

**A READERSHIP SURVEY OF THE O'CLUB NEWS-  
LETTER:**

**A PUBLICATION FOR FORMER ATHLETES AT  
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY**

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**1991**

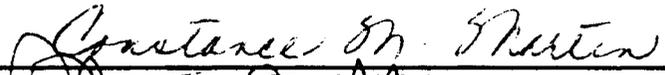
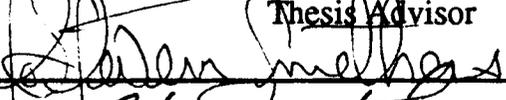
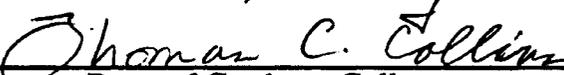
**Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE  
July, 1994**

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

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## PREFACE

This study was conducted to provide new knowledge pertinent to improving the readership and quality of the "O" Club Newsletter; a publication for former athletes of Oklahoma State University. A survey of the readers of this newsletter can contribute to a more informative and effective communication tool that delivers information on a wider range of topics of interest to its readers. Specific objectives of this research were to (a) determine reader preferences for regular material included in each issue of the newsletter, (b) to determine if readers believe the newsletter to be representative of all sports at Oklahoma State University, and (c) to determine readers' overall opinions of the newsletter. A four page questionnaire was used to derive responses from former men and women athletes of Oklahoma State University.

I sincerely thank my thesis committee--Drs. Constance Martin, Steve Smethers, and Charles Fleming--for guidance and support in the completion of this research. I also thank the Oklahoma State Athletics Department staff for their support and assistance of this research project, and friends and family for support, cooperation and patience during my master's program.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Maintaining effective two-way communication among groups and their members is essential to the success of any business or organization. To achieve this goal, large organizations may choose a variety of media to communicate among their members, including memorandums, organizational meetings and newsletters.

The in-house newsletter has become one of the most common communication vehicles used in companies, organizations and other institutions. Organizational managers often decide to publish a newsletter because it is a relatively inexpensive way to reach a large group of people (Beach 1988). For the newsletter to survive as a communication tool, it is essential that it be read by as many of the intended audience as possible (Cooper 1992). In order for a newsletter to be successful, it must serve its readers and their preferences. Thus, it is vitally important to know what the reader wants from the publication and how he or she can benefit from reading the newsletter.

Designing a publication to inform a large, diverse group of people can be a difficult and involved task. Thus, feedback becomes essential to maintain clear communication. However, informal feedback from a small representation of the group may not reflect all

of the views of the membership. A more formal means of gathering information is necessary to ensure the audience is adequately served. A readership survey is such a formal method; consequently, it can be very important in establishing two-way communication with any audience.

Within the Oklahoma State University Department of Intercollegiate Athletics, the "O" Club, an organization for all former OSU letterwinners, publishes a newsletter for its members. This publication, the "O" Club Newsletter, has been criticized by club members and staff as being uninteresting, untimely and ineffective. Because the "O" Club itself and not the Athletics Department as a whole absorbs the publishing costs, it is imperative that the costs stay at an absolute minimum. Furthermore, if it is not being read by the targeted audience, the "O" Club newsletter is not serving its main purpose of catering to the audiences wants and needs.

This study is designed to provide reliable, objective information about the readership of the OSU "O" Club newsletter. The information collected through a readership survey will provide the OSU "O" Club with a more accurate description of the readers of the newsletter. Likewise, the collection of this new data can contribute to a more informative and effective communication tool that delivers information on a wider range of topics of interest to its readers.

## BACKGROUND

In 1992, the "O" Club newsletter was originated by a former Athletics Department staff member. Today, it is still maintained with the help of a small support staff. There has never been a readership survey of the OSU "O" Club newsletter. Word-of-mouth inquiries are the only means of evaluation used to critique the newsletter's effectiveness. This information was compiled from Athletics Department staff members and past "O" Club representatives.

The "O" Club newsletter was designed to create more effective communication between the athletic department staff and former athletes of OSU. However, no clearly stated goals or objectives were originated along with the introduction of the newsletter. Consequently, this has contributed to a lack of completeness when it comes to measuring the success of the newsletter.

Athletics Department staff and "O" Club members have recently questioned the effectiveness of the newsletter. Since a readership survey has never been used to evaluate the newsletter, the issue of how better to serve the readers has been tabled. Without the readership survey, it would be difficult to make revisions in the format and content of the newsletter. Feedback from the readers is an essential step toward improving the newsletter.

Although the newsletter has not been in existence long, many changes have occurred in the "O" Club organization. Since its inception in 1992, it has had changes in command and goals that have affected its quality. In addition, there have been numerous staff changes that have affected the power and impact of its voice.

With a readership survey and various other means, the "O" Club is working to improve itself and regain a stronger voice again.

In addition to changes in the "O" Club, internal departmental and university changes have also occurred. Those changes involved the previous Athletic Director's insistence on enhancing the former lettermen's club. Likewise, the present Interim Athletic Director strongly supports the "O" Club and its activities. Fortunately, the change-of-command only increased the acceptance of the newsletter and its communication with former athletes. Since the newsletter originated within the Athletics Department, the staff has been fortunate to have access to a desktop publishing system, which is responsible for the quality of its appearance.

Re-evaluating the newsletter and its format to better serve its readers will contribute to the development of a better communication tool and a more balanced organization as a whole. A more representative newsletter will better reflect the group and incorporate more of the group's ideas. Proposed changes by the Athletics Department staff include the use of more color and photographs. Photographs are already used, but could be used more extensively. Other proposals for change include more overall sports coverage and departmental information. Due to advances in technology which make it possible to communicate in new ways, and the overuse of communication materials in society, a survey becomes essential to measure readers' preferences in order to maintain reader interest.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Once a set of problems has been defined research becomes the link between the problems and the possible solutions (Hsia, 1988). Through research, the problem can be investigated, information gathered and actions taken based on the evidence, thus eliminating guesswork.

Research is a vital part of the existence of any institution. Despite the vast amounts of research being conducted at Oklahoma State University, research has never been utilized in connection with the "O" Club Newsletter. Without research, the editor has had to rely on in-house opinions and informal external comments to continue the functioning of the newsletter. Thus, the format and content have been based in large part on the editor's preferences. Timely information about the readers and their interests is essential to make the "O" Club Newsletter a better and more effective communication vehicle.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to determine reader preferences for different kinds of subject matter appearing in the "O" Club newsletter. In addition, the study determined the type of format preferred by readers and the sources from which they obtain information concerning OSU sports and Athletics Department matters. Information about the readers themselves also was collected to help learn more about this diverse group of former athletes. Reader

preferences about content, format and common sources of information about the Athletics Department for readers analyzed by their primary participation sport were also studied.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In discussions with the "O" Club President, Athletics Department staff, and the editor, it was decided that the survey should focus on 9 main objectives:

1. To determine reader preferences for regular material included in each issue of the newsletter,
2. To determine which sources readers most often use for information about the Athletics Department and OSU sports news,
3. To determine if the "O" Club newsletter serves as a supplement to the readers' sources of sports information,
4. To determine preferences for physical format of the newsletter,
5. To determine how often the newsletter should be published,
6. To determine readers' principal participation sport in order to compare preferences between specific sports within the diverse audience,
7. To determine if readers believe the newsletter to be representative of all sports,
8. To determine if readers are representative of all sports, and
9. To determine readers' overall opinions of the newsletter.

## METHODOLOGY

Readers' opinions concerning the "O" Club newsletter were gathered by surveying all former OSU athletes who were current paid members of the "O" Club for the 1993-1994 term. This list included both annual and life members.

The population included 292 former men and women athletes, representative of all sports. The data for this study was collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire mailed to each person. The questionnaire packets included a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, the survey instrument, a stamped return envelope, and an OSU Pistol Pete sticker as a token of thanks. Reminder notices and a second questionnaire were sent to those who did not respond to the first mailing.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to provide reliable, objective information about the readers and about the "O" Club newsletter. The study attempted to determine the most desirable balance of athletic material appealing to the largest number of readers. The results of the study also identified the athletic topics preferred by specific sports of the readers.

Upon completion of the study, the "O" Club staff will be able to use the data during planning to help determine:

1. The effectiveness of the "O" Club newsletter
2. The content of future issues,

3. The physical format of future issues,
4. The nature of the audience,
5. The sources of information for athletic information currently used by readers,
6. The best number of issues to be published,
7. The best way to accommodate the newsletter as a supplement to other materials,
8. The representation of all sports within the newsletter, and
9. The representation of all sports within the readership of the newsletter.

Based on these data, a new communication tool may be created which better suits the needs and interests of the employees of Oklahoma State University athletics and the "O" Club. This study also can serve as a source for comparison with future Athletics Department readership studies. In addition, it is hoped that this study will benefit other publications' editors at other universities and institutions in planning their readership surveys.

#### SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This study was designed to assess the readership of the Oklahoma State University "O" Club newsletter. Results from this study cannot be generalized to other university publications or to the same audience at a different time.

Another limitation relates to the fact that the concept of an attitude or opinion is abstract. The opinions of readers cannot be

measured in the same way that we measure length on a ruler. Reader preferences, in this case, only can be inferred from the responses that participants mark on their questionnaires (Henerson et al. 1978). It must also be assumed that the respondents answered the questions honestly.

There are also no guarantees that the audience will participate long enough for a one-time measurement to be reliable. The pool of the athletes in the "O" Club is constantly changing. A fluctuating attitude cannot be revealed by information gathered in one contact (Henerson et al. 1978).

Another limitation of the study is that ideas or comments can not be expanded upon. For most survey questions, a respondent had to match his or her opinion to a pre-scaled response. In addition, if questionnaire items were interpreted differently from one respondent to the next, the validity of the study is jeopardized.

## OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to provide reliable information about the readers of the Oklahoma State University Athletics Department "O" Club newsletter, and thus improve communication among the members of the "O" Club.

Information concerning other in-house readership surveys, including studies conducted at private industries, at other colleges and universities, and at Oklahoma State University, is discussed in Chapter II. A brief history of the Oklahoma State "O" Club newsletter also is included in this chapter.

Chapter III describes the methods used to select participants from the population of former OSU athletes, the rationale for questionnaire items, and methods used to administer, distribute and analyze the questionnaires.

The findings from the returned questionnaires are detailed in Chapter IV. This chapter also contains a statistical analysis of the responses from the survey participants.

A summary of the study is contained in Chapter V, along with recommendations to the editor, Athletics Department staff and "O" Club board members of the "O" Club newsletter concerning changes to be made in the newsletter's format and content. This chapter also lists topics for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Communication is a two-way process. A person cannot effectively communicate with another person merely by sending messages. For the communication process to work, a form of feedback must occur.

Organizations and the individuals that comprise them can be said to have a "pulse." That particular pulse is a valuable and accurate indicator of the state of the organization's most internal and significant resources--its human resources (York 1985).

This chapter describes some of the activities of the Oklahoma State University Athletics Department which serves as the outlet for all programs of the Oklahoma State University "O" Club. This information provides the context for a study of the "O" Club newsletter. The chapter then reviews previous research dealing with readership surveys of various publications from institutions. It is important to note that several of these surveys deal with internal newsletters intended for the employees of companies; however, many of their findings are applicable to the organization of former athletes of the "O" Club and their views of their newsletter.

The "O" Club, through the Athletics Department, utilizes publications and informal methods of communication to provide

information and maintain contact within its organization of former athletes. The "O" Club newsletter is published 10 times each year. The first two issues are mailed to everyone with a current address available in the "O" Club computer system. The remaining eight are mailed only to those whose dues are current for the year. Other means of communication include informational flyers and letters concerning upcoming reunions and gatherings. In addition, the "O" Club board members and "O" Club officers meet once in the spring and once in the fall to prepare for future events. These minutes are then passed on to other members.

In addition to the "O" Club newsletter, the Athletics Department publishes another newsletter, *The Orange and Black Sports Report*. The publication is distributed to Athletics Department donors on a quarterly basis. This serves as another medium for distribution of department information. Likewise, the Academic Services unit of the Athletics Department publishes a newsletter, *Academia*, which is also made available to Athletics donors and "O" Club members. Thus, there tends to be an overlap of information. Hence, the "O" Club newsletter tries to publish information of particular interest to the former athletes.

Although there is an abundance of materials being used within the Athletics Department to communicate with its constituency, little research has been done in the past to determine reader preference or attitudes toward any of these materials.

Perhaps the most important tool for describing the core of an organization is a survey of its members (York 1985). Accurate representation about the characteristics and interests of a large

group of people requires a measurement of beliefs, opinions, and feelings. Researchers can better understand the basic orientation of a group's members once attitudes have been understood (Backstrom 1963). Likewise, periodic surveying of the group over time can keep the organization abreast of changes in attitudes that may occur.

Because readers are related to the goals and objectives of the newsletter, it is important to know what the readers want (Fancher 1983). Readership surveys can help confirm how the audience feels about a publication. Data gathered through a readership survey can give valuable information to the planning and improvement of publications by determining the types of information that the audience wants and needs; hence, the editor can justify the reasons for change (Haines 1981).

According to researchers, in order for the editor to know about the readers' attitudes, interests and opinions and use them in determining what content to offer the readers, it is important that the editor also know something about the readers (Tevis 1992). Likewise, it is important that editors know who is reached by the medium and, thus understand the relationship between the medium and the readers that it reaches (Erdos and Morgan 1970).

A readership survey can achieve many of the previously stated objectives and meet the needs of its intended audience. In addition, a readership survey can help determine the demographics of the readers and also how groups of readers view a publication. Further research on demographics of the readers identifies that readers can be grouped together on the basis of their characteristics such as

occupation. Thus, this can further define a group's interests and reactions (Jackson 1980).

Another benefit of using readership surveys is that they can help clarify an issue or identify a problem related to the publication. Because of response to their readers' interests, Hubbard (1976) found that editors began to change their concept of business news coverage.

For communication to be effective, it must be a two-way process involving feedback and understanding. Merely sending messages via a medium does not constitute understanding (Cooper 1992). Without feedback there is no way of knowing if the message was understood. Moreover, when dealing with large groups, the process becomes even more complex (Smith 1983).

In order to accurately reflect the thoughts and beliefs of a particular group, a means of formally gathering feedback is necessary (Smith 1983). The majority of internal newsletters are designed to give internal information to a limited audience on a regular schedule. Because readers are directly connected with the goals and objectives for the newsletter, it is important to know what the readers want (Beach 1988). Although letters to the editor and membership contribution columns have proven effective, this is not enough when trying to measure the success of a publication because the needs of the entire group are not represented. Thus, a more formal and universal means of feedback must be achieved.

A particular form of feedback is readership surveys. These surveys help to confirm what the audience believes about a subject or about the information included in a publication. Data gathered

through these means can provide valuable insight into improving a publication by utilizing the audience's thoughts and opinions regarding various types of information. In addition, surveys can provide insight into new avenues introduced by the audience. Thus, the editor has a more solid basis for the introduction of new ideas, revamping of existing ones and change-overall. (Haines 1981).

In addition to understanding readers' wants and needs, it is equally important to understand the readers themselves when making decisions (Stephan and McCarthy 1958). To accurately reach the audience, it is important that the editor understand the link that connects the audience and the medium (Erdos and Morgan 1970). Once this is understood, the editor can begin to understand why the audience needs the newsletter.

Newsletters are designed to reach a variety of people within a particular group of similar interest. However, one cannot assume the group shares all the same interests and concerns. Thus, preparing an internal newsletter to a diverse group of readers becomes a complex task.

It is vitally important that a sense of community exists among the members of an organization. A readership survey can contribute to that sense of community (Cartier 1984). A survey signals readers that management is genuinely interested in their thoughts and voice (York 1985).

Another use of readership surveys is their ability to help identify a problem that may not have been noticed. For example, in 1981 Portland State University communication staff members had proposed changes in format and the number of issues of the

university's publication, the *Bulletin* (Cooper 1992). Contrary to the staff's assumptions, the readership study showed no significant support of the proposed changes. However, it was noted that inadequate coverage had been given to non-faculty matters and support staff activities (Cartier 1984).

A readership survey can be the first of many steps toward improving a publication and showing interest in readers. Most newsletters intend to serve the readers, but they do not always achieve this purpose.

Without serving the readers by publishing the types of news and information of interest to them, a newsletter will not survive. Moreover, if publications do not provide their readers with sought-after information, readers will seek out newspapers, tabloids and other media to satisfy that need (Cartier 1984).

Although readership surveys have proven their significance, many editors fail to formally report their findings. Disappointingly, most results of readership surveys are kept within the organization. Despite the extensive information available as to why and how a survey should be conducted, limited information could be found concerning reader preferences.

## INDUSTRY NEWSLETTER STUDIES

### A Typical Corporate Employee Newsletter

In 1985, researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay conducted a survey of newsletter editors to determine what elements exist in a "typical" employee newsletter.

A "typical" employee publication was published monthly and primarily written by the editor. It was mailed to employees at their homes or handed out at the work place, used illustrations, had the dimensions of 8-1/2 x 11 inches, had a length of 1 to 10 pages and presented information in a newspaper format (Clampitt et al. 1986). Motivation of employees and employee recognition were the driving force behind producing a publication. In addition, the study showed that survey respondents had taken steps to formally evaluate the effectiveness of the publication (Cooper 1992).

