



# President Boren's world-view tutorial preparing OU students to face a new reality

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**A**cademic convocations at the University of Oklahoma are colorful events. The faculty in academic regalia enters Lloyd Noble Center behind flags of their various colleges, marching with appropriate solemnity to stirring music provided by the University orchestra. And leading them all is the magnificently attired color guard from the Kiowa Black Leggings Society, leaving no doubt that this is, after all, Oklahoma.

But here the indigenous symbolism ends. Carrying the flags of some 100 countries are representatives of the 1,600 international students that have become an enriching component of OU's current student body. Their participation in these august occasions is indicative of a direction taken in the seven years since the arrival of President David L. Boren. This university, nestled comfortably in land-locked Oklahoma, has acquired a certain international flavor—and apparently not a moment too soon.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, OU students, like all Americans, are struggling with a new reality. No longer are they safe behind their national borders; their futures may not be what they had imagined; and there are people who hate them beyond all reason. For these students, international relations and foreign policy are no longer mere academic exercises; understanding the world in which they live has become a matter of survival.

College campuses with their young, intense populations often are the scenes of extreme—and sometimes inappropriate—reactions in times of

national crisis. When Iranian mobs seized the U.S. embassy in 1979, OU's 800 Iranian students—and many who merely looked foreign—faced an immediate, fierce hostility on campus and in the community. There was thought for the welfare of international students this time as well—but also a strong and valid conviction that David Boren's seven-year tutorial had had its intended effect.

The well-traveled Boren brought to OU a world view gained from 16 years in the U.S. Senate, where he was closely involved in foreign policy development as chairman of the Senate Committee on Intelligence and where he authored the largest student foreign exchange program since the establishment of the Fulbright fellowships. Early in his administration, Boren made clear his determination to widen horizons at OU.

He wanted increased international enrollment, and he wanted these visiting students to return home having made American friends, having learned what America is all about. With his wife Molly's active support, he established OU Cousins, a program to match American and international students one-to-one. But the ratio had to be adjusted. So many American students signed up that they had to share international buddies. At this fall's match-up event, 450 international students were greeted by 1,000 American hosts. Meanwhile in the Norman community, the Host Family Program, an old OU tradition of inviting the visitors into local homes, has been rejuvenated.

But international understanding must work both ways. Boren wanted

OU students to have a similar experience in other countries. International exchange program director Millie Audas hit the air lanes. Today 128 exchange arrangements are in force with institutions in 55 countries, bringing 500 exchange students to OU each semester and sending approximately the same number abroad. Audas notes a 54 percent increase in OU students applying for the spring 2002 semester exchange—and two months after September 11, no sign of withdrawals.

But there is more to Boren's vision than travel and hospitality. He has established an International Studies Center headed by former U.N. Ambassador Edward Perkins, and brought a steady procession of world figures to the campus, notably through four Foreign Policy Conferences. Most of these events and their participants have been featured in past issues of *Sooner Magazine*, the most recent bringing Mikhail Gorbachev, Sergei Khrushchev (Nikita's son) and some former U.S. ambassadors to discuss future relations with Russia. The former directors of the CIA who now appear regularly as the media's intelligence analysts, as well as the current director, are no mere talking heads to OU students who have traded questions and answers with them on this campus over the past few years.

The war against terrorism is going to be a long one, unlike anything this country has seen. Before it is over, the OU students of today, both home-grown and international, could be calling the shots. They will need a lot of knowledge, a lot of understanding and a lot of friends. -CJB