

It is a peculiar trait of colleges and universities that they talk out of both sides of their mouths. On one side they extol the virtues of their educational opportunities and the excellence of their facilities, yet on the other side they are crying poor, bemoaning the lack of excellence.

True, some institutions are so poorly funded that they are lying by pointing to excellence anywhere. For most, however, there are areas of excellence — areas where programs and people have been scraped up, held together with a shoestring, and through some miracle of perseverance and devotion manage to succeed and succeed impressively. Those areas are few, and while the potential for widespread excellence is there, most programs remain only average.

This is the kind of situation that higher education in Oklahoma has faced almost from the beginning. Judicious use of private funds has thrust outstanding reputation on a few areas. The rest get by.

In Oklahoma it has long been the practice of college administrators to overstate their budget needs. It sort of mushrooms as it goes along. Each year the various departments in the University submit their budget needs to the vice president for finance. He and his staff go over these requests, make a few adjustments and spend the summer preparing a request for the State Regents for Higher Education. In the fall, the president and his finance people trek up to the state capitol for the budget hearings. Armed with charts and graphs and arguments, they spend the morning presenting their case.

In all these years the unwritten rule of the game has been that the universities and colleges ask for probably twice as much as they believe they will get. The figure is based on the amount of money they would need to do all the things they would like to do — raise faculty salaries to the 100 point level on the American Association of University Professors' rating

AND HIGHER

scale, raise hourly wages to a competitive level, initiate all the new programs that are wanted and needed, and so on.

The State Regents are in on this unwritten rule. They accept the request, shave it here, whittle it there and end up asking for about 15 per cent more than they know the Legislature will come up with.

A peculiarity of the system is that technically the money an institution makes is not its own. It all goes into a central fund administered by the state and is re-allocated to the University. The Legislature makes a lump sum allocation of all available funds to the State Regents who in turn split up the money in smaller pots for the various state-supported institutions.

So, when the State Regents come up with a satisfactory figure for OU, they set it aside and listen to the requests from each of the other state-supported schools. In the end, they lump all the needs together and send the package request to the Legislature.

Now, the Legislature is in on the unwritten rule too. They know that the State Regents have asked for more than they expect to get, so they cut down the sum again, and they make their lump sum allocation to the State Regents.

The State Regents then have to re-evaluate all the requests they have received to see where the requests can be cut again, and finally, they announce the budget figures for each school. The end result is never satisfactory. What little increase is given usually is eaten up by inflation.

At OU there are three separate budgets — the main campus, the Geological Survey (which is really a state agency that operates in conjunction with OU), and the Medical Center in Oklahoma City.

For the fellow who would like to play the budget game honestly, things go hard. To ask the State Regents only for what your institution really needs in the coming year is courting the danger that the usual percent-

age cuts will be made anyway. Should that happen, there simply wouldn't be enough money to operate.

The University of Oklahoma's efforts to get more money have taken various tacks. The current one is couched in a tuition increase. The first request was for a flat fee, a system rejected by the State Regents as unworkable. The latest request, yet to be acted on by the State Regents, is for a unilateral fee increase at OU with the provision that OU would get to keep any added revenue from that fee increase without counting it against the state funding. If that last condition weren't added, then the extra money wouldn't mean a thing — the Legislature would just count it against the state allocation.

So the struggle goes on. At the Medical Center services are being cut back one by one. As a public facility much of the medical service there is for indigents — those needing medical care who are unable to pay. As hospital costs rise, wings are closed, staffs are cut.

With a reputation for an outstanding kidney transplant program, the Medical Center has had to set a limit of 12 transplants per year. And when the thirteenth very worthy case comes in, he must be turned away.

As in any large business there are inefficiencies in University operation. Red tape surely wastes more money than it saves. Sheer job turnover results in inefficiency. Turnover in classified jobs runs as high as 150 per cent a year which means costly re-training as new people come in. But the problem is linked to low salaries. Why should a trained machine operator work for the University for \$281 per month when he can make twice that working for a private business in Norman?

