



# Six months later

**Sooner:**

Having been at a private institution which to all external appearances had relatively few difficulties, was well financed and had a workable size student body, what was the motivating factor in your decision to come to the University?

**Dr. Sharp:**

These are two entirely different kinds of institutions, and the appeals of the University of Oklahoma are quite different. They range from such considerations as the fact that it is a state institution serving a wider and more diverse clientele, to the fact that the range of internal programs is much more extensive both as to scope and depth. Drake University didn't have any doctoral programs; we were just planning these. Here we have a wide range of doctoral programs. In fact our problem may be just the reverse. We may have too many doctoral programs in terms of our capacity to mount and finance effectively.

**Sooner:**

In your brief experience here at the University, what aspect would you classify as its major asset?

**Dr. Sharp:**

Obviously its major asset is the people who have been attracted here as administrators, faculty, staff and non-academic personnel. I think this is unique because we've not had some of the other attractions. We don't have the tradition of antiquity in the academic community that is so important along the Atlantic seaboard, and we don't

have the dynamism of the west coast as it developed in the 40s and 50s. We may be on the threshold of that, but I think the attractions here have brought some very able people, and they have stayed.

**Sooner:**

Excluding the question of finances, what is the major problem here?

**Dr. Sharp:**

When you move into any new institution, you are struck with things that you feel are important for change or modification. Like most institutions of higher learning, OU can well undergo and is undergoing managerial changes which will make it more responsive to current needs—structures that are not responding to needs of the 50s, but rather to needs of the 70s.

I think another very important consideration is the extent of our curriculum and what we ought to be doing in the 70s and 80s. We lived through a period of intense proliferation of curriculum commitments in the 50s and on through the 60s without much heed to what the continuing costs were to be. We always reached a point where we said the start-up costs are covered. But we forgot that the start-up costs over the long haul are only a minor fraction of the total costs.

So, we need to review critically our commitments and ask ourselves what do we really want to be doing through the 70s. I think we must be pragmatically hard-nosed about it and say, "If it is being

It has been six months since Dr. Paul F. Sharp assumed the OU presidency, and while he has been analyzing institutional needs and problems, the people of the community and the state have been analyzing the new man at OU. He has come through the initiation period well.

He has won a lot of people over by his easy and thoughtful manner and his disinterest in fanfare, such as a costly inauguration. When he talks about change, he does so in the framework of philosophies and opinions rather than wide-sweeping reforms, and when he talks about finances, he gives more emphasis to cause of present problems than to admonitions of "We need more money." In short, he faces issues squarely, rationally and in the way which has established him as a strong administrator.

The Sooner Magazine has included in this issue an interview with Paul Sharp, in order that our alumni can become better acquainted with the man behind the University.

offered at the University of 'X' and people have access to it, maybe we shouldn't be competing."

**Sooner:**

The problem of money is universal for colleges and universities throughout the nation. What is the short-term financial outlook for this university?

**Dr. Sharp:**

The short-term outlook is at best a standstill operation. This is true around the country. We are in one of those unfortunate cycles, and we are at the low point.

I think that a combination of factors led to this troughing, both internal and external to the university. It can't be divorced from the economic factor. By the same token it can never be divorced from the internal disarray of universities during the past five years. On all these counts we reached a point of focus that hit us very hard.

It was exacerbated by the fact that universities were not equipped to handle crisis—neither from the standpoint of administration nor governance. We found at the point of governance that our documents that had been put together under gentlemen's codes in the 30s just had no relevance. So, for a period of approximately three years most universities floundered as they found new ways of meeting the new society that emerged so suddenly in the United States.

In my mind we have lived through that period. Many people on the outside assume this is because of a change of philosophy or management internally. It's really a conviction on the part of the whole community that indeed we do live in a different society, and this calls for a different response internally. I think the educational and political leaders of the nation and state have come to the realization that further erosion of our educational strength simply can't be tolerated—even if we're only considering the people who are being educated right now, quite apart from the future commitment. We need to remember that not only education but practically every public service in the country is floundering.

The second problem, in my opinion, is an antiquated tax base which is unrelated to present commitments. By and large it's true in any society, that except for a handful of enlightened people, you're always dealing with yesterday's problems. It's only recently that we have developed a whole set of futurologists who are trying to anticipate scientifically and objectively what will be tomorrow's problems. We're living in the tomorrow that wasn't planned in the 1950s. This is the reason for the magnitude of our problems.

Unless we get beyond the standstill budgeting very soon, we will suffer a considerable erosion of educational services. When you can't provide the right people, the proper equipment and the proper

support services, then quality goes down. In the private sector, many institutions are really going out of business. One of the reasons there are so many Ph.D's available to institutions now is that many private institutions are saying to sizeable segments of faculty, "good-bye." Instead of a student-faculty ratio of 18 to 1, they're going to a ratio of 25 to 1.

There is an enormous irony in all of this. The very people who are saying that you must not allow the university to become impersonal nor allow student-faculty ratios to exceed human relationships are the same people that say you can't spend money.

There is a third and I think very important consideration in all institutional life in this country. We cannot permit ourselves to remain at standstill levels, whether we are talking about industry or our educational enterprises. A standstill commitment destroys the momentum built up over many years. It erodes morale, so that it is very difficult to get back on the road when the time comes. In universities around the country we can lose as much as 10 to 15 years of accumulated momentum during this period of financial disarray. That's an enormous loss to the young people who are still in junior high schools because they are the ones who will suffer.

