

Public/Private Partnership Works in Oklahoma



In the spring of 1892, the superintendent of schools in Arkansas City, Kansas, was mulling over three employment opportunities — the position of superintendent of schools in Wichita, a political race for Kansas' state superintendent of schools and the presidency of the newly-formed University of Oklahoma. The Oklahoma job was running a distant third. However, a close friend encouraged David Ross Boyd to reconsider.

"By all means, take that presidency," the friend counseled. "Oklahoma Territory will become a state sooner or later, and no state university has ever failed."

The wisdom of this advice is worth remembering. The University of Oklahoma is now, always has been and always will be a state-supported institution. And far from failing, this state university is flourishing as never before.

Obviously, OU's budgetary prosperity is due to the healthy condition of Oklahoma's economy in a national sea of fiscal troubles. But another major factor in OU's relative affluence is a blending of public and private resources which has created a partnership unique to Oklahoma. The endowed professorships are a good example with the state providing the base pay and private funds providing extra compensation to attract the very best faculty available. OU's

major building projects — the library, the energy center, the music building — are being financed by both state and private money — and the physical fitness center even added student fee support.

The extraordinary generosity of the private sector in this partnership has drawn most of the media attention, but equally remarkable has been the willingness of the legislature and the governor to compensate for all the have-not years which have hampered the development of Oklahoma higher education.

The 1982-83 appropriation for the total state system of 27 colleges and universities has been increased by approximately \$71.75 million, coming on top of a \$55 million increase last year. Increased tuition will add another \$5.3 million for the system during 1982-83.

While the University of Missouri at Columbia, for instance, ponders cuts of \$12 million for next year, OU's two campuses expect more than \$20 million in new state money and \$1.5 million in increased tuition. Meanwhile, private contributions of cash and property actually received (not counting pledges) will top \$18 million by the end of fiscal 1981-82 — up from \$14 million last year — and the prospect for 1982-83 looks even better.

With this sort of backing, the University is hiring while others are fir-

ing. Salaries paid full and associate professors at OU have risen from last to first in the Big Eight, and good progress is being made at the lower faculty levels. Teaching and research support is being strengthened substantially and an unparalleled building program is under way — all in the last four years.

The plight of the country's great state universities and its distinguished private schools is cause for national alarm. Oklahomans can sympathize; they've been there. The University of Oklahoma has a lot of catching up to do, and fortunately its public and private partners have the means to help.

The legitimacy of private support for public institutions still was being debated 10 years ago. Traditionalists warned that (1) if private support was forthcoming, the state would reduce public support and conversely (2) if the state did its job, the private sector would not feel obliged to help. Both predictions have proven dead wrong. State appropriations for the University of Oklahoma have gone from \$33.5 million in 1971-72 to \$95.1 million in 1981-82, and private contributions from \$2.8 million to more than \$18 million.

It appears that everyone likes to back a winner.

—CAROL J. BURR