In faculty and administrative areas the problem is different but nonetheless related. Some stay because they like Oklahoma and believe in its future. They

# EDUCATION

could make more elsewhere, but this is their home. Some come to teach at the lower faculty levels where salaries are more competitive but then, as their rank rises, leave for better paying jobs. An extra \$5,000 a year somewhere else where they teach fewer hours and have better facilities is a hard offer to turn down.

Just physically maintaining a University is a costly business. Out of a total budget for 1969-70 of \$23.6 million, OU spends almost \$2.2 million on physical maintenance — repairing buildings, equipment, utilities, streets, walks and parking lots; mowing and otherwise maintaining the landscape; providing janitor service for all the buildings (\$345,477); fire and police protection; refuse collection; telephone service; transportation; power, water, heat and light (\$685,040).

As each big new building goes up, the maintenance problem is compounded. Dale Hall, for example, can accommodate 2,000 students every hour. Conceivably the entire student body could be in Dale Hall at some time in any one day. Cleaning up after that many students is a monumental task in itself. Yet efficient land use seems to dictate construction of larger and larger facilities.

Back in September President Hollomon and Governor Bartlett got in a semantics argument over what constitutes a critical situation in higher education. At a press conference Hollomon pointed out that though faculty salaries were raised, the raises did not meet inflationary trends; medical supply costs are up 25 per cent; that there have been serious cutbacks in federal aid. The governor, on the other hand, pointed out that in the past 10 years appropriations have increased more than 120 per cent, that the university does get more money each year. And the governor is right. In 1959-60 Oklahoma institutions were receiving only \$27,014,000 in state money, whereas in 1969-70 they received \$59,552,000, an increase of 120.25 per

cent. In the last two years there has been a 27 per cent increase.

Of course in the numbers argument no one wins. Almost any picture can be painted depending on whose figures are used.

In the November issue of the "Oklahoma Business Bulletin" Dr. Jack L. Robinson, associate professor of economics and a specialist in public finance, discussed the support of higher education in Oklahoma.

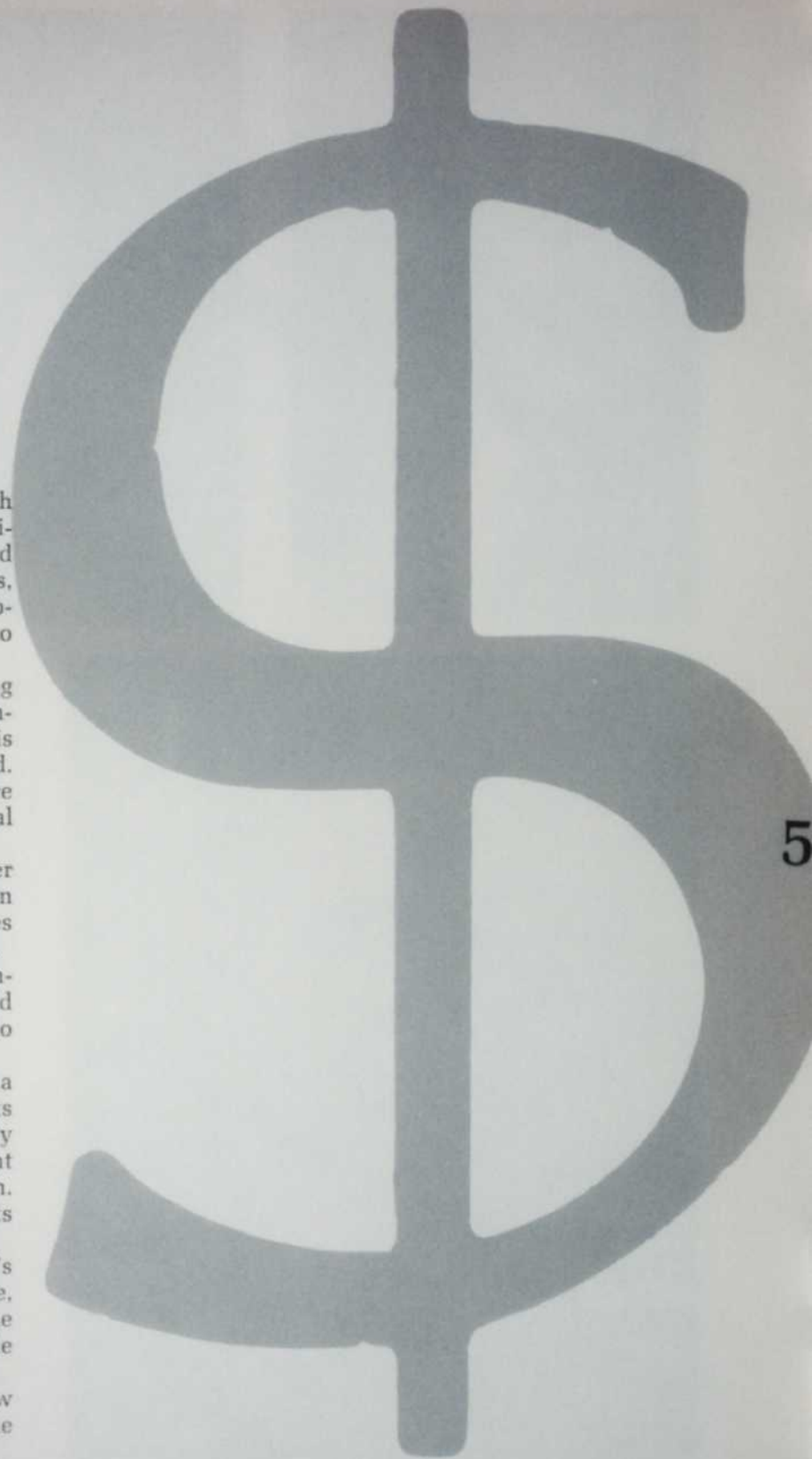
"Those who argue that state support in Oklahoma is adequate like to present data showing the per capita (or per person) data on state support of higher education for the various states," Robinson said.

