



The University of Oklahoma finds itself in good company in the winter of 1971 as it stands at a cross-road of history in American higher education.

For most institutions the post-Sputnik honeymoon is over. The sudden thirst for technical knowledge, the headlong rush to pour federal funds and foundation money into beefing up higher education have all faded, indeed diminished into a virtual retreat. The glut of specialized programs established on college and university campuses through outside funds still exist, but the funds don't, and those same colleges and universities find themselves faced with a plethora of programs and a dearth of money.

Now, uniformly, they face transition, and it will be a difficult one to make. The institution that is higher education today is left with disenchanted students, apprehensive alumni, bored professors, concerned parents, astronomical financial burdens and a host of administrators who are wondering how they are going to feed the giant that everyone seemed to want until he became too big to support.

The Carnegie Commission's recent report, "The New Depression in Higher Education," states that a growing number of colleges and universities are in financial trouble, many others are headed for trouble, and all institutions ultimately will be in financial trouble. Many reasons are implied; the following seem to be prevalent causes:

- (1) most institutional growth has been under-financed;
- (2) the reaction to campus disturbance has had an effect on private gifts and legislative funds;
- (3) a general drop in federal financial support;
- (4) a loss in public confidence in the institution's activities;
- (5) increased requirements for student aid;
- (6) a drop in enrollment at both the graduate and undergraduate level;
- (7) rising faculty costs;

By Thomas E. Broce

# End of the Honeymoon

**(8) an absence of clearly defined institutional goals;**

**(9) the effect of the nation's general economy.**

In addition to financial problems, there are striking, often ironical forces pounding at the traditional walls of higher education. They are coming from many directions; as many are internal as external.

Critics are saying that the bull market in education is over and there is little to suggest it will return soon.

Others observe that like any other industry that has lived for years with 10 per cent growth rates, higher education must now adjust to a more normal 2 to 3 per cent rate.

There is growing evidence of disenchantment against the collegiate formal education process and the standard degree pattern. The future consumers of the academic capital goods industry are beginning to ask why they should continue in lock-step from high school to college when so much of undergraduate life lacks focus and meaning.

Graduate education is beginning to lose much of its appeal, especially now when draft laws are being changed and the overproduction and unemployment of young Ph.D.s is common reading in the daily press.

For many educators and laymen these forecasts loom as prophecies of gloom and despair. For others they are considered as another redeployment that has characterized the phenomenal growth of American higher education.

One fact is emerging, however. Institutions with clearly defined goals and objectives are having less difficulty adapting to the season and the times than those that have danced to the tunes of many pipers and tried to be all things to all people.

These factors all have bearing on the University of Oklahoma today. In addition to national changes in direction, the University is being affected by local influences, many that are just now coming to light after long periods of gestation. The accelerated pace of change that is threatening most aspects of traditional life is evident in Norman.

It is abundantly clear that no university can pull a Scarlet O'Hara in 1971 and worry about the problem tomorrow. The institution that chooses to tread water today will be gone tomorrow. OU finds itself in that role of the vulnerable incumbent in Oklahoma, and there are many institutions waiting in the wings to take its place as the educational leader.

The external forces affecting OU, both positively and negatively, should respond to the leadership of the total University community — faculty, students, staff, alumni, regents, involved citizens. This places special burdens but also new opportunities on those who are seeking to get the house in order for the new president.

What follows then is an attempt to list eight situa-

tions facing American higher education today. Most have application in Oklahoma.

It is easy to mount a soap box and tell how to correct the other guy's mistakes. But these suggestions are written by one who is dedicated to implementing these and other correctives to make higher education more relevant and more responsive to the needs of the people it serves. These suggestions and a dime may get you a cup of coffee in the Oklahoma Memorial Union, but here they are anyway:

### **1. We must improve the procedures for institutional planning.**

This will require better planning in every facet of academic life and far better planning on a statewide level.

Ironically, some of the problems faced by the University of Oklahoma in 1971 may be the result of a system of higher education that may have been influenced as much by Chamber of Commerce appeals as by sound academic and fiscal policies.

One of the immediate problems at OU is enrollment, a very real problem indeed when much of the institution's income is based on number of persons enrolled.

There are growing indications that the proliferation of junior colleges in most cities and hamlets in Oklahoma and North Texas is cutting into the University's supply of students. This is happening at a time when the University has built itself, as it was directed to do, to handle the future crush of more students. At the same time, enrollment may be affected by the recent decision to raise out-of-state students' entrance requirements.

