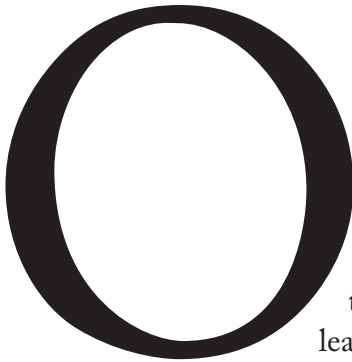


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# THE BOREN LEGACY

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BY LYNETTE LOBBAN



One night as he was leaving the office late in the evening, University of Oklahoma President David L. Boren noticed a backpack-toting freshman bounding across the north oval with great enthusiasm. When the student saw the president on the steps of Evans Hall, he vaulted up to greet him, put his arm around the OU leader and exclaimed, “DBo, you’re doing a hell of a job for us.”

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“I chuckled to myself all the way to the car,” says Boren.

A love of students brought Boren home from Washington, D.C., in 1994 to become OU’s 13th president. That same love will keep him in the classroom after he retires on June 30.

“I can’t begin to describe how rewarding this experience has been,” Boren says. “And so many people have made it that way. Above all, the students. There is no satisfaction like seeing a young person filled with talent. What a privilege to share in their lives. If you kept a balance sheet on how much have they given me, their idealism and hopes and energy, I would be the one in debt.”

Boren’s desk in Evans Hall is nearly obliterated with books, mementos and photographs from friends and supporters throughout his 50 years of public service. From an office wall, a gift of calligraphy proclaims, “Do right and fear not.” The phrase, a favorite of the late OU supporter Mary Eddy Jones, has served Boren like a homing device throughout his presidency. His other favorite precept, also from Mrs. Jones, is “Take your cookies when they’re passed.”

Like his father, Boren served Oklahoma in public office. First elected to the state legislature in 1967, he is the only Oklahoman to have held the positions of representative, governor, U.S. senator and university president.

The last position may not have made it onto his résumé. In 1994, Boren had two years left in his third term in the Senate. His approval ratings were high and *The Almanac of American Politics* listed him in the top five most influential senators. There were rumors of a secretary of state position or a vice presidential nomination. Some believed he could go one step higher.

Boren’s life took a different course when OU Regent Stephen F. Bentley asked him if he would consent to being considered for the OU presidency.

The cookies were being passed, not in two years, not in eight, but right then.

“I asked myself, ‘What’s going to be the main purpose of your life going forward? Where can I be of greatest service?’ The University of Oklahoma is somewhere I could invest my life. Except for marrying Molly, it was the best decision I’ve ever made.”

Boren’s vision for the university, and equally important, his

ability to inspire and motivate others to be part of that vision, has been transformational.

In the past 20 years, the number of endowed faculty positions has increased from 94 to 550, the university boasts more National Merit Scholars than any university, public or private, in the nation and an economic engine and research campus have emerged from an empty field just south of the Norman campus. The OU-Tulsa campus and OUHSC have seen similar transformations. The university has raised \$3 billion in private support to fund scholarships, faculty endowments and capital projects. The unprecedented growth and development in academic programs was a clear case of “fearing not” and “taking the cookies.”

“The excellence that we have achieved — the students, the faculty and staff — couldn’t have happened without the huge amount of private support we have been given,” Boren says. “The effort that is being made by our supporters is phenomenal.”

Boren believes it is money well spent.

“The university has never in our history been more important than it is today. It is the guardian of intellectual freedom, a place where we learn to think for ourselves. Because a university combines the wisdom and energy of generations, it is the greatest creator of intellectual energy and creativity in our entire society.”

Boren is looking forward to that “intellectual energy” in the classroom. He hopes to teach political science in both an honors course and an open course of 200 in the fall. He will have an office in the student union just off Beard Lounge, where he will be available to students and other members of the “OU family” he has nurtured and befriended over the years.

“To be fully successful as president, you must truly love the university and truly love the students. Everything else will fall into place. You can gain experience. You learn from your mistakes, but nothing can substitute for a genuine love for the university and its students.”

To the thousands who have taken part in the president’s never-ending reach for excellence, Boren adds, “Thank you for being part of my life. I am blessed by it. And I know Molly feels the same way.”

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Lynette Lobban

The president's desk is a treasure trove of mementos from his years of public service. Behind Boren's right shoulder is a bust of former OU President George Lynn Cross, Boren's friend and mentor.



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President Boren often calls teaching the best part of his job and plans to continue heading a freshman-level political science class after retirement. “That’s the joy, that’s the connection,” he has said of teaching.



David L. Boren launched the ambitious “Reach for Excellence” campaign soon after accepting OU’s presidency. The campaign’s initial goal of \$200 million topped \$500 million. During his tenure, Boren helped OU raise more than \$3 billion in private gifts. ▶



President David L. Boren reinvigorated OU traditions and made them a vital part of campus life, including the OU Chant, written in 1938 by Jessie Lone Clarkson Gilkey. ▶



President and Mrs. Boren at his Sept. 15, 1995, inauguration as OU’s 13th president. Boren outlined a clear vision for OU’s future in which the entire community would embark upon a “quest for excellence.”

**Editor’s note:** At the unveiling of the Boren statue in April, David Levy, David Ross Boyd Professor Emeritus, said, “If you seek [Boren’s] monument, look at the student body — the steady increase in its diversity, its intellectual standing, its record of staying to graduation, the national honors it keeps winning in every area, the commitment to public service that so many have demonstrated.

Look at the faculty he is leaving behind ... look at the new colleges, the new programs that have been instituted and nursed into maturity.”

In this issue, take a look at President David L. and First Lady Molly Shi Boren’s legacy at OU — the colleges, programs, research centers, faculty and students that have raised the bar of higher education nationwide.

Thank you, David and Molly, for your service.

*Live On, University!* 🍷