anything you want to discover. You shouldn't force your values on students, but you should

challenge them to formulate their own, and then challenge those so that the student thinks about them. Higher education ought to embrace the teaching of values, but I don't see that in the future. I think the faculty has repudiated this.

**JOURNAL:** *What advice would you give to people going into student personnel work today?*

**MUELLER:** You have to like to work with people. You have to know how to teach reading 'riting and relationships. You have to ask your-



self if you understand how to do this; if you like to work with people, and what goals you have set for the time you have. We only have a certain amount of time in life and we are happier if we have achieved our goals.

You also have to ask yourself what you want people to do and what kind of world do you want them to set up. You have to be able to know how to set up and get individuals involved in groups so they can interact.

I would also advise people to not get into student personnel work if they are not willing to deal with the values of students and the world they live in. Values are what you should give your students: what you think is important in life. There are very few people that go for that.