Another statewide planning decision affecting OU's future is the responsibility it shares with Oklahoma State University for graduate education in Oklahoma. When the state's study of the role and scope of higher education was done in 1969, it was assumed that by reserving graduate education for Norman and Stillwater the graduate enrollment would take up the slack created by re-focusing undergraduate education at the new junior and community colleges. Now, two years later, there is a glut on the Ph.D. market. Graduate school enrollment, instead of swelling, is declining, and the University feels new pressure.

There is also the need for more and better fiscal planning and management. Few universities in the nation could not reduce their operating budgets by at least five per cent if they had the courage to try, and at OU the new administration is now giving serious review to its expenditures. Economic factors in the 1970s may force this everywhere. Pouring in more and more money will never solve the problems of education until institutions learn better how to manage their resources.

## **2. We must restore the status of teaching.**

Professors in many cases teach in a perfunctory fashion, not because they don't know any better but because they are not motivated to do better.

While the publish or perish publicity is for the most part an exaggerated myth, there is truth that many bored faculty members seek rewards, financial and other, in activities other than good teaching. Inflexible allegiance to the academic guild and the rigidity of the structure have created part of the boredom. Lack-luster undergraduates add to it. However, the present shift in the academic labor market caused by an over production of Ph.D.s may do for teaching what faculty members have failed to do for themselves.

The decline in the current academic job market also will have other effects on the teaching profession. The college teacher may now have greater incentive to identify his well being with that of his institution. In the seller's market that prevailed until recently professorial job hopping was commonplace. Now teaching positions are not so plentiful and the faculty member can afford the time to take a long look at his institution and feel some compulsion to try to improve its offerings along with his own reputation.

Another corrective force to improve the status of teaching might be closer evaluation of teaching ability with appropriate rewards and disciplines. Students may be the best judges, and why shouldn't the captive audience get a chance to evaluate the performance? Faculty members might also consider the creation of a set of professional ethics and standards to be enforced within their own ranks.

## **3. Colleges and universities must undertake a thorough reform of the undergraduate curriculum.**

Historian Arnold Toynbee wrote that the atmosphere of universities has been conservative in the past and that tradition remains a potent force. This is true in the undergraduate education.

The random accumulation of credit hours no longer satisfies the more varied and socially committed students, many of whom have been exposed to more lively offerings in high school. The present curriculum, at many institutions, is often a mindless holdover from the past.

Curriculum reform is needed, but reform is incomplete if its only consequence is that each specific subject is better taught. It must reintroduce into the undergraduate program the breadth so essential for young people who will reach the peak of their careers in the 21st century. It will require searching reappraisal of the aims of education in all fields and thorough

exploration of the possibilities of new teaching aids and methods.

One solution might be the introduction of problem-theme courses that cut across disciplinary bounds. Such programs are more flexible for students and bring instruction to the borders of discipline where boredom might give way to the challenge of new relationships.

## **4. We must eliminate the now-or-never aspect of higher education.**

The conformism about entering college immediately after high school fails to take account of different rates of maturation. Avoidance of the draft has been a prime preserver of this conformity, but new federal laws will soon change this. Today, 12 or more years of formal schooling and exposure to a potent mass media have created a younger generation saturated with information but deficient in some important kinds of experience and motivation.

Many oldtimers on college faculties remember the "golden age of teaching." These were the years after World War II when classes were filled with older, more mature veterans who tended to know exactly why they were in college and who were quick to challenge offerings that did not square with real life.

A period of compulsory national service between high school and college might have some educational importance. Delayed admission in which a student would be admitted to an institution although he may decide to wait until the following fall to enter might help. The experience of the year away from formal instruction might provide greater motivation among college students and teachers.

## **5. We need new patterns for the organization of student life.**

Campus rules and regulations are often based on the assumption that college students are incapable of mature judgment. We tend to expect mature behavior from our students, yet we continue to treat them like children.

A return to the concept of the university as an academic community might be a major step. Students have demonstrated that they are willing to play their role, but in many instances, faculty and administrators have failed to take the game seriously.

The University of Oklahoma is recognized for its university community concept, an idea that is far ahead of many other institutions, but still not perfect. OU still has some rules affecting student life that may not be realistic.

