

# Backlog

## THE IVORY TOWER IS CRUMBLING NO ONE NEED MOURN ITS PASSING

They began to tear down the ivory tower years ago—and not a minute too soon. The walls have crumbled every time someone has recognized that a university must be an active part of the community if it is to serve the needs of the community.

The demolition hasn't always been easy, and not everyone affected has been pleased with the results. With the protective tower gone, leaving the university exposed to public scrutiny, it has often been necessary for scholars to explain themselves to the public—and this is something most scholars don't like to do. But we are coming to the realization that this explanation is not only necessary but that it is also healthy for both the academicians and the public.

When few Oklahomans had had any experience with higher education, it was small wonder that colleges and universities were regarded with awe by some and downright suspicion by others. But today, with the majority of Oklahoma high school graduates going on to college, the public is being packed with alumni who have some basic understanding of colleges and univer-

sities. They know what questions to ask, and have a right to expect some answers.

Alumni have the right to these answers because the University is asking them for personal support and for their help in securing the support of the public at large. This support and understanding is prerequisite to the University's ambition to become the Southwest's most dynamic center of learning. Its lofty purpose cannot be achieved in isolation. It cannot be achieved solely by convincing the hard-pressed legislature that higher education needs more money—although this is a necessary part of the project. Rather the goal will be attained only when private business sees its stake in the development of the University of Oklahoma, only when individual and foundation philanthropy is convinced that the University possesses the potential, the backing, the ability to achieve its purpose.

We are asking these people, alumni and non-alumni alike, for quite a lot. They have a right to know what sort of institution the University of Oklahoma is. Only they can decide if this is the sort of institution they

wish to support. They may ask irritating questions based on rumor, hearsay or misinterpretation; they may ask embarrassing questions about weaknesses we would rather not discuss—but these questions more than any others should be answered.

This does not mean that any university should allow its financial and moral supporters to dictate who its professors will be, what or how they will teach. Nor does it imply infringement on the principles of academic freedom. Rather it is a logical extension of academic freedom to recognize the right to criticize as well as to profess.

The University of Oklahoma does not need to create false images. If the University lacks sufficient merit to stand an honest evaluation, the University should never have embarked on its ambitious Plan for Excellence in the first place. We can afford to rest our case on the facts as they exist.

There is a lot to be said for tearing down towers. To be sure, they can furnish a warm, comfortable sense of safety for their inhabitants. But in addition to serving as places of refuge, towers have also served as prisons. A prison is not a place for education to flourish, whether it be a prison built of ivory or misunderstanding. —CJB

IMAGE IS NOT AVAILABLE ONLINE DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

A paper copy of this issue is available at call number LH 1 .06S6 in Bizzell Memorial Library.