

THE BRAIN DRAIN

By HAROLD J. COUSINS

THE RECENT STUDY on U.S. education, in which the OU Graduate College received "adequate plus" and "acceptable plus" ratings (*see "The Graduate School Report"*), has direct bearing on one of Oklahoma's major problems—the loss of trained and skilled, creative and imaginative youth. Oklahoma is facing, in Sen. Fred Harris' words, a "brain drain." The loss of college graduates to other states is quite costly and can be measured morally and culturally as well as in practical and commercial terms.

In moral and cultural terms, Oklahoma is losing the creative imagination, the cultural contribution, and the moral idealism that these young people can give our state. The state loses, but more important we who want to stay in Oklahoma are the main losers because we are denied the opportunity to share their ideas and vitality in the process of building a better, more attractive Oklahoma community.

In practical and commercial terms, Oklahoma is losing its most valuable resource. The "brain drain" is just as wasteful and costly as letting our lakes dry up, our land erode, or our oil flow underground, untapped and unused.

It is ironic that while we have managed to use and conserve such resources as land and water, we have not found a way to use and conserve our most abundant resource—our college-trained youth. Why do we allow this resource to be drained from the state?

It is this resource that attracts industry, provides revenue for the public sector, provides profits for the private sector, provides a market for goods and services and thus helps create more jobs.

The "brain drain" is a major problem. What can be done about it? Part of the solution is for industry to provide more jobs for college graduates. Thus we need to attract new industry, industry which has a large demand for college-educated men and women. The ability to attract this kind of industry is related to the quality of the higher education system within the state, particularly the graduate and research facilities. Without any desire to magnify our problems in graduate education, we must face the fact that an "adequate plus" rating sadly is one more "negative plus" in the state's educational image. The rating could hurt our efforts to bring quality industry to Oklahoma.

The picture is not entirely negative, however. The report and the subsequent publicity can serve the positive function of dramatically documenting to our political leaders and the public that action must be taken to provide the graduate facilities with the necessary funds to perform the increased services demanded of them. The fact that graduate enrollment has grown and thereby increased the demand for graduate facilities is in itself no problem.

It actually is indicative of a healthy graduate program. The problem, then, is not a question of *academic* quality but rather of *political* quality.

If our political leaders act upon this situation as soon as possible and rectify it, we will not have any serious problem at the graduate level. However, if they do not, then our image nationally will be greatly damaged and the "brain drain" will not be significantly checked. All of us in the academic and business communities who have an interest in the graduate facilities in Oklahoma should make our concern quite clear to those seeking political office in November. I think it should be one of the "Moore" important issues, or should I say "Bartlett" important issues, of the gubernatorial campaign. Those concerned should ask the candidates to take a specific stand on the issue. It will enable us to see the kind of imagination and boldness the new governor may or may not bring to the office.

The report on U.S. graduate education, although arbitrary and incomplete in my opinion, nevertheless ranked practically every other Big Eight school above OU. This suggests some interesting questions to me. Why is it that our neighboring states, particularly Kansas and Iowa, can more successfully finance their graduate programs? If Kansas can do it, why can't Oklahoma? If we can, why aren't we? And if we are going to do it, when do we begin?

Time is a factor. These states are competing with us not only for quality industry but also for the young talent necessary to such industry and in doing so, tend to increase the "brain drain." The problem, then, is partially the result of a vicious circle of industrial and academic anemia. We have anemic academic resources because we have anemic industrial resources which places limitations on academic growth. Industrial growth would not only increase both private and government grants but would provide a larger tax base which could be used to improve the educational situation.

One of the factors, however, in attracting industry is having universities with graduate programs of quality. The circle of industrial and academic anemia can be broken and cured with proper funding of graduate programs.

The vicious circle can become an upward spiral toward academic and industrial abundance. To cause such a change is a task we should all address ourselves to. If the vicious circle and the "brain drain" problems are to be solved, cooperation between the business and academic communities is essential.

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