Most serious students can make valuable contributions to institutional life and planning. Who is in a better position to render an opinion about what is really happening or needed?

Administrators should not abandon or transfer responsibility for decision-making, but they might share the joy of the total college learning experience with

(Continued on page 20)

# End of the Honeymoon

(Continued from page 3)

the entire academic community, or at least those who are willing to responsibly share it.

**6. Administrators must recognize the seriousness of today's financial crisis and be willing to take bold action.**

The Carnegie report has made the charge that many administrators, particularly schools in financial difficulty or headed for it, are not doing all they can to make adjustments to the new financial situation. Many are unwilling or partially unable to take stronger action than they have.

One reason for the hesitance is the fear of giving credibility to the severity of the financial crisis. Some administrators feel a need to keep up appearances and, even in the face of difficulty, to continue to operate as if nothing is happening in the belief that potential donors, private and public, may shy away from institutions in trouble.

Another reason is the resistance to make changes in campus structure that would significantly reallocate resources. One set of barriers lies in the policies and traditions ruling out faculty firings. Another is that many feel they don't have the machinery, authority, or support for major decisions requiring sharp cuts. Since colleges have historically changed by growing rather than cutting, most institutions lack the decision-making apparatus to make and implement new priority decisions.

Many administrators are resistant to using the financial problem as an opportunity to get rid of dead wood. Some are not sure what wood is in fact dead, and thus, don't feel equipped to make those decisions.

Finally, many administrators are not taking decisive action in face of the financial crisis because they believe the crisis will end in a few years.

Administrators who fail to act with reason in times of important decision-making, particularly with regard to public and gift money, are guilty of ignoring their public trust and stewardship responsibility.

**7. We must modernize and rebalance the structure of colleges and universities.**

Every college or university that has experienced confrontation, and even some that have only read about campus threat, recognize that the existing structure of governance and decision-making often is too slow, too cumbersome, and often not truly representative.

The power of the college presidency also has come into serious question in recent months. Jokes about weak-kneed administrators replaced Aggie jokes last fall.

Yet, confrontation and disturbance brought to the fore what many administrators have known for some time: the president's powers in the governance of institutions are limited at best. Decisions about curriculum, student hours, and the hiring and firing of the faculty are seldom in his hands. Yet, most of the difficult decisions have a way of making it to the

president's desk. A more realistic management structure should channel the flow of activity to areas where the responsibility should be.

There also is an internal problem that baffles many—how to get answers to questions. The run-around policy is often on a par with the military service. Students find this to be one of the most annoying facts of college life.

Institutions must demand greater concern for individuals at all levels of administration. Streamlined organization should develop better channels of information and communication.

**8. We must put an end to coercion on the campus.**

One way to do this is to stop granting concessions and immunity to law breakers. At the same time the institutions must keep clear in everyone's mind the vast difference between dissent and breaking the law.

Coercion takes many forms in the academic community with as much implied under the guise of legitimate threat as illegitimate law breaking. Colleges long ago gave up their tradition as places of sanctuary.

Power must be used with justice and restraint. The rights of the majority must not be sacrificed or subdued for the vested interests of a few. Institutional goals, once defined and adopted by the total community, must be enforced.

Institutions that have had the courage to take firm stands have witnessed that the walls did not come tumbling down.

Institutions of higher education have never advertised themselves as perfect organizations. Ideally, they reflect the cutting edge of society and this is an uncomfortable position in times of great change.

The battles fought on the campuses in the 1960s are being waged today on the streets of commerce and in the factories. The lessons learned during the past decade were painful, but the challenge was met with dignity.

Now, new demands and responsibilities face America's colleges and universities. Most institutions are caught in positions of overbuilding, over-extension of services, weak financial preparation, and poor planning. Most will recover and flourish.

The University of Oklahoma must make some tough decisions about its future, and they can't be put off. This should be a time of great renewal and excitement. Expectations are high in the minds of many, and rightly so. Support, encouragement, and expression of confidence from the men and women of Oklahoma have never been more important to the University.

---

Thomas E. Broce, '70Ph.D., is executive assistant to interim president Dr. Pete Kyle McCarter. He holds a bachelor's degree from Baylor and a master's degree from the University of North Carolina. He has been a newspaper reporter, an Air Force officer, director of public relations and development and instructor of journalism at the University of Arkansas, development director at Duke and a vice president at Southern Methodist University. He is 35.

---