### Honeywell Inc. Newsletter Survey

In 1980, Honeywell Inc. conducted a survey seeking to understand the interactions between the extent to which and the reasons why employees read the company's newsletter. In addition, the survey sought to understand the level of integration of the employees within the organization.

Honeywell distributed 320 questionnaires, but only 95 of those received back were considered valid for the survey. The results showed little relationship between the degree to which employees

were integrated in the hierarchy of the organization and their readership of the publication. Notably, the survey showed a relationship between reasons for reading the newsletter and career aspirations and overall readership (Pavlik 1980).

#### Reader Interest in *The Oklahoma Banker*

John H. Beard (1976), as part of a master's thesis at Oklahoma State University, conducted a survey of reader interest in *The Oklahoma Banker* magazine, a publication of the Oklahoma Bankers' Association. This study sought to determine reader preferences for existing subject matter featured in the magazine. Likewise, it sought to determine possible topics of interest in the future.

Beard mailed 1,400 questionnaires and received an 89 percent return. Rated most favorable by the respondents was a regular feature, "People and Places." In addition, other features that were favored by the respondents were "Dates to Remember," "President's Message," and "Letters to the Editor." Subject matter preferences included "Legislation and Regulatory Changes," "Topics Peculiar to Oklahoma," and "Managerial Innovations" (Beard 1976).

#### A Readership Survey of *Agriculture and Natural Resources Alumni Association Magazine*

In this study at Michigan State University, a mail questionnaire was used to survey a random sample of alumni magazine readers. A response rate of 76 percent was achieved.

Results showed that readers gave favorable ratings of the magazine's appearance and writing quality and considered it a reliable source of information. Likewise, the survey showed that most of the respondents read all or most of the magazine (Wink 1979).

The study also found that the magazine content should provide a mixture of alumni profiles, news items, in-depth features and class notes content not previously included. In addition, the study indicated the survey participants expressed interest in natural resource issues and opinion pieces.

#### Readership Survey of Gallaudet Today Magazine

The *Gallaudet Today*, published by the Office of Alumni and Public Relations for Gallaudet College, was researched in 1979 to evaluate the attitudes of the readers.

Five-hundred readers were randomly selected and mailed questionnaires. Of those surveyed, 277 responded. Results indicated 44.8 percent of the respondents read most of the magazine.

Future articles of interest indicated by the respondents were those of interest to deaf persons and in-depth articles on the college programs (Gilbert 1979). Furthermore, readers expressed future interest in having more information about research projects.

## Internal Publication Surveys Conducted at Institutions of Higher Education

### Outlook 1989-1990 Readership Survey

In 1990, The University of Maryland's Office of Public Information mailed approximately 9,000 questionnaires to readers of *Outlook*, the university's faculty and staff newspaper. However, only 1000 questionnaires were returned.

Because more than half of the respondents indicated they spent 5 to 15 minutes reading selected articles each week, more stories were added and the length of news items shortened. Both of these were a direct result of the readership survey. Likewise, more room was allotted for photos and artwork and the amount of white space was increased in the overall design of the newsletter (Hiebert 1990).

Stories of interest indicated by the survey respondents included campus construction, the budget process, administrative actions and parking fees. Furthermore, respondents expressed interest in the research page, letters to the editor, the news in brief, the calendar of university events and "close up," a weekly page about staff members.

The *Outlook* publication was rated as good or excellent by 85 percent of those who responded. Areas needing improvement included copy editing, timeliness, and subject matter (Hiebert 1990).

### Campus Report Readership Survey

A readership survey of the university's internal newspaper, *Campus Report*, was conducted by the news and information staff at Emory University (Atlanta, Georgia) in 1989. The survey focused on questions about employees' attitudes about the university and the newsletter's format and content (Gleason 1990). Of the university's 12,500 employees, a random selection of 1,600 people were chosen to receive a mail survey. Of those mailed, 488 (30 percent) were returned.

The newspaper was considered "a valuable source of information" by 86 percent of the respondents. Likewise, a majority of those surveyed indicated they "always" or "occasionally" read the front page of the paper. Items in the newspaper least read by the respondents included those covering university committee accounting and budget procedures. However, no more than five percent thought any current news categories should be eliminated (Cooper 1992).

Eighty-five percent of the respondents thought a campus job listing should be reinstated and more attention should be given to staff accomplishments and contributions. In addition, respondents also suggested a classified section be added (Gleason 1990).

### A Readership Survey of *Upbeat*

In 1988, the University of Portland's *Upbeat* newsletter was surveyed. The survey found that only 15 percent of the 100

randomly selected and returned surveys of faculty and staff considered the newsletter to be a primary source for information about the university.

In 1989, after changes were made in the newsletter's design and content, a follow-up survey showed that *Upbeat* was the primary campus news source for 50 percent of respondents (Gleason 1990). In addition, the study showed an increase in the number of readers who felt the newsletter was effective in communicating university news, information about available services, and the goals and plans of the university (Anon. 1989).

#### House Organ Readership Survey

The internal newsletter of Vanderbilt University Medical Center, *House Organ*, indicated a great deal of interest in articles specifically about the medical center. The editor discontinued "news you can use" features, including tax tips and ways to reduce electric bills, as a result of the readership survey.

Results of the study indicated that although most employees regularly picked up a copy of the newsletter, some employees, mainly those on the night shift, said they never saw it. Hence, changes were made in the method of distribution for the newsletter (Gleason 1990).

### Results of the *Messenger* Survey

In 1988, the University of Texas Public Information officers conducted a readership survey of the *Messenger*, the newsletter of the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center. From a list of all employees, 180 were randomly selected for a telephone survey (Davis 1988).

Nearly all of the 180 respondents said they were familiar with the newsletter and that they read most or all of the issues they received. As a major source of information about the M. D. Anderson Center, the *Messenger* was considered the major source of information for 47 percent of the respondents. This 47 percent represented a notable increase over the 32 percent in a 1980 survey that said they looked to the *Messenger* newsletter as a main source of information. Other sources sought for information were co-workers and supervisors (Davis 1988).

Respondents indicated they were most interested in benefits information, followed by stories involving the advancement of research and medicine. Moreover, 39 percent of the respondents were not interested in the newsletter's feature "Bank On It," which listed contracts and grants (Davis 1988).

Overall, when readers were asked about future story ideas, many suggested more stories about their departments. In addition, other suggestions included more articles about research and pediatrics, a listing of job openings and more information about benefits (Davis 1988).

## Oklahoma State University Surveys of Relevance

### A Readership Survey of the *Oklahoma State Alumnus Magazine*

The *Oklahoma State Alumnus Magazine* was surveyed in 1968. Although the first part of the questionnaire was designed to obtain information regarding a national advertising promotion, the second half focused on the content and format of the magazine. As indicated by the respondents, readers found "Class Notes," a regular column that lists activities of alumni, the most interesting item in the magazine. Other highly rated items were "OSU Research" and "Campus Developments" (Dollar 1974).

### A Readership Survey of the *Daily O'Collegian*

Roger R. Klock (1975) conducted a readership survey of the *Daily O'Collegian* to determine readers' news preferences. The study revealed that "Editorial Cartoons," "Editorials," "News in Brief," "Letters to the Editor," and "Administrative Policies" were the most frequently read news items by the non-student survey participants. In addition, the study indicated that the non-student group had a lower level of interest in the newspaper than the student group. For this particular study of a college newspaper, the previous finding is not surprising.

### Readership Survey of Outreach Magazine

As part of a master's thesis at Oklahoma State University, Doug Dollar surveyed *Outreach*, the magazine for alumni and friends of Oklahoma State University. This study was designed to improve readership of *Outreach* magazine. Results indicated "Class Notes" to be the most interesting feature of the magazine. In addition, "Alumni Achievements" and "OSU Contributions to Community" were high rated topics. Other topics considered, but of less interest included "OSU Administrative Programs," "Honors and Award Banquets," and "Staff and Faculty Changes."

### Readership Survey of Oklahoma State News

As part of a master's thesis at Oklahoma State University, Margaret S. Cooper conducted a readership survey of reader preference in the *Oklahoma State News*, a newsletter for OSU employees. The main purpose of the study was to determine the news topics in which readers were most interested.

Of the 500 questionnaires sent to the readers, 83 percent were returned. The breakdown of those who responded was as follows: 173(42%) were classified staff, 98(24%) were administrative and professional, 95(23%) were faculty, 16(4%) were administrators, and 27(7%) were emeritus employees. Of those who received the survey, 83 percent said they received the publication. The survey indicated that 79 percent of those who responded do not keep issues of the newsletter for future reference. In addition, 76 percent of the

employees who responded said they do not pass the the newsletter to their spouse or other family members.

