

November 24, 1967

Dr. R. Taylor Cole  
Provost's Office  
Allen Building

Dear Dr. Cole:

As you are now aware, Duke University was formally accepted as a member of the Organization for Tropical Studies, Inc. at the meetings in San Jose, Costa Rica on November 9-10. In my capacity as Duke's representative I have a few comments and impressions that may be of interest. A list of those in attendance and an outline of the program are appended and before too long we should receive the formal minutes of the meetings.

The meeting was called to order by President Jim Bethel at 9 a.m. Thursday. After the 35 or so delegates introduced themselves Bethel then proceeded to spend the next hour and one half recapping the past year's activities. Many of the things he said could not fully be appreciated without more background but, from what I could gather, many of the details were known only by select committee members. The general tenor of his talk was optimistic. During the past five years O.T.S. has been very cautious. Permanent equipment purchases were made reluctantly. They tried at first, for example, to operate field-oriented biology courses with the aid of rented vehicles. The mechanical unreliability of the rented trucks further compounded logistic problems. O.T.S. has had no alternative but to acquire their own 4-wheel drive units. They now have a fleet of 11 trucks. A similar path has been taken in regard to field stations.

In the early days the February-March and July-August courses operated out of small towns and hotels in the proximity of the best-available "public" lands. These nomadic courses were highly variable in quality. In particular it was found that year-to-year improvement depended on some degree of stability that could only come through staking out and controlling the study sites.

Bethel reported on several negotiations that would give O.T.S. ownership or lease-control over some biologically choice lands. O.T.S. has an option to buy a sizeable plot of lowland virgin rainforest on the Atlantic drainage of Costa Rica (La Selva). A field station has been completed on the Pacific slopes at 4,000 ft elevation (San Vito) and they have access to a field station and beautiful Pacific rainforests on the Osa Peninsula. In addition, they have just obtained a lease on untouched lands on the Nicoya Peninsula in the dry Guanacaste area of western Costa Rica. Several other sites were mentioned but with due caution of over-extending.

Lancetilla Valley at Tela, Honduras will be used this spring for the first time in connection with a forestry course. For some years United Fruit has been trying to unload this lovely botanical garden on some responsible scientific group. Years ago the Valley served as the testing center for exotic plants that United Fruit thought might have economic potential. Long since they have settled on bananas and the African oil palm and lost interest in maintaining the gardens. Fortunately, they still have a 39 year obligation to the Honduran government to preserve it. In addition to the plantings, the encircling hills have virgin forests preserved as watershed for the town of Tela. O.T.S. will give Lancetilla a try and if it pans out the possibility exists of setting up some permanent type of arrangement.

Bethel also discussed the present and proposed O.T.S. offerings. Most of the courses have been field-oriented biology courses. Each of the 8-week programs (February-March and July-August) offer an ecology course and usually one speciality course in botany and one in zoology. Since O.T.S. has no permanent instructional staff, the speciality courses, in particular, are dependent on the interest and expertise of the temporary faculty. Last summer for the first time the program was expanded to include a course in tropical land utilization. There was talk about expanding into marine biology, meteorology, soils, and anthropology. They are wide open for suggestions of ways in which maximum utilization can be made of the facilities. My impression is that they would be receptive to social science proposals that would "increase our understanding of tropical environment and...provide a scientific basis for their intelligent use by mankind." Mention was made of discussions with British

biologists on the feasibility of cooperating on an O.T.S. type of operation in Africa. Apparently, for the time being at least, they decided it would be best for the groups to remain independent and develop according to their own choosing but with the understanding that facilities would be shared if the groups decided to do some New World-Old World comparative studies.

To date, the teaching program has received the most emphasis. A few participants have been supported in research projects but funding has been inadequate to support the many who probably deserve it. One of the problems has been that students are enticed into the tropical courses, get excited about the prospects of tropical work, but then are unable to find financing to support tropically oriented research projects and theses. Things are looking up. Healthy support from the Ford Foundation and National Science Foundation will permit the rewarding of funds to deserving graduate students and faculty. Bethel was vague on the details about the extent of this program.

Steve Preston, who is the executive director (University of Michigan) of O.T.S., followed Bethel with a more detailed account of the operating procedures and problems. He gave a run down on the personnel (2 secretaries, 1 handy man, 1 cook-handy man, 1 office boy, 1 librarian, 1 assistant director, 1 associate director, 1 executive director) and was quick to point out that now for the first time there was adequate help to handle the 100 plus students and staff that flock to San Jose for the July-August program. The biggest problem now seems to be the lack of adequate space for activities in San Jose. O.T.S. has rented rooms from the University of Costa Rica for the past several years but recently has had to give up space with the pressures of university needs. Preston mentioned the possibility of maintaining an office on campus and locating the main storage center and work space in a rental near campus. Those of us who have had to scramble for work space heartily agree with this suggestion.

Thursday afternoon was devoted to reports from the four schools applying for membership. Besides Duke, Michigan State, Wisconsin and Illinois State (Normal) submitted formal applications. We each gave a report to the group and were then put through a question and answer

November 27, 1967

period. Duke had several outspoken friends on her side. Jim Bethel (University of Washington), Mildred Mathias (U.C.L.A.), and Herb Baker (U.C.) put in some good words during the discussion period. The formal voting on the applications was put off until Friday.

A new slate of board of directors was elected. Each institution is entitled to two representatives and from this group 16 board members are selected. Steve Spurr of the University of Michigan was, in turn, elected by the board of directors as the new president of O.T.S.

As it turned out, the meeting on Friday was restricted to old and new board members. It wasn't until late in the afternoon that I found out that all but Illinois State had been admitted. This brings the institutional membership to 20. There was talk about setting some upper limit on membership. No decision was reached however.

In concluding, I would like to mention two suggestions that were brought out in the discussions. New member institutions are encouraged to set up a local committee of interested faculty. In other institutions this group (i) keeps the departments informed of O.T.S. activities, (ii) passes on suggestions to the university representatives, (iii) screens candidates for O.T.S. courses, and, at some schools, (iv) grants graduate school funds to faculty in the encouragement of exploratory work in the tropics. Also, O.T.S. is strongly encouraging member schools to release faculty (with pay) for teaching programs in Costa Rica. One of the deans from Wisconsin pointed out that this could be done at his school as long as the department could cover the faculty member's teaching commitment from within.

I hope these ramblings may give you some feeling for the O.T.S. activities. When we have the minutes of the meeting in hand, I'll be glad to discuss the program in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Donald E. Stone

cc: Harold W. Lewis  
T.W. Johnson, Jr.