





The Study-In: An Attempt At Adult Education

A threatening cloud cover broke shortly before noon, and a brilliant sun shone on more than 2,000 Oklahoma college students who gathered at the State Capitol on Wednesday, April 26 to show their concern about the financial plight of higher education in Oklahoma.

It was the kind of spring day that young people normally devote to less serious matters than dramatizing to the governor, the legislature, and the people of Oklahoma that their college students are deeply disturbed about the education they are receiving and about the future of higher education in their state. There they were though, impressive in their numbers, orderly, knowledgeable, and well organized, attempting to educate their elders with a concentrated short course which could be entitled Comparative College Standings 67.

Regretfully, the beautiful, balmy afternoon was in marked contrast to the bleak fiscal forecast which faces our colleges and universities. The situation can quite accurately be described as critical. Even Norman Vincent Peale would be duly pessimistic if he were to become familiar with the outlook. Many of our positive-thinking state leaders and citizens seem largely undisturbed, however, and it was to them that the students wished to speak.

The students who organized the demonstration, labeled a Study-In, wished to impart their concern to the state powers-that-be, to offer solutions, and to hear what the men who make the decisions intend to do. The Study-In called for an assembly of college students at the Capitol, at which the governor and the legislative leaders were invited to speak—and to listen.

The planning for the rally was thoughtful, thorough, and hectic—due to the brief interlude between inspiration and actualization. The idea for the Study-In preceded the event by only two weeks, and considerable preparation had to be packed into

those fourteen or so days. College students, though, are notoriously expert at cramming, and sure enough, they came through splendidly.

The demonstration was conceived by the leaders of the Student Lobby for Higher Education in Oklahoma, organized at OU in December (Sooner News-Makers). When it became apparent that the governor's budget would undercut the minimum appropriation requested by the State Regents by \$23 million and prevent OU's share from even meeting the needs caused by the fall's projected increased enrollment, the lobby decided to act through a public demonstration, a publicity device not uncommon with college students, as you may know.

The leadership was aware that some people consider any demonstrations subversive, that many more find them at best distasteful, no matter what the issue, and that the appearance and grooming of demonstrators are quite important to even more. Those in charge took pains to explain that this was a rally endorsed by the well scrubbed majority—the clean-cut, button-down types who usually wouldn't be caught near a placard—and they reassured any suspicious citizens that the hippies—the tonsorially deprived bunch which causes such agitation among us square, middle-class types—would at least be in the background. Everyone cooperated admirably; practically all dressed well enough to attend a rush party and even a couple of hippies wore ties.

Prior to S-Day, the lobby mounted a formidable information campaign. Its research committee compiled copious facts and figures, charts and graphs to illustrate Oklahoma's dilemma and its needs. The Oklahoma Daily, which has shown unaccustomed vitality and force this semester under the leadership of its editor, Susan Waltz, and a capable staff, did an excellent job in presenting the situation to the students through interviews, editorials, and statistical data.

The governor speaks to the throng of college students at the April 26 Capitol Study-In.

Next the lobby moved to consolidate its effort with Oklahoma State and other schools. Student government leaders at Stillwater quickly joined the planning, and the lobby's goal of 3,000 students seemed realistic.

The final week was a furious one. Logistical and financial problems were met and overcome. The transportation to the City was expensive; OU's 27 buses cost \$1,575. The Student Senate kicked in \$500, and the rest was raised from individual and group contributions.

Four leaders from each of the two universities appeared before the House Committee on Higher Education the morning of the Study-In. At the hearing they presented proposals which would raise additional funds for education.

The students' main intent was to emphasize the need for more substantial public support of higher education in the state, which ranks 49th in the nation in money appropriated per college student, though its per capita income is 36th. Our colleges and universities, because of inadequate state appropriations, lag behind those of *all* the neighboring states, thus making it impossible to compete equally even within our geographical region, not to mention the rest of the country. Because of meager state support, OU is an academic also-ran in the Big Eight and in the Southwest, the educational Mets when it comes to public funding.