Of the topics in the newsletter, "Health Insurance" was considered most useful. Other topics of interest to the respondents were "Oklahoma Teachers Retirement Information," "Payroll Policies," and "Personnel Services Program." Those topics considered not useful included "Club Activities," "Emeritus Activities," and "Videoconference Schedules."

Overall, these newsletter studies illustrated the importance of conducting readership surveys of many types of newsletters. Each helped to identify problems, leading to positive changes in each publication, which better served the readers and their interests. In addition, these studies support the effectiveness and participation that readership surveys elicit when trying to identify the attitudes and interest of any group.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the readers' preferences for content and format of the "O" Club Newsletter. In addition, this study was designed to look for the best publication schedule and what sources "O" Club members use to find information about OSU athletics. Moreover, the study identified which sports are represented in the "O" Club active membership. The basis for developing this mail questionnaire resulted from a meeting of the Athletics Department staff and board members of the "O" Club.

#### Research Questions

The following questions were developed in coordination with the objectives established by the "O" Club board members and officers.

1. What do readers think about the "O" Club Newsletter overall?
2. How often would readers like to see the "O" Club Newsletter published? Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the preferred frequency of the newsletter and the readers' primary participation sport.

3. What topics/features currently included in the newsletter are of most interest to readers? Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between interest in particular features and the readers' primary participation sport.

4. What improvements in appearance could be made to make the newsletter more attractive?

5. What are the primary sources most often used by "O" Club members to obtain information about university sports? Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between sports information source and residency.

6. What is the breakdown of primary participation sports within the readership of the newsletter?

7. Does the newsletter give balanced coverage of each sport? Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between perceptions of balance of coverage and the readers' primary participation sport.

8. What are the demographic characteristics of the newsletter's readers?

### Population Surveyed

Because the "O" Club board members, officers and Athletics Department staff were most interested in the opinions of active members of the "O" Club, only current paid members were surveyed. This was a total of 292 out of a pool of 5000+ names of former athletes. Current addresses are available on only 1500+ of the 5000+ former OSU athletes.

Two newsletter issues each year are mailed to all 1500+ former athletes for whom current addresses are available. However, the remaining eight issues of the newsletter are mailed to only the 292 individuals whose paid dues are current. Therefore, the population of readers who receive all 10 newsletter issues is 292. This survey did not sample the overall 1500+ former athletes with available addresses, but instead surveyed all 292 current paid members.

From the list of current paid members, each was given a number so as to protect the privacy of the respondent's answer.

### Questionnaire Content

To determine the questionnaire content, "O" Club board members, officers and Athletics Department staff contributed to create questions that would enable the editors to change as appropriate, the content and/or format of the newsletter to make it more effective as a means of communication. In-depth interviews were also used to surface information regarding ideas and suggestions for the "O" Club Newsletter.

The study asked readers to indicate whether copies of the newsletter were saved or passed to other family members to find out how readers valued the newsletter and its content. In addition, questions were included to find out how often the newsletter should be published. Because there are various sources for OSU Athletics information, readers were asked questions regarding where they turned for their athletic information concerning OSU. In addition, this was related to the respondent's residency. Through in-depth

interviews with athletic department staff and "O" Club board members, the issue was addressed concerning what source out-of-state members use as their OSU sports source. By combining residency and sources of information, the more popular information sources are recognized.

To help determine readers' overall opinions of the "O" Club Newsletter, a question was inserted to elicit an overall rating of the newsletter. In addition, readers were asked to rate current topics of information about the Athletics Department and topics not included but considered for future issues. To provide a more specific evaluation of the content of the newsletter and all OSU sports, each sport was listed and then readers were asked to rate those sports on the adequacy of the balanced coverage given to them in the newsletter. In addition to surveying the respondent's view of the balance of coverage of each sport, staff and board members were also interested in the respondent's participation sport in connection with his/her view of the balance of coverage. Those sports included:

1. Football
2. Men's Basketball
3. Women's Basketball
4. Baseball
5. Softball
6. Wrestling
7. Men's Tennis
8. Women's Tennis
9. Men's Golf
10. Women's Golf

## 11. Track/Cross Country

Regular columns in the newsletter included:

1. President's Column
2. Athletic Director Column
3. "Where Are They Now" Column
4. Athletic Department business
5. Recruiting information
6. Reunion information
7. Contributor Section
8. Other

These topics/features were listed because they appear frequently in the newsletter and it was believed that respondents could recognize and rate these items on a scaled value of how useful they believed them to be. Readers were invited to suggest other topics and features that they would like to see included.

In order to compare responses of different sports and age groups, demographics solicited on the questionnaire included: age, gender, in or out-of-state residency, primary participation sport at OSU, and length of membership in the OSU "O" Club.

### Questionnaire Format

Athletics Department Staff, board members and officers made recommendations concerning the layout, content and format of the questionnaire.

It was suggested that the survey be put into sections. The first section consisted of easy-to-answer questions, followed by somewhat

more difficult questions and the instrument concluded with demographic information. This format was used assuming readers would find it easy to understand. Other suggestions concerning content were also given by the representatives of the department and "O" Club staff.

All of the comments and suggestions were considered in several revisions of the questionnaire. The final drafts of the questionnaire and cover letter are included in the Appendix.

### Survey Pre-test

Five Athletics Department staff members who also read the "O" Club newsletter agreed to participate in a pre-test. They were each given a packet consisting of the survey and a cover letter explaining the content and purpose of the survey. These packets were hand delivered on February 16, 1994. The volunteers were asked to complete and return the questionnaires by February 18. The participants were given no additional instructions for completing the questionnaire.

Corrections were made to the final version of the questionnaire and cover letter based on interviews with the selected pre-testers to determine where there was ambiguity or confusion in the questions.

### Response Rate

To contribute to a strong response rate, various precautionary steps were taken. To keep the survey from being lost among other

paper materials, it was printed on bright, orange paper. A cover letter written on official Athletics Department university letterhead bearing the name and the signature of the Director of Community Relations and of the "O" Club was included in the survey packet. In addition, an addressed and stamped return envelope was included for all respondents. The envelopes were coded in order to identify those who did not respond to the initial mailing. The code numbers were used to help the researcher remove names from the master mailing list before mailing a second survey packet to non-respondents. In addition, a Pistol Pete sticker was included to offer a little incentive and thanks.

#### Mailing Schedule

Survey packets were sent in two mailings. The first mailing was on February 18, 1994. Reminder cards were sent three days later. As the questionnaires were returned, the names of participants were deleted from the master mailing list.

On March 2, 1994, follow-up packets, which included a questionnaire and a revised cover letter (Appendix), were sent to those who had not yet returned their questionnaire. Reminder cards were not sent on this mailing.

#### Statistical Analysis

For this study, the SYSTAT program was used to compile and compute the data received back on a personal computer. The basic

tools of analysis for this study included descriptive statistics, chi-square, and analysis of variance.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The overall purpose of this study was to determine readers' interest in and usefulness of the various topics covered in the "O" Club newsletter and the readers' overall opinion of the newsletter. Moreover, this study addressed possible changes in newsletter appearance and format, usual sources for information about university sports and preference for a publication schedule.

The study consisted of 292 questionnaires mailed to numerous locations in and outside of Oklahoma. The entire population of all 292 current paid "O" Club members, those who receive all 10 issues of the newsletter, was provided by the Athletics Department "O" Club computer system.

Of the 292 mailed, 198 were returned, or 68 percent of the group. Of those, three were returned due to lack of forwarding address, six were returned with incomplete sections, and one survey was returned completely blank. This left 188 usable returns or 64 percent of the total number initially mailed.

Balanced coverage of each sport was computed on a three-point scale for each of the nine current varsity sports at OSU. Another scale was used to measure overall opinion of the newsletter. This scale consisted of a five-point scale where 1=Excellent and

5=Bad. Readers' interest was also computed by a five-point scale where 1= Extremely interested and 5=Uninterested. Further information concerning the newsletter's appearance, publishing schedule and reader demographics was grouped into several categories to answer the following questions:

1. What do readers think about the "O" Club Newsletter overall?
2. Do readers usually keep issues of the "O" Club Newsletter?
3. How often would readers like to see a newsletter published?
4. What are the primary sources for information about OSU sports used by the "O" Club readers?
5. What improvements or changes in appearance could be made to make the newsletter more attractive to its readers?
6. Which regularly covered topics are read the most?  
Which are read the least?
7. What is the primary participation sport of the "O" Club readers?
8. What are the demographic characteristics of the newsletter's readers?

The Athletics Department, "O" Club staff and board members were interested in analyzing some responses by the primary participation sport of the respondents. These analyses are identified in the text or within the table when appropriate. The demographic

section of the questionnaire asked readers to indicate their primary participation sport at OSU.