In one set of data cited Oklahoma ranked 20th among the 50 states in per capita support with \$63.98. Yet in another set of figures, not used by Robinson, Oklahoma ranks 41st with \$22.35. Both figures supposedly were arrived at by dividing state support by the number of people in the state. The problem here is deciding what constitutes state support. Each agency compiling national data uses a different set of criteria. The responding states also have different sets of criteria in answering the questionnaires.

The possibility of getting undisputed data is almost nil. While all the data is generally correct, it seldom reflects the real picture in any situation.

As Robinson points out, "There is such a wide gap between the apparently strong effort put forth by the citizens of Oklahoma and the apparently modest results achieved that a careful study is needed to ascertain the precise reasons for the gap. Some of the more obvious possible explanatory factors that need to be examined include: college-age persons as a percentage of the total population in Oklahoma, compared with other states; the percentage of out-of-state students attending Oklahoma colleges and universities; the percentage of college students attending state as

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opposed to private schools in Oklahoma compared with other states; and the number of state-supported institutions of higher learning in Oklahoma as compared to other states. Differences in state total populations, dispersion or concentration of the population geographically, and levels of income by state might also bear investigation."

What it boils down to then is that comparing Oklahoma to any other state by and large is like comparing apples and oranges—the basic information is not comparable. So other yardsticks have to be found.

At OU the yardsticks are there. If there were enough money, cutbacks in services at the Medical Center would not be necessary.

If there were enough money, the employee turnover at all salary levels. As it now stands Oklahoma can attract people at the assistant professor levels but loses them in the higher ranks to better paying institutions.

If there were enough money, the employee turnover would be lower because the University would be able to compete with industrial salaries paid to clerical, skilled and semi-skilled workers.

Clearly more money is needed to give Oklahoma the kind of higher education it needs. No one expects all the extra money to come from the state. University officials have proved their willingness to raise student fees. Private fund raising has become a major concern. Despite cutbacks in federal spending, serious efforts are being made to attract government programs.

Right now about 30 per cent of the University's money comes from the people through the Legislature, 30 per cent from student fees, 30 per cent from the federal government and 10 per cent from private sources.

What remains is for each of those areas to grow in numbers of dollars. The answer is simple; it's the means that is so difficult.

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