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Under Cover

By DAVID BURR, '52ba

DO YOU FAVOR restricting enrolment at the University?

Do you favor lowering academic standards?

Do you favor an increase in student enrolment fees?

The possibility that one of these three policies must be adopted by the University of Oklahoma in the near future is real. If you were faced with such a dilemma, which choice would you make?

You may refuse to accept the premise that these are the only three avenues that are open to the University. You may believe that talk about lowering standards, restricting enrolment, increasing student fees is scare talk. Just another cry of "Wolf." But facts dispute such a belief.

The State Legislature is expected to approve an appropriation bill for higher education amounting to \$22,000,000 for 1957 with the possibility that this figure could be raised another million for '58-'59. This would appear to be a healthy raise over the past appropriation that called for \$19,500,000 per year.

But sharing in the higher education appropriation are 18 state institutions. The State Board of Regents for Higher Education had asked for an annual appropriation of \$27,438,908. Most observers considered the request a conservative figure. In the past three years enrolments increased 38 percent while appropriations increased 7 percent and a positive increase of approximately \$8 million was essential. Even with such a figure, University officials figured O. U.'s share would fall short of actual operating needs.

The \$22,000,000 figure, spread thin over 18 institutions, will leave O. U. far short of an operating budget that will provide for an ever-increasing enrolment. In the past five years enrolment has increased by about 600 students per year. The University counted approximately 11,500 students in the fall of 1956.

One additional ingredient enters the picture. The new appropriation offers no hope for additional buildings on the O. U. cam-

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pus. President Cross has estimated that the present physical plant is capable of accommodating less than 10,000 students and is, therefore, overburdened already.

It is obvious that the University must accept some plan of action that will compensate for a shortage of funds for its enrolment. As a result the three courses of action mentioned earlier become considerations, however reluctantly.

PLAN 1. *Restrict Enrolment.* At the present time all in-state students who satisfactorily complete their high school requirements are admitted to the University. How well equipped they are mentally or how well prepared they are academically plays no part. Perhaps few can find fault with the theory that a state institution, supported by taxes of all the people, should conform to such a policy. Although no formal plans for restricting enrolment have been put into effect, the University on recent occasion has turned students away as courses were filled to maximum capacity at the freshman level. This was not capricious. Only so many faculty members were available to teach. When they were given the maximum load, no more students could be admitted.

If a formal program were to be adopted for restricting enrolment it might include two major provisions: (1) anyone who graduated in upper 50 percent of high school class would automatically be eligible; (2) anyone in lower 50 percent who could pass an entrance exam would also be allowed to enrol.

PLAN 2. *Lower the Standards.* This program needs little thought and consideration to become a reality. Unless a great many more teachers can be added to the faculty (O. U. estimate: 71 new teachers at a cost of \$168,311), and unless present faculty can be retained through at least token pay raises (O. U. situation: \$1,569 below average of 69 state universities according to 1955-56 survey), this plan goes into effect without effort. These figures are based on the prospect of continuing present enrolment procedures.

PLAN 3. *Raise Student Fees.* At the present time in-state students pay \$84 per semester. Out-of-state students pay an additional \$132 per semester. To secure required financing, University could raise fees. Few people want to see this happen. If fees were raised enrolment would be restricted automatically, but the method of restriction is intolerable to most thinking people. Brains and the ability for college work have no direct relationship to economic potential for college. However distressing a raise in student fees may be, such a raise may be essential.

These are some of the arguments pro and con that the University must face as they look for an adequate answer for financing the work of the coming two years.

If you were faced with the dilemma as outlined here, which of the three choices would you recommend? The *Sooner Magazine* will consider all letters on the subject for publication. Send your comments to *Sooner Magazine*, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

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