Description of "O" Club Readers

Of the 188 questionnaires that were analyzed for this study, 41 percent were from football players; 19 percent, basketball players; 13 percent, baseball players; 3 percent, softball players; 6 percent, wrestlers; 3 percent, golfers; 3 percent, tennis players; and 3 percent, swimmers (a varsity sport no longer offered at OSU).

Table I(A) shows the actual distribution of athletes in each participation sport at OSU. Compared with the primary participation sport of the respondents, the survey is representative of the group.

TABLE I  
RESPONDENTS BY PRIMARY  
PARTICIPATION SPORT AT OSU

N = 188								
FB	BB	Bb	SB	WR	G	T	T/CC	OTHER
41% (78)	19% (36)	13% (25)	3% (6)	6% (11)	3% (5)	3% (6)	(10% (18))	2% (3)

() Frequency  
FB = Football, BB = Basketball, Bb = Baseball, Sb = Softball, WR = Wrestling, G = Golf, T = Tennis, T/CC = Track/Cross Country

TABLE I (A)  
ACTUAL DISTRIBUTION OF  
PARTICIPATION SPORTS

N = 5045							
FB	BB	Bb	SB	WR	G	T	T/CC
57% (2879)	16% (813)	11% (572)	4% (197)	6% (298)	2% (91)	2% (104)	2% (105)

() Frequency  
FB = Football, BB = Basketball, Bb = Baseball, SB = Softball, WR = Wrestling, G = Golf, T = Tennis, T/CC = Track/Cross Country

### Gender of Respondents

The total group of readers was comprised of 89 percent men and 11 percent women. Of the 20 women respondents, six were track/cross country and three were softball players. The other 11 were distributed through women's basketball, tennis and golf (Table II).

Table II(A) shows the actual gender of the 5045 former athletes in the "O" Club directory. Compared with the gender of the respondents of the survey, the survey results are representative of the group.

TABLE II  
GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

N = 188	
Male	89% (168)
Female	11% (20)

() Frequency

TABLE II (A)  
GENDER OF  
FORMER ATHLETES

N = 5045	
MALE	87% (4398)
FEMALE	13% (647)

() FREQUENCY

### Age of Respondents

For the entire group, the largest percentage of respondents were between the ages of 50-65 at 37 percent. The age group of 65 or older was close behind with 30 percent of the respondents represented here. Additionally, 16 percent of the readers were 40-

49 years of age; 14 percent, 30-39 years of age; and 3 percent, 29 or younger (Table III).

TABLE III  
AGE OF RESPONDENTS  
BY PARTICIPATION SPORT

N = 188										
	FB	BB	Bb	Sb	WR	G	T	T/CC	OTHER	TOTAL
29 or younger	0% (0)	6% (2)	0% (0)	33% (2)	9% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	3% (5)
30 - 39	17% (13)	14% (5)	16% (4)	0% (0)	18% (2)	0% (0)	5% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)	14% (27)
40 - 49	28% (22)	14% (5)	0% (0)	33% (2)	9% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	16% (30)
50 - 65	38% (30)	11% (4)	24% (6)	17% (1)	28% (3)	100% (5)	50% (3)	94% (17)	33% (1)	37% (70)
Older than 65	17% (13)	55% (20)	17% (15)	36% (4)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	6% (1)	67% (2)	30% (56)
Total	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (25)	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (5)	100% (6)	100% (18)	100% (3)	100% (188)

( ) Frequency  
FB = Football, BB = Basketball, Bb = Baseball, Sb = Softball, WR = Wrestling, G = Golf, T = Tennis, T/CC = Track/Cross Country

#### Number of Years A Member in "O" Club

Of the respondents, 41 percent had been a member of the "O" Club for 21 years or more. The next largest representation was 5 years or less at 30 percent. Additionally, 18 percent had been an "O" Club member for 5-9 years (Table IV).

TABLE IV  
NUMBER OF YEARS A MEMBER OF "O" CLUB

N = 171	
Less than 5 years	30% (51)
5 - 9 years	18% (31)
10 - 15 years	9% (16)
16 - 20 years	2% (4)
21 or more years	41% (69)

( ) Frequency

### Residency

For the entire group, 62 percent lived in Oklahoma. The remaining 38 percent had residency outside of Oklahoma.

TABLE V  
WHERE RESPONDENTS LIVE

N = 188	
In Oklahoma	62% (117)
Out of Oklahoma	38% (71)

() Frequency

### Responses Concerning the "O" Club Newsletter

#### Proportion of Respondents Who Keep the Newsletter for Future Reference

Table VI shows the percentage of respondents who keep issues of the newsletter for future reference. 41 percent of the readers responded "yes" to keeping the newsletter, while 59 percent of the readers responded "no" to keeping the newsletter.

TABLE VI  
RESPONDENTS  
WHO KEEP NEWSLETTER FOR  
FUTURE REFERENCE

N = 188	
Yes	41% (77)
No	59% (111)

() Frequency

Proportion of Respondents Who Pass the Newsletter to Others

Fifty-six percent of the respondents said someone else in the household does read the newsletter. Forty-four percent of the readers do not pass the newsletter on to others.

TABLE VII  
RESPONDENTS  
WHO PASS NEWSLETTER  
TO OTHERS

N = 188	
Yes	56% (106)
No	44% (82)

() Frequency

### Frequency of Publication

In order for a publication to continue serving its readers on a timely basis, it must be published on a schedule that suits the readers' needs. Timing is an important factor when competing with other publications with similar content.

The "O" Club staff is aware of the need for timeliness of their newsletter content. Thus, a monthly publication seemed appropriate. However, a limited staff makes the publication schedule irregular. Although the staff believes the monthly schedule to be the most appropriate, they still wanted the readers' opinions and/or suggestions on how often they would like to receive the "O" Club Newsletter. Respondents' opinions concerning the frequency of publication are shown in Table VIII.

Fifty-seven percent of the readers preferred a monthly publication schedule. The next most favored publication schedule was "every other month" at 24 percent. Seven percent had "no opinion" concerning the publication schedule.

Comments noted under "Other" included, "Quarterly," "depends on the time of year," and "bi-monthly."

Chi-square analysis of this information showed that there was a relationship between the readers' participation sport and preferred frequency of publication. That is, a person's preference for publication frequency was related to what sport he or she participated in. The computed chi-square of 362.297 was larger than the tabled value of 86.66 at a confidence level of 99.9 percent with 45 degrees of freedom. This means that a relationship exists between frequency of publication and primary participation sport,

and differences in the table are probably genuine. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between frequency and primary sport is not supported. A contingency coefficient of .804 indicates that the relationship is very strong. However, the small number of responses in some categories makes the test of significance questionable. Simple chi-square analysis of preferences for monthly publication indicated that participants in basketball and baseball were more in favor of monthly publication than were participants in football, softball, golf and track/cross country. Simple chi-square tests were not done on the other categories of frequency because of low cell counts in those categories. Overall, tests showed a significant relationship between primary participation sport and those who preferred the newsletter be published monthly.

TABLE VIII  
FREQUENCY OF PUBLICATION  
BY PRIMARY PARTICIPATION SPORT

	N = 188									
	FB	BB	Bb	Sb	WR	G	T	T/CC	Other	Total
Every Other Month	37% (29)	19% (7)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	17% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	24% (46)
Monthly	50% (39)	72% (26)	80% (20)	33% (2)	55% (6)	20% (1)	50% (3)	33% (1)	100% (3)	57% (107)
Twice A Month	8% (6)	6% (2)	0% (0)	33% (2)	27% (3)	0% (0)	17% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	7% (14)
No Opinion	4% (3)	0% (0)	4% (1)	34% (2)	9% (1)	80% (4)	16% (1)	67% (2)	0% (0)	7% (14)
Other	1% (1)	3% (1)	16% (4)	0% (0)	9% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	5% (7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (78)</b>	<b>100% (36)</b>	<b>100% (25)</b>	<b>100% (6)</b>	<b>100% (11)</b>	<b>100% (5)</b>	<b>100% (6)</b>	<b>100% (3)</b>	<b>100% (3)</b>	<b>100% (188)</b>

() Frequency

FB = Football, BB = Basketball, Bb = Baseball, Sb = Softball, WR = Wrestling, G = Golf, T = Tennis, T/CC = Track/Cross Country

### Balanced Coverage of Each Sport

The "O" Club Newsletter strives to give balanced coverage of each varsity sport at OSU. At the beginning of each sport season, detailed information is given outlining recruiting information and the respective coach's remarks concerning each player and/or position in that particular sport.

The "O" Club staff and Athletics Department members were interested in the respondents' opinions of the balance of the coverage in relation to their primary participation sport.

The balanced coverage of each varsity sport was measured by a scale where respondents indicated their opinion as to whether the coverage was "Too Much," "Just Right," or "Too Little." For analysis, the response columns were scaled where 1 = "Too Much," 2 = "Just Right," and 3 = "Too Little."

