

# History of the College Living Organization

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NOTE: This narrative history was prepared in 1967, and has been edited slightly since then. Readers who identify errors or omissions are encouraged to contact one of the persons named in the "Contacts" link on this page. Readers may also wish to see the [CLO entry on Wikipedia](#) for additional information.

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1932 was a year deep in the depression. In the Fall of that year, four Tallahassee boys found that the only way they could stay in school was to pool their efforts and their meager resources. They rented an apartment over a garage on a back street, did their own housework, cooking and dishwashing, and managed to live on \$13.00 a month per man.

About the middle of the second month of operation, their garage apartment was forced to accommodate a fifth member, a friend who would have had to leave school because he could not earn enough to support himself at prevailing rates. Before the end of the first semester a new Governor was inaugurated and many state employees lost their jobs. Several Tallahassee boys found their incomes cut off) leaving them with very little to live on.

The plight of these home-town friends forced an expansion and reorganization of the group. Four new members were lodged in two rooms in an adjacent house and fed in the garage apartment. This marked conscious beginning of the Cooperative Living Organization as a means by which boys with small incomes might attend the University.

For the first time a formal election of officers was held. Two of the original four members became the first officers of our organization. Robert Carter (now prominent in the Florida State Board of Health) was elected Business Manager, and Joseph Burnett (now Director of World Mission Support of the American Baptist Convention) was elected House Manager.

The success of the first year saw the organization grow to 23 members occupying two houses at the beginning of the school year the next fall (1933), and a third elective office was added. However, friction developed among the members of the old house, and it was disbanded just before the Christmas Holidays. This left the new house with a membership 13 men, a terrific setback in the growth of the C.L.O.

This failure stimulated the formation of policies which have remained fundamental to the C.L.O. First of all, the C.L.O. learned that an organization of its nature could readily fail under either of two conditions: if it operated on too low an economic basis it would require too great a personal sacrifice and too many hardships of its members, and they would become dissatisfied; and if it operated on too lavish a scale it would no longer serve its purpose. So it was decided that assessments should always be set and all efforts should be made in order to obtain comfortable living conditions for the least amount of money possible.

Secondly, it was decided that fraternity men, non-students, and students who could afford to live elsewhere were to be excluded from membership. This was done because the boys felt that it was unfair and contrary to the purpose of the C.L.O. to allow such people to fill places which should be

filled by students who perhaps could not attend the University without the economic advantages of our organization.

Since that time, membership has been selective. Application must be made and members are then chosen by the Selection Committee who interviews each applicant. Several factors are considered when choosing a good member. Financial need is examined with note taken of the sources of income. Adequate scholastic achievement is another criterion which must be met. Leadership qualities are valued greatly since the future of our organization depends upon members who take an active role in the affairs of the organization. And a good member must have a cooperative attitude, a willingness to participate fully in the necessary work assignments and in the spirit of the organization.

These policies which determine the character of the membership and then seek to provide for the economic welfare of those members, having been formally established in 1933, have remained with our organization throughout its history.

The third year, 1934-35, brought new policies which have also remained with us as guiding principles. Three weeks before the end of the summer vacation, the C.L.O. was notified that the house they had engaged for the coming school year had been sold. The new owner was to occupy the house himself.

The General Manager was thus compelled to make new arrangements immediately. He convened a membership meeting in Tallahassee (the membership was still composed almost exclusively of Leon and Gadsden County boys) and used this occasion to pose the question: "Shall we pursue a long-term policy of expansion, beginning this year, so that we may periodically accept into membership a greater number of worthy applicants; or, shall we limit membership to ourselves, consider the C.L.O. simply as the means by which we alone shall be enabled to attend school, and, thus, avoid the risks and inconveniences entailed by any program of expansion?" In view of the setback of the previous year, the issue was hotly debated. After a long session, however, the membership voted to adopt the former policy which has guided the organization ever since.

As a result of long hours of searching and a great deal of financial juggling, the General Manager rented a large, well located house and purchased enough furniture to fill it. The new house opened with 30 members and a deficit of \$812. Before the opening of the next school year, that debt had been paid, and the C.L.O. started building its operating surplus, little by little.

In accepting applicants for that third year, 1934-35, a conscious effort was made to select as cosmopolitan a membership as possible.

