PROLOGUE

Catch 22: The More You Charge, The Less You Make

Anyone who has read *Catch 22* will note similarities in the fourth straight tuition/fee increase proposed for state-supported colleges and universities.

As the result of a Carnegie Council on Higher Education study in the '70s, the State Regents for Higher Education decreed that students in the state system should pay *not less than* 25 percent of the total cost of instruction if residents of Oklahoma and 75 percent if non-residents. Beginning with the 1982-83 school year, the regents recommended and the legislature approved three successive tuition/fees increases, not to exceed 10 percent each year, toward this objective.

Unfortunately for the University of Oklahoma, the effect of the tuition vs. cost formula has not been uniform throughout the system. When talk of a fourth increase surfaced at the state regents office last spring, OU's student leadership argued that enrollment projected for the fall semester would put tuition and fees at the state's two comprehensive universities over the magic 25 percent in-state, 25.2 percent at OU and 25.9 at OSU, while the percentage paid by students elsewhere in the system was considerably less, anywhere from the extreme case of one junior college at approximately 10.5 percent to 21 percent at some of the 4-year state regional institutions.

There already was evidence that escalating educational costs in a depressed economy were having an adverse effect on enrollments at the University. In the fall of 1983, for instance, OU and OSU were down 433 and 426 first-time freshmen respectively while Rogers State (junior) College was up 370 and Northeastern Oklahoma Junior College up 117 at entry level. Fall 1984 continued the trend with OU enrollment down 8 percent and neighboring Rose State (junior) College up 2 percent. The cumulative 33 percent increase in resident tuition and fees since fall 1982 (52 percent for non-residents) was costing the University money, not bringing in more.

For example, if the 1984 fall semester enrollment had held steady from the previous fall, this year's 10 percent increase would have brought the University of Oklahoma $1.3 million in added income. With the pool of Oklahoma's high school graduates shrinking, however, OU officials expected a drop in enrollment of 750 based on demographics alone, reducing the anticipated windfall to $600,000. Actual enrollment was down 1,500, a reduction in tuition/fees income of $650,000. So, instead of gaining $1.3 million or even $600,000, the University lost $50,000.

The loss of students is not simply a loss of the tuition and fees they would have paid into OU coffers; it also is a loss at the appropriations level. To determine each institution's share of the appropriations pie, the state regents use a complicated formula based on the cost of individual academic programs and the number and classification of students enrolled in each program, but the end result is head count.

The irony of the situation does not end there. The aforementioned minimum goal of 25 percent which in-state students are expected to pay (75 percent out-of-state) increases dollarwise as enrollment decreases. When fall 1984 enrollment at OU fell below expectations, the percentages of the educational cost paid by students was refigured to show that in-state freshmen and sophomores now were paying only 18.68 percent and junior and seniors 21.98, with out-of-staters at 67.3 and 78.6 respectively.

At the same time students at junior colleges are paying 14.7 percent of cost, the senior colleges 13.9 and regional universities 17.8 to 18.1. With the 10 percent per year ceiling on tuition increases, the dollar-value gap between the major universities and the junior colleges will continue to widen if an additional across-the-board increase is approved. A junior college student paying $436 a year in tuition and fees, for example, would pay an additional $43.60; an OU student paying $808 would have $80.80 added to his bill.

One might assume that the more expensive OU/OSU course carries a higher academic value than the same course taken on the junior college level. In actuality, perhaps, but no acknowledgement is made on the state level of any difference in quality. The state regents' matriculation policy states that OU and OSU must accept courses taken at any other state institution — 4-year or junior college — as equal to those same courses completed at OU or OSU.

It is true that tuitions and fees at Oklahoma's two major universities rank near the bottom both regionally and nationally when compared with other states. It is equally true that state support for the Oklahoma universities also is near the bottom, making the relative percentages of educational costs borne by Oklahoma's students compared to those in other states somewhat higher than might appear at first glance.

OU student leaders, along with their colleagues at other institutions, gave unqualified support to the first 10 percent tuition/fee hike three years ago when increased legislative appropriations were enabling OU to make up years' worth of lost ground in building a truly distinguished university. Even with the unequal application of the 25/75 percent formula, they felt that students should do their part in enriching their own educations and the value of their degrees. Through two more successive increases, they maintained this stance, even as the state's economic troubles resulted in a 12 percent cut in the University's budget. But they have seen higher and higher tuitions result in less and less income for the University. To young people unaccustomed to the workings of government, this doesn't make sense. They need to read *Catch 22*. — *CJB*