Table IX shows the overall opinions on the balance of the coverage of each sport. For this series of questions, the sports categories differentiated between men and women and included: Football, Men's Basketball, Women's Basketball, Baseball, Softball, Wrestling, Men's Golf, Women's Golf, Track/Cross Country, Men's Tennis, Women's Tennis.

A chi-square analysis of this information showed a relationship between the respondent's participation sport and his/her opinion of the balance of the coverage of each sport. That is, a person's opinion of the balanced coverage was related to what sport he or she participated in. This relationship was most prevalent in the participation sports of Football and Basketball. The computed chi-square of 251.901 was larger than the tabled value of 55.48 at a

confidence level of 99.9 percent with 27 degrees of freedom. This means that a relationship exists between primary participation sport and opinion of balanced coverage of each varsity sport and differences are probably genuine. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between primary participation sport and opinion of balanced coverage is not supported. A contingency coefficient of .800 indicates that the relationship is very strong. However, the small number of responses in some categories makes this test of significance questionable.

Table IX shows the frequency count for each participation sport broken into the scaled categories of "Too Much," "Just Right," and "Too Little."

TABLE IX  
FREQUENCY AS RESPONSE TO THE  
BALANCE OF COVERAGE OF EACH SPORT

	N=188										
	FB	MBB	WBB	Bb	Sb	WR	MG	WG	T/CC	MT	WT
TM	9% (17)	9% (17)	13% (25)	3% (5)	13% (25)	6% (11)	6% (11)	14% (26)	10% (19)	13% (25)	16% (30)
JR	76% (142)	66% (125)	70% (148)	82% (154)	75% (141)	76% (141)	65% (123)	61% (115)	63% (118)	70% (148)	66% (125)
TL	15% (28)	24% (46)	15% (28)	15% (28)	12% (23)	18% (34)	28% (52)	25% (47)	27% (51)	18% (34)	18% (34)

( ) Frequency

FB = Football, MBB = Men's Basketball, WBB = Women's Basketball, Bb = Baseball, Sb = Softball, WR = Wrestling, MG = Men's Golf, WG = Women's Golf, T/CC = Track/Cross Country, MT = Men's Tennis, WT = Women's Tennis.

TM = Too Much, JR = Just Right, TL = Too Little

### Sources of Information

To better serve the readers, it is important to know what other sources readers use for their information about OSU sports. In addition, to separate the "O" Club Newsletter from other sources of OSU sports information, the newsletter must distinguish itself from other local and state media. With this in mind, the "O" Club staff wanted to know which news sources the readers consulted for information about OSU sports. In addition, they wanted to know what sources out-of-state members used for OSU sports information. This would help to understand the usefulness of the newsletter to out-of-state members as a source of OSU sports information.

Responses indicated that the "O" Club Newsletter was by far the most used source for OSU sports information in and outside of Oklahoma. In addition, using a 5-point scale, all other media were rated around a 3.000, being somewhat useful. These sources included: local newspapers, Tulsa World, Daily Oklahoman, USA Today, CNN, local radio, Orange & Black Sports Report, former athletes, ESPN and the OSU Alumni Magazine.

Table X shows the mean scores for each source in relation to in or out-of-state residency. Statistical tests indicated there was no significant relationship between residency and source of information.

**TABLE X**  
**USEFULNESS OF SOURCE OF SPORTS INFORMATION**  
**BY RESIDENCY**

N=188			
	In Oklahoma	Outside Oklahoma	Total
Local Newspaper	3.319	3.556	3.438
Tulsa World	3.810	4.181	3.996
Daily Oklahoman	3.871	3.958	3.915
USA Today	4.750	4.750	4.750
CNN	4.026	3.861	3.944
"O" Club Newsletter	1.483	1.597	1.54
Local Radio	3.241	3.694	3.468
Orange & Black Sports Report	4.181	4.111	4.146
Former Athletes	2.983	3.083	3.033
ESPN	2.888	2.931	2.910
OSU Alumni Magazine	2.853	2.972	2.913
Mean	3.140	3.264	3.206

Scale: 1 = Extremely Useful; 5 = Useless

### Appearance

The appearance of the "O" Club Newsletter was an issue discussed by the staff and members of the Athletics Department. Although it was not a primary concern, they still wanted to know how the readers viewed the appearance of the newsletter. Fortunately, desktop publishing is available to the "O" Club editor, so changes can be easily adopted.

A summary of the respondents' answers is shown in Table XI. Of the entire group, 28 percent of the readers believed the newsletter's appearance needed "no change." Twenty-three percent of the readers suggested the "use of more photos" within the newsletter. In addition, 21 percent of the readers wanted an increase in the number of pages. Although not all indicated what

they considered to be the optimum number of pages, of those who did answer, 11 percent wanted an increase in the number of pages to six pages, and nine percent wanted an increase to eight pages. Nineteen percent wanted to see more sports statistics used in the newsletter.

Suggestions in the "Other" column included, "more coach and player interviews," and more "overall statistics" (i.e., records, awards, honors, etc.).

Table XI  
PREFERENCES FOR CHANGES IN APPEARANCE

N = 188

Increase Number of pages	21% (40)
to 6 pages:	11% (21)
to 8 pages:	9% (17)
Use more photos	23% (44)
Use more color	8% (15)
Use more sport statistics	19% (35)
Other	3% (6)
No change	28% (53)
No opinion	15% (29)

( ) Frequency

### Interest In Topics Within The Newsletter

Content of the newsletter was the primary concern of the "O" Club staff and Athletics Department members. Without knowing which topics readers find most interesting and useful, it would be impossible to meet the needs of the readers that the newsletter was meant to serve.

"O" Club staff members suggested 10 topics that are included in the newsletter. Respondents were asked to rate their interest in each topic.

The topics rated by the respondents included:

1. "O" Club President's column,
2. Athletic Director's column,
3. game day schedules,
4. reunion information,
5. "Where are they now" column,
6. social gatherings,
7. contributor section,
8. athletics department internal business,
9. all sports information,
10. other

Of the listed topics, the "Where are they now" column was ranked the most interesting by the readers. Other interesting topics were "reunion information" and "all sports information." Less interest was expressed for the "contributor section," "Athletic Director's" column, and "President's" column.

Table XII shows the mean scores for interest in topics. Overall, the results of the statistical tests showed that there were no

significant relationship between topic preference and primary participation sport of the readers. However, recruiting information did have significant differences. A tukey test was used to identify these differences. It was found that the significant differences occurred between basketball players, baseball players and wrestlers and all other sports.

TABLE XII  
TOPIC INTEREST BY  
PARTICIPATION SPORT

	N=188									
	FB	BB	Bb	Sb	WR	G	T	T/CC	Other	Overall
President's column	2.231	2.122	2.226	2.500	2.750	1.667	2.000	2.000	1.857	2.150
AD's column	2.090	1.976	2.290	2.750	2.500	1.667	1.500	2.125	2.714	2.179
Game day sched.	1.833	2.049	2.258	1.500	1.750	2.000	1.750	1.688	1.857	1.854
Reunion info.	1.551	2.366	2.000	1.500	1.000	1.667	1.500	1.500	1.429	1.613
Recruiting info.	1.628	2.073	2.129	2.000	2.750	2.000	1.250	1.500	2.714	1.894
Where they are	1.628	1.610	1.871	1.750	1.750	1.667	1.500	1.500	1.857	1.570
Social gatherings	1.949	2.122	2.194	2.250	1.750	2.000	1.500	1.750	2.429	1.994
Contributor section	2.462	2.488	2.419	2.750	2.250	3.000	1.750	2.188	2.429	2.448
Internal business	2.256	2.268	2.452	2.500	2.250	1.333	1.500	2.000	2.000	2.062
All sports	1.795	1.756	2.065	1.500	2.000	2.000	1.500	1.500	2.000	1.791
Other	.282	.634	.355	.500	.000	.000	.000	.188	.143	.234
Mean	1.791	1.951	2.024	1.955	1.886	1.727	1.432	1.631	1.908	

Scale: 1 = extremely interested; 5 = uninterested

FB = Football, BB = Basketball, Bb = Baseball, Sb = Softball, WR = Wrestling, G = Golf, T = Tennis, T/CC = Track/  
Cross Country

### Overall Opinions of the "O" Club Newsletter

"O" Club staff listed 11 general factors or qualities of the "O" Club Newsletter. It was anticipated that a measure of these qualities would reveal areas of strengths and weaknesses and this would help in improving the newsletter. Using a five-point semantic differential scale, with a 5 being the most negative and 1 being the most positive, respondents rated the newsletter as to whether they believed the newsletter was:

1. needed or not needed,
2. interesting or uninteresting,
3. accurate or inaccurate,
4. timely or untimely,
5. believable or not believable,
6. valuable or worthless,
7. attractive or unattractive,
8. diverse in coverage or narrow in coverage,
9. unbiased or biased,
10. complete or incomplete, and
11. whether they read all or read none.