It was recognized that living with people who come from a variety of backgrounds and who think in a variety of ways can be just as educational as anything learned from a textbook.

This policy has always been maintained by our Selection Committee. Our members come from all sections of Florida, both rural and urban. We have had members of every religious belief. Our foreign student members have been many, coming from the Near and Far East, Central and South America and Canada. We have members from each academic class, from freshman to doctoral candidates and from almost every college at the University. And in 1967 we were glad to include two Afro-Americans as members. This was notable due to fact not one fraternity had admitted any Afro-American students.)

With a membership of thirty, the question of becoming a fraternity arose during the third year. After a lengthy discussion, the unanimous decision was that the C.L.O. should never go fraternity. They thought that there were already enough fraternities to serve <sup>3</sup>whatever purpose they serve,<sup>2</sup> but there was no other organization serving the purpose of the C.L.O., a purpose very dear to boys who worked hard in order to attend the University,. The members felt that their friendship, common

interest and economic interdependence bound them together more securely than any ritualistic vows possibly could.

This decision established the independent spirit of our organization which is still very strong today. C.L.O. members are proud of the fact that they have built and that they manage their organization without outside supervision or other interference. Although the C.L.O. is responsible to the University, administration officials do not take any direct part in the operation.

But independence does not mean a lack of participation in campus activities. The C.L.O., throughout its history, has competed with fraternities as an equal in student politics, having had several members elected to important positions. Our academic average has consistently ranked within the top five fraternities. Our members have been active in student publications, band, ROTC, Florida Players, various organizations within the different colleges and in intramural sports.

After their historic third year, the organization continued to grow. In 1936, membership was increased from 30 to 47 members by opening a second house. The C.L.O. changed quarters again in 1938 and membership increased to 64.

Then, in 1940, Dr. Joseph Fulk, a former professor of School Administration at the University, donated to the C.L.O. its present property, in trust, as a memorial to his deceased wife, Nellie Swanson Fulk. After wide discussion among members, it was decided that it would be to our advantage to incorporate. So in May of that same year, the Cooperative Living Organization was chartered as a corporation.

The organization then managed to house and feed from 60 to 80 members in various years. And with a monthly assessment of only \$22.50 per man, we still were able to show a good profit at the end-of each year.

With the coming of the war, our membership dropped to almost nil and at one time there was even talk of turning our property over to the university to be used for housing soldiers who were taking various phases of their training at the University. However, we pulled through all right. From 1945 on we've been operating very much the same as we do now, with the monthly assessment gradually increasing to the present \$60 per man, which is the most inexpensive living anywhere on or off campus. In 1953, upon Dr. Fulk's death, our property deed reverted in trust to the State Board of Education, who in turn established a C.L.O. Advisory Committee composed of various faculty and administrative officers of the University.

In February of 1967, the C.L.O. was reincorporated under the name of the Collegiate Living Organization. This change in name was necessary in order to comply with a long forgotten law which did not allow the use of the word "cooperative" in the name of any corporation not associated with the agricultural industry. A few other changes in the charter were made at this time and a non-discrimination clause was added.

A new house to replace the rapidly deteriorating old buildings had long been the dream of C.L.O. members. Some attempts had been made to realize that dream, but they really amounted to very little. It was not until the 1966-67 school year that one member in particular took his time to inquire into the possibilities of financial aid from private foundations and government agencies. Frank Shepherd, who was then secretary and who was later elected president for the next year, found that we would have to apply for a loan from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. He also found that it would be necessary to reincorporate. Then he enlisted the aid of Jack Turner, an architect and past C.L.O. president, to draw up the preliminary plans for an 88 man house. And he then sought to gain the approval and cooperation of University officials. After meeting all the resistance which he encountered from time to time, he finally had everything ready by June of 1968, and the preliminary application for a loan of \$280,000 was then filed with HUD.

Now the members of today are faced with the very same question that was posed in 1934. "Shall we avoid the risks and inconveniences entailed by a program of expansion?"<sup>2</sup> The leadership of the past leaves us with very little doubt as to our direction. We have always recognized the great need for our organization, and we know that the C.L.O. must exist not only for the students of the present, but also for those who come after us. We are determined to see the C.L.O. perpetuated, and we will make sure that the guiding principles and the character of the organization will be maintained.

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