Without its life-saving private support through the Alumni Development Fund, the Plan for Excellence, and the OU Foundation, and through federal support, OU's outlook would be even more dismal. Private funds, however, have enabled the University to attract some outstanding professors, to retain others, to buy essential specialized equipment, and to sponsor research, which state appropriations have not provided.

The gloomy situation which the students wanted to relate is not an easy one to get across. The University looks great, even prosperous, when alumni come back, particularly on football weekends. There are all those nice new buildings and an attractive campus. Many impressive things are happening here. Fine professors are conspicuous and numerous. It's a deceptive scene, however, for Oklahoma gets by on less than every state but Tennessee, making it increasingly dif-

icult to attract teaching talent and a constant struggle to keep our most able teachers. Departments are generally undermanned and overworked, but little to nothing is done legislatively to halt the deterioration of Oklahoma's already poor competitive position.

A convincing argument can be made that higher education is but one of a number of important areas that have problems and that the present administration was elected because it promised no new taxes. Still, the lobby believes that unless efforts are initiated to put our colleges on a competitive footing in our region that Oklahoma's problems will become even more desperate.

Nine buses from OSU arrived first at the south steps of the Capitol. By 2 p.m. the OU buses and cars had arrived and swelled the crowd to about 2,500.

Gov. Bartlett was the first speaker. He defended his budget and said the increase in state appropriations higher education would receive (\$4.9 million) was the second highest in 12 years. He seemed cheered by this. Another way of looking at it is that Oklahoma has done so little in the past 12 years that it has slipped from 38th in the nation to 49th. "We have made progress," said Bartlett, and he introduced a batch of statistics that seemed to indicate a healthy position for Oklahoma higher education. Student leaders around the podium appeared incredulous that he was talking about the same state they were. Bartlett spoke about five minutes and left, not choosing to answer any questions. Bob Vincent, OU's lobby coordinator, called Bartlett's figures misleading and blatant lies, and presented some of his own in reply. OU Student Senator Ralph Doty of College Bowl fame in his remarks said: "I've really learned a lot today. Until I heard the governor's speech, I hadn't known Oklahoma was among the top states in money appropriated for higher education. What I think the governor meant is that we are near the top until the appropriation bill reaches his desk . . . Let me speak personally for a moment. I was a member of OU's College Bowl team, and we were four people who agreed on nothing except that we are all going to graduate school and that none of us is going to graduate school in Oklahoma, because this state hasn't

been able to have a really good graduate program. I'd prefer to go to school here—I'm an Oklahoman. I just want a better education."

The next speakers were Speaker of the House Rex Privett and Clem McSpadden, president pro tem of the senate. They blamed the governor's budget, said that's the way things are, but they ought to be different.

Students received the largest doses of straight talk from Sen. Bryce Baggett (Oklahoma City), Rep. Dave Boren (Seminole), and Rep. Curtis Lawson (Tulsa).

"The legislators blamed the governor, and the governor blamed the legislators," said one student after the hour-and-a-half program, and his was an accurate assessment. The students were told by everyone to keep up the good work, that what they are doing is important, that the people must be made aware of the situation, that we must all work together for improvement. Then the students went home, and the legislators went back to their business.

The Student Lobby intends to keep up the pressure and the campaign to inform the citizens of the situation. A big part of the job, of course, is to explain the value of top-notch colleges and universities, to make Oklahomans understand that well financed education is essential if a state wants to attract the kind of industry and talent that will make it competitive and affluent.

Daily Editor Waltz commented the day after the Study-In on the need for continued commitment: "One thing which the governor and legislators alike echoed and re-echoed was 'It's up to you. Pretty soon you'll be the people doing the voting, and then you'll have to change things.' . . . Ten or 20 years from now we could be the ones living on those placid streets we passed on our way home in our buses, and we too could fall into the comfortable habit of letting our immediate responsibilities take priority over anything so remote from us as the university . . . We'll have no time to worry about anything as abstract as 'higher education.' . . . We must realize if we don't force ourselves to continue to act and care, we will someday be the ones standing on the steps of the Capitol, telling another group of students that it's up to them."—Paul Galloway