Mean scores for overall opinions, listed by primary participation sport and for the total group, are shown in Table XIII. Of the entire group, baseball players held the highest overall opinion of the newsletter, while the lowest scores were given by golfers. Overall, the "O" Club Newsletter received the highest ratings for the qualities: needed, read all, and interesting. Comparatively, lower ratings were given for being unbiased, complete and having diverse coverage. It should be noted that the ambiguity of "bias" could be a

factor. More specifically, revenue vs. non-revenue sports may be viewed differently by the respondent's. Thus, this could influence "bias" in the respondent's answers. Likewise, the question could have been interpreted differently by the respondent's.

The results of statistical tests showed there was no significant relationship between overall opinion and primary participation sport.

TABLE XIII  
OVERALL OPINION BY  
PARTICIPATION SPORT

N=188										
	FB	BB	Bb	Sb	WR	G	T	T/CC	Other	OVERALL
Needed	1.256	1.244	1.290	1.250	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.375	1.286	1.189
Interesting	1.397	1.415	1.323	1.500	1.500	1.667	1.000	1.563	1.429	1.422
Accurate	1.538	1.585	1.581	2.250	1.500	2.000	1.750	1.375	1.286	1.652
Timely	1.821	1.951	1.677	1.750	2.500	2.333	2.000	1.875	2.143	1.950
Believable	1.346	1.439	1.355	1.750	1.250	1.667	1.500	1.438	1.857	1.511
Valuable	1.564	1.488	1.484	1.750	1.250	1.333	1.500	1.563	1.429	1.485
Attractive	1.705	1.829	1.581	1.750	1.500	1.667	2.000	1.500	1.429	1.662
Diverse coverage	1.821	2.073	1.774	1.500	2.250	2.667	1.750	2.313	1.857	2.000
Biased	2.269	2.512	2.387	2.750	3.000	2.333	2.500	2.375	2.143	2.474
Complete	2.192	2.049	1.839	1.500	2.250	3.000	2.000	2.500	1.857	2.132
Read all	1.372	1.415	1.452	1.250	1.250	1.333	1.250	1.563	1.286	1.380
Mean	1.662	1.727	1.613	1.727	1.773	1.909	1.659	1.767	1.636	

Scale: 1 = most positive; 5 = most negative

FB = Football, BB = Basketball, Bb = Baseball, Sb = Softball, WR = Wrestling, G = Golf, T = Tennis, T/CC = Track/  
Cross Country

Chapter V  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study examined the opinions and preferences of readers concerning the "O" Club Newsletter, the newsletter for former athletes at Oklahoma State University. This study surveyed readers' interest in the newsletter's topics and also asked their opinions on the newsletter's format, physical appearance and preferred publication schedule. Respondents were also asked to identify their main sources for information about OSU sports, and to supply selected demographic information about themselves.

The population of 292 current paid "O" Club members was surveyed to provide this information. The report findings are based on information provided by 188 readers who completed and returned the survey instrument by the March 1994 deadline. This resulted in a 64 percent response rate.

When relevant, some responses were compared by the primary participation sport (i.e., football, basketball, baseball, softball, wrestling, golf, tennis, track/cross country) of the respondents. The demographic information, whether or not respondents keep the newsletter, whether they pass the newsletter

to others, and appearance were recorded in percentages. The frequency of publication and balance of coverage were calculated using chi-square analysis. Mean scores for sources of information about OSU sports, overall opinions of the newsletter, and interest in newsletter topics were recorded on a five-point scale, ranging from a high of 1 to a low of 5. In addition, ANOVA was used to determine if the relationship's between primary participation sport and sources of OSU sports information, overall opinions of the newsletter and interest in regular newsletter topics were significant. Tukey tests were used to find the differences within the categories.

### Conclusions

Results showed that most readers do not keep the newsletter for future reference, but most do give the newsletter to others to read. Thus, the editor should recognize that it is not kept for future use as an informative newsletter.

The "O" Club Newsletter was rated positive on all factors. Factors were rated on a five-point scale, ranging from a most positive = 1 to least positive = 5. The least positive scores were recorded for being biased, complete and diverse in coverage. More positive mean scores were given to needed, read all and interesting categories. Thus, the editor should recognize that the newsletter is important to the readers and well liked by the readers.

The results indicated the highest percentage of readers believed no change was necessary concerning the newsletter's

appearance. Overall, it would appear the readers are satisfied with the appearance of the newsletter.

The preferred frequency of publication was monthly. This was a shared opinion by readers in all primary participation sports. The editor should try to maintain a monthly publication schedule.

The most useful source of information about OSU sports was found to be the "O" Club Newsletter, for both in and out-of-state residents. Topics of greatest interest were reunion information and the "Where Are They Now" column. Those of least interest included the "O" Club President's column and the Athletic Director's column. It would seem that readers are more interested in past teammates and upcoming information than informative letters from the Athletics Department staff.

The overall balance of coverage of each varsity sport was indicated to be "Just Right" for all sports. Thus, it would appear the editor is including the right amount of coverage for each sport. An interesting note, the revenue sports of Football and Basketball received the highest marks for balance of coverage. Hence, it becomes important to note that the revenue sports appear to be more recognized than those non-revenue sports. Another way to increase the coverage of each sport, while maintaining diversity among the sports would be to use more internal contacts and their input.

It would appear that a great interest exists among the members to keep the newsletter. This fact was supported by the many respondents who indicated their interest by writing in-depth comments and letters when they returned their surveys. Perhaps a

survey could be undertaken every three years to maintain a strong newsletter that caters to the needs of the intended group.

In addition to conducting a survey every three years, perhaps a focus group of readers could be assembled to discuss the newsletter in greater depth and complement the surveys. This would help to establish better communication among the readers and spark other brainstorming ideas not accessible through a readership survey.

Recommendations to  
The Editor of the "O" Club Newsletter

The following would be recommended to the editor of the "O" Club Newsletter, based on the results of this study:

1. The "O" Club Newsletter seems to serve the readers as a major source for information about OSU sports. It would seem logical to avoid reprinting in the "O" Club Newsletter stories that have already appeared in other Athletics Department publications.

2. Most people believe that the appearance of the newsletter is acceptable. Some respondents indicated they would like a change in page length. However, this may not always be appropriate, depending on the amount of sports news being generated at different times of the year. More photos and more sports statistics were also indicated as a preference by the respondents. This should be considered when applicable and when such material is accessible to the editor, and should perhaps be expanded upon in every other issue.

3. Overall, the newsletter was rated very positive by the respondents. To improve upon the timeliness and diversity of the stories printed, the editor may want to establish more contact to create a "networking" environment. This would help to uncover more stories before they become old news. Likewise, expanding the writing staff by using internal staff or interns may also increase the diversity of coverage of OSU sports. In addition, the timeliness could also be improved upon by a more balanced publication schedule.

To address the areas of bias and completeness, the Athletics Department staff and "O" Club staff may want to establish a focus group to find out what areas are incomplete and in what ways readers consider the "O" Club Newsletter to be bias. It should be noted that this question may have been interpreted differently by the respondents.

In addition, the opinions expressed in phone calls and "Letter's to the Editor" should also be considered when determining the overall appeal of the newsletter.

4. Respondents were most interested in the "Where Are They Now" column and reunion information. The editor should consider alternating the Athletics Director column and the "O" Club President's column, both of which were rated as of relatively less interest to respondents. In addition, more informative information on upcoming events, games, reunions, etc. should be focused on.

5. It should be recognized that bias toward the newsletter and the opinion of the balance of coverage are related to the sport being a revenue (football) or non-revenue (softball) sport. This must be

considered when evaluating responses and remarks about the newsletter.

### Recommendations for Further Research

It is suggested that the information drawn from this study serve as a basis for comparison for future readership studies of the department newsletter.

Areas for consideration include the following:

Readership surveys of the newsletter should be conducted periodically, perhaps every two to three years. Through such research, the newsletter can be made more responsive to its audience. If mail questionnaires are to be used in such studies, it is further recommended that the instrument be based on the questionnaire used in this study in order to more accurately monitor any observed changes or trends. Moreover, readership surveys for all Athletics Department publications should be conducted periodically.

Another consideration for the "O" Club Newsletter would be to conduct a content analysis of the various issues to see how space has actually been devoted to each sport. A content analysis would also help to surface other specific areas that cannot be asked on an in-depth basis with a questionnaire.

In addition to the above recommendations, more specific goals, objectives and the purpose of the newsletter should be established before proceeding with more research or changes within the newsletter.