**Sooner:**

There seems to be a growing concern on the part of faculty, staff and



The very people who are saying that the university must not become impersonal and not exceed workable faculty-student ratios are the same people that say you can't spend money.

In higher education it costs twice as much to educate a junior in college as it does a freshman and eight times as much for a first year graduate student.



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alumni of the University as to the viability of the system the state employs in financing higher education. Many people feel that the major institutions such as OU and OSU are being somewhat penalized under our current allocation system. Do you think that this is generally a fair observation, and do you think we can indeed continue this type of allocation system?

**Dr. Sharp:**

I think there is a growing concern at this point. It is shared by almost everybody involved in higher education in the state. First, during any great period of change, such as we are moving through now, budgeting procedures tend to lag, and the emphasis is on the new at the expense of the older programs. The new institutions are going through start-up costs, which are always greater. All this combines to create for the "flagship universities" a standstill operation while others are beginning and developing.

The second factor is the very concern the State Regents for Higher Education have shown for program budgeting. This is based on the simple observation that programs vary enormously in cost. Once we get through the start-up cost period, program budgeting is obviously imperative if we are going

to keep the strength, particularly in the more costly levels of professional education, of graduate studies and of research essential for public services.

Roughly speaking, in higher education it costs twice as much to educate a junior in college as it does a freshman. But by the time we get to a first-year graduate student, it's eight times as much. The escalation of costs needs to be reflected in program budgeting. I know that Chancellor Dunlap and the State Regents are much concerned about this, and there is currently a proposal to move to this kind of budgeting as soon as the proper feasibility studies and mechanics can be arranged.

**Sooner:**

Are we able to maintain our top faculty during periods such as we are currently experiencing?

**Dr. Sharp:**

We are losing some people. There is obviously a normal amount of mobility. This has been reduced somewhat by reason of limited budgets, yet there are always positions opening in institutions—individual positions which call for men of particular qualifications. When this happens, you tend to lose your best people. We have not yet suffered extensively from this. But if

we retain this standstill budgeting, it is going to call for very difficult decisions of selective increases for the people we may lose, unless of course we lose our commitment to quality.

Since we are one of the institutions that is really called upon to maintain high educational quality services in all areas of educational activity, we simply cannot afford that. We have to have pacemakers—people who have national reputations in higher education. They are the ones we stand to lose if we are not careful.

**Sooner:**

Have you found the leadership in the student body as a whole at the University to be a group of young people who are concerned about education and their future, or are we experiencing an alienation and withdrawal of our students from our society?

**Dr. Sharp:**

Here we are undergoing changes that are so rapid it is difficult to generalize within the four-year span of the undergraduate experience. I find that seniors are very different from freshmen—so different in fact that seniors tell me they don't understand these freshmen. The thinking and feeling are highly individualistic, and, therefore, you



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don't get a mass or uniform response. Maybe that is one of the real keys to understanding this generation of students.

I will take the risk to make one or two generalizations. I would say that first there is a grave concern for private matters such as career development and ultimate adjustment and employment in society. Apparently this is due to the economic circumstance. The students are not guaranteed employment when they graduate now. Yet, I feel that with most of the students there is a real concern for society and for the university as an institution in society.

I don't find as much negative concern about the university as we did three years ago on most campuses. We have a new generation of students who are quite different in their general relationship to the university. I find an assertion of some views and commitments that seem quite traditional—a revival and interest in group activities and a kind of activism that relates itself to positive affirmations of personal commitment.

### Sooner:

Alumni organizations throughout the country have been undergoing

some of the same agonies of understanding their role. What kind of productive contribution do you think alumni associations, such as the one at OU, can make that will legitimately benefit the University?

### Dr. Sharp:

I've always felt that one of the indications of a great university, and I think this is true here, is that the alumni have a sense of belonging to an academic institution of consequence. There are many activities of a university which can be of great interest and involvement such as our athletic programs and our performing arts. But, basically, a great university is held in high regard by its alumni because it is fulfilling its primary mission in education.

A university is always in a position where it needs the loyalty, understanding and support of its alumni. That's very primitive. Yet, it's very true. If our alumni don't have high regard and affection for us, who should? When properly informed and a part of this total program, alumni are the most effective interpreters of the university in a society where we desperately need interpretation.

Alumni who don't understand the

university and what it's doing can be the least effective representatives of the university. The public generally assumes, "Well, you've been there, so you know about it," even though what they know may be 20 years out of date. We have an obligation to keep them up to date.

A well informed and dynamic alumni group is always helpful at specific points of programming, whether we're talking about internal programs in academic development or about external relationships in fund raising and political relationships of the state. All of these add up to a much more effective relationship if alumni are in the forefront.

Looked at in the larger sense, we offer alumni the invaluable experience of belonging to something meaningful. This is a rare experience in our society. People are struggling, looking for things to belong to which have meaning. It offers for us the opportunity to call forth a loyalty that is very meaningful and an expression of energy and activity that is not only rich in its personal involvement but socially useful. So I think the alumni relationship to a university is rich in both directions.

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