



prologue.

Scholarships, Scholarships, Scholarships

President David Boren has never been shy about repeating himself if he feels re-emphasis is warranted—or if there is the slightest chance that his audience has failed to receive his message. So if the refrain, “Scholarships, scholarships, scholarships,” sounds familiar, there is a good reason.

Sooner Magazine first picked up the phrase in a 2004 interview with Boren on the 10th anniversary of his presidency. Topping his list of job frustrations was the need to continually raise tuition and fees to compensate for the declining percentage of the state budget going to higher education. An affordable college education, he feared, was slipping away for too many high school graduates, especially those in the middle, with family incomes too high for federal assistance programs, too low to cover expenses.

What Boren did not say in that interview was that several months earlier he had initiated the “silent phase” of an ambitious plan to fund scholarships. A year later, April 2005, he formally announced a 5-year, \$50 million campaign—a goal that was reached in just one year. In fall 2006, the bar was raised to \$100 million; it took little more than a year to get there. Funding efforts continued, but in April 2010, the president initiated another big push to reach \$250 million.

Elation at this private funding program’s success might be even more exuberant if the world had stood still during the ensuing six years. In 2003-04, tuition per student credit hour was \$82; in 2009-10, it was \$117.90. Insert a major recession into the midst of the pathway to college, and the need for scholarships becomes a desperate need for many students whose personal and family situations have been drastically altered.

Even more alarming is the plight of public funding, despite the signs of recovery in the private sector. This is espe-

cially true in Oklahoma, which as usual was slow to be affected by the economic downturn and will be slow to recover. In years past, the springtime concern was what kind of increase higher education could expect from the legislature in the face of increasing costs. Now the worry is how deep the cuts in appropriations will be.

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Going into FY10, OU experienced a 3.9 percent cut; then during the year another 7.5 percent, eased somewhat by a supplemental appropriation, which is expected to be annualized. At this writing, the ink is not dry on the FY11 budget, but administrators have been told to expect another 3.3 percent reduction in state support.

Before the 2009-10 school year, Boren promised students that OU would hold the line on tuition—and he was as good as his word. At this spring’s open forum with students, facing the inevitability of an increase, he promised that the hike would be under 10 percent.

To update figures *Sooner Magazine* first presented in 2007, tuition and fees for a 30-credit-hour year have gone from \$1,869 when Boren became president in 1994-95 to \$7,423 in 2009-10 for in-state students, non-residents from \$5,109 to \$17,404. Count housing, books and miscellaneous expenses and an Oklahoman paid \$19,612 during the year just ending and an out-of-stater \$28,928.

There is a bright side. While the University’s individual and corporate donors have experienced the same economic distress as did students and their families, scholarship contributors have remained amazingly supportive. A heartening number of those able to maintain their philanthropic ways studied society’s needs and stepped forward to offer direct assistance to OU’s students. The nearly \$160 million contributed over the life of the campaign so far—March 2004 to April 2010—has put into play new scholarship funds and augmented other existing funds at the University’s three campuses—Norman, Oklahoma City and Tulsa—and well over half of them are endowed, here for the ages.

An estimated 80 percent of OU students are receiving some form of financial aid—federal loans and grants, state assistance for qualifying lower-income high school graduates, University supplements, work-study—and privately funded scholarships. In the present economic climate, only in the area of scholarships can the University do much to mitigate the pressures students face.

The mail comes nearly every day with abundant opportunities to support worthy causes, each with its own immediate needs. Scholarship appeals offer something just a little bit different—response to a current need, yes, but also the chance to invest in a life that can pay dividends far into the future.

—CJB