### Concluding Comments

This survey, the first for this publication, offered the readers an opportunity to evaluate the "O" Club Newsletter. The information provided by the survey participants was most useful and contributed to the success of this study.

After examining the responses given by the participants in this study, the author came to the conclusion that the importance of the "O" Club Newsletter is recognized by the former athletes.

The results of this study should serve as a guide for the Athletics Department staff so that they may continue to improve upon their communication with the various groups within the Athletics Department organization.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX - A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

**“O” CLUB NEWSLETTER  
READERSHIP SURVEY**

Please complete the survey form and return it in the enclosed envelope by March 4. If you have questions, please call Leslie Harris at (405)744-7301, or write: “O” Club Survey, 103 Gallagher-Iba Arena. Your answers will be kept confidential.

**SECTION I: DISTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP**

For questions 1 through 5, please mark the box next to the appropriate answer.

1. Do you receive issues of the “O” Club newsletter?
  - Yes
  - No (Proceed to question 4)
  - Not sure? (Proceed to question 4)
  
2. Do you usually keep your issues of the “O” Club newsletter for future reference?
  - Yes
  - No
  
3. Does anyone else usually read your copy of the “O” Club newsletter?
  - Yes
  - No
  
4. How often would you like to see the “O” Club newsletter published?
  - Every other month
  - Every month
  - Twice a month
  - No opinion
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. The “O” Club newsletter attempts to provide balanced coverage of all sports. Please indicate below by marking the appropriate box what you think about the amount of coverage given to each sport. (If you do not receive the “O” Club newsletter, please skip to Section II.)

	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Just Right</u>	<u>Too Little</u>
Football	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Men’s Basketball	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women’s Basketball	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baseball	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Softball	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wrestling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Men’s Golf	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women’s Golf	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Track/Cross Country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Men’s Tennis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women’s Tennis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**PLEASE CONTINUE TO THE NEXT PAGE.**

**SECTION II: HOW USEFUL ARE THESE SOURCES OF INFORMATION TO YOU?**

For questions 6 through 17, please rate the following as sources of information about OSU sports using the scale "Extremely Useful" to "Useless."

	Extremely Useful	Somewhat Useful	Undecided Neutral	Not Very Useful	Useless	Do Not Receive/Use
6. Local Newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/>					
7. Tulsa World	<input type="checkbox"/>					
8. Daily Oklahoman	<input type="checkbox"/>					
9. USA Today	<input type="checkbox"/>					
10. CNN	<input type="checkbox"/>					
11. "O"Club newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>					
12. Local Radio	<input type="checkbox"/>					
13. Orange and Black Sports Report	<input type="checkbox"/>					
14. Former athletes	<input type="checkbox"/>					
15. ESPN	<input type="checkbox"/>					
16. OSU Magazine (Alumni)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
17. Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>					

**SECTION III: WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE "O" CLUB NEWSLETTER OVERALL?**

For questions 18 through 28, please check the appropriate box for each scale. (If you do not receive the "O"Club newsletter, please skip to Section IV.)

18. Needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Needed				
19. Interesting	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uninteresting				
20. Inaccurate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accurate				
21. Timely	<input type="checkbox"/>	Untimely				
22. Believable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not believable				
23. Worthless	<input type="checkbox"/>	Valuable				
24. Attractive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unattractive				
25. Diverse coverage	<input type="checkbox"/>	Narrow coverage				
26. Biased	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unbiased				
27. Complete	<input type="checkbox"/>	Incomplete				
28. Read all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read none				

**PLEASE CONTINUE TO THE NEXT PAGE.**

29. If you could change the general appearance of the "O" Club newsletter, how would you do so? (Check *all* that apply.)
- Increase number of pages (currently 4 pages) \_\_\_ to 6 \_\_\_ to 8
  - Use more photos
  - Use more than one color of ink
  - Use more sport statistics
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - I would not change the appearance
  - No opinion

#### SECTION IV: WHAT ARE YOU INTERESTED IN?

Indicate your level of interest in each topic below by marking the box closest to your opinion.

	Extremely Interested	Quite Interested	Somewhat Interested	Not Very Interested	Uninterested
30. "O" Club President column	<input type="checkbox"/>				
31. Athletic Director column	<input type="checkbox"/>				
32. Game day schedules	<input type="checkbox"/>				
33. Reunion information	<input type="checkbox"/>				
34. Recruiting information	<input type="checkbox"/>				
35. Where are they now column	<input type="checkbox"/>				
36. Social gatherings	<input type="checkbox"/>				
37. Contributor section	<input type="checkbox"/>				
38. Athletic department internal business	<input type="checkbox"/>				
39. All sports	<input type="checkbox"/>				
40. Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>				

#### SECTION V: WHO ARE YOU?

This section will be used to obtain a profile of "O" Club subscribers. Please check the appropriate boxes in questions 41 through 45.

41. I am:
- Male
  - Female
42. My age group is:
- 29 or younger
  - 30 to 39
  - 40 to 49
  - 50 to 65
  - Older than 65

**PLEASE CONTINUE TO THE NEXT PAGE.**

43. The primary sport in which I competed for OSU was:

- Football
- Basketball
- Baseball
- Softball
- Wrestling
- Golf
- Tennis
- Track/Cross Country
- Other

44. I live:

- In Oklahoma
- Outside of Oklahoma

45. I have been a member of "O" Club for:

- Less than 5 years
- 5 to 9 years
- 10 to 15 years
- 16 to 20 years
- 21 years or more

**Thank you for participating in this survey!**

Please place this questionnaire in the envelope provided and return it to 103 Gallagher-Iba Arena by March 4. Your responses will be kept completely confidential. The results of this study will be published in a future issue of the newsletter.

APPENDIX - B  
SURVEY COVER LETTER

February 18, 1994

Dear Reader,

We need your help so the Oklahoma State University "O" Club newsletter can better serve you.

All subscribers of the "O" Club newsletter have been selected to complete a readership survey. Although this is a small number as compared to the entire "O" Club pool, your response is vital to the success of this readership survey.

The results of this study will be used to develop a newsletter which better meets the needs of the "O" Club members. This study is being conducted by a graduate student in mass communications, Leslie Harris, as part of a thesis for a master's degree. In addition, she serves as liaison for the "O" Club organization.

Please take a few minutes to mark your answers on the enclosed survey and return it in the enclosed envelope, as soon as possible. Send it to:

Readership Survey  
103 Gallagher-Iba Arena  
Stillwater, OK 74078

All data collected will be reported in a compiled form and the answers you give us will not be revealed as coming from you. The code number on the survey is for keeping track of responses and will be removed upon receipt of the survey.

If you have questions, please call Leslie Harris at (405)744-7301.

Sincerely,



John Hopkins  
Director of Community Relations  
"O" Club Advisor

APPENDIX - C  
REMINDER LETTER

March 4, 1994

Dear Reader,

We have not yet received your completed questionnaire for the "O" Club readership survey. We know this is a busy time for you, but we need to know your opinion in order to plan the best possible newsletter for our readers.

If you misplaced your original questionnaire, another one is enclosed. Please return it in the envelope provided as soon as possible. Send it to:

Readership Survey  
103 Gallagher-Iba Arena  
Stillwater, OK 74078

If you have any questions concerning the questionnaire, please call Leslie Harris at (405) 744-7301.

Thank you for participating in the survey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Hopkins", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Hopkins  
Director of Community Relations  
"O" Club Advisor

VITA <sup>2</sup>

Leslie Lee Harris

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

**Thesis:** A READERSHIP SURVEY OF THE "O" CLUB NEWSLETTER: A PUBLICATION FOR FORMER ATHLETES AT OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

**Major Field:** Mass Communications

**Biographical:**

**Personal Data:** Born in Enid, Oklahoma, On November 20, 1968, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Murray and Jim Harris.

**Education:** Graduated from Enid High School, Enid, Oklahoma, in May 1987; received Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December of 1991. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a major in Mass Communications at Oklahoma State University in July 1994.

**Experience:** Employed by Oklahoma State University, Department of Athletics as an undergraduate and graduate assistant for the Athletic Development Department; Oklahoma State University, Department of Athletics, 1990 to present. Additionally employed by Profesional Sports Publications out of New York from May of 1993 until March of 1994 as an Advertising Representative for Oklahoma State.

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: 02-25-94

IRB#: AS-94-027

Proposal Title: A READERSHIP SURVEY OF THE "O" CLUB NEWSLETTER

Principal Investigator(s): Constance M. Martin, Leslie L. Harris

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

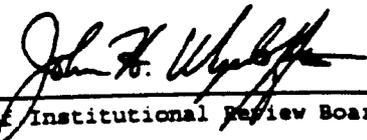
APPROVAL STATUS SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT NEXT MEETING.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL. ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

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Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for Deferral or Disapproval are as follows:

Signature:

  
Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: February 28, 1994