prologue.

Are "public" universities disappearing? The notion isn't as far-fetched as you may think.

Scholarships. Scholarships. Scholarships.

The theme recurs with regularity when 10th anniversary conversations with President David Boren turn from the accomplishments of the past to the needs of the future. He terms it his "master plan" for the next decade—because without massive scholarship aid, he envisions the door to educational opportunity closing, particularly for middle-income students, those who cannot meet the expense on their own but who cannot qualify for need-based assistance.

OU students have encountered continually rising tuition and fees over the past few years, and they can take little comfort in knowing that they are not alone among the nation's college crowd. While comparison shopping places this institution in the bargain category for value received, it still costs a lot of money to attend the University of Oklahoma.

When Boren became president, during the school year 1994-95, resident tuition was $48.60 per credit hour; in 2004-05, it is $92.60, according to the OU Office of Enrollment and Student Financial Services. Non-resident tuition has gone from $156.60 per credit hour to $343.20 in the same 10 years. Meanwhile fees have increased dramatically to support a higher level of student services, making the cost of a 30-credit-hour year for a resident student $4,515, up from $1,869 a decade ago, and for today's non-resident, $12,033, compared to $5,109. Add in housing, books and miscellaneous expenses, and a resident, who was paying an estimated $9,670 a year in 1994-95, currently is shelling out $15,588, while total non-resident cost has risen from $13,106 to $23,106.

The basic cost of keeping the University operational historically is borne by the state of Oklahoma; that is the "public" part of "public university." A hundred years ago, as attested by the young Oklahomans of 1904 in the article on Page 15 ("Why Did You Come to the University"), the state met all the academic expense. By the 1930s, a portion of the cost was being passed on to the users of higher education in the form of "fees," and in 1947 through per-credit-hour tuition. This student share over the past 10 years has continued to grow, while the "public" share as expressed in the percentage of the state budget going to higher education, has continued to shrink.

In FY 1993, the year before Boren's arrival, the OU Budget Office reports that state appropriations accounted for 35.5 percent of the Norman campus' operating budget. In FY 2005, state appropriations are supplying 20.3 percent. Over that same time span, the percentage of the operating budget attributed to tuition and fees went from 11.6 percent to 23.7 percent. For some other Big 12 schools, the decline in state percentage of their budgets is even more alarming: Colorado, 7.4 percent; Missouri, 17 percent; Texas, 19.3 percent.

Systemwide, *The Oklahoman* reports that Oklahoma higher education's budget support from the state has gone from 70 percent in 1993 to the current 50 percent, while student tuition and fees have gone the opposite direction, from 19 percent to 36 percent.

The distinction between public and private institutions has been blurring for decades. Amazingly in the post-WWII years, there was still debate about the merits of federal aid to education, whether with federal aid also came federal control. Today public institutions—and private ones too—compete actively and openly for all the federal funds they can get in many different forms. In the same manner, private support for public universities, also once debated, has become a life-saving reality for those wise enough to build a strong base with alumni, friends and corporate and philanthropic entities.

At the University of Oklahoma, this public-private partnership always has been predicated on the state being responsible for the basic operating costs and private support providing the "margin for excellence." A prime example: The state pays faculty salaries; private endowments, in recent years matched by the state, add supplements that enable OU to recruit and retain the very best. With capital projects, a varying mix of state appropriations, University funds and/or bond money, private contributions and, in some cases, federal funds has made possible much more than a single source could have accomplished.

Private donors have answered the University's call to the tune of $1 billion in "margin for excellence" money over the past 10 years, and the results are dazzling. Faculty efforts have garnered $1.6 billion in outside research grants and sponsored programs to bolster that area of the University's mission. The students—and their families—have dug deeply to pay their fair share and more. Only the commitment of state support lags.

Boren is not happy with a trend that makes OU seem increasingly like a private university, but if the percentage of the state budget going to higher education keeps shrinking, the administration will be faced with continuing to hike the students' tuition or offering them a second-rate education. Faced with such a Hobson's choice, Boren's only alternative is scholarships, scholarships, scholarships.

—*CJB*