To: David L. Boren, President

From: Budget Council

The Budget Council would like to express our sincere appreciation for your leadership and advocacy for the University during the last four very difficult budget years.

Although the national economy and, in particular, the Oklahoma economy, is showing signs of improvement, indications are that the University will continue to face a difficult budget situation for some time to come, due in large part to increases in fixed costs and continued reduction in the proportion of the budget underwritten by the state government. In this report we would like to offer our perspective on possible ways forward from here, based on the input we have obtained not only from officials representing many different sectors of the University, but from conversations with our colleagues and students.

One message we have encountered consistently from those we have consulted in our deliberations has been that much of the progress the University has made over the years has been due to your skillful negotiation of the complicated and difficult budget process, in which competing ideas and pressures from a variety of state agencies must be reconciled. In the spirit of the Guiding Principles for Budgetary Actions approved by the Faculty Senate in May 2010 (see attached), we offer these suggestions in hopes they will help you as you continue to navigate these waters.

As you know, the University has implemented permanent budget cuts of around 5% each year for the past few years and is planning to institute further permanent cuts. Their cumulative effect has been such that there is now little left to cut without making some very hard decisions. Many departments have dealt with the cuts by reducing their one-time instructional support (OTIS) budgets. Students are facing larger class sizes and less interaction with faculty as temporary faculty lines and adjunct positions have been eliminated. This, together with the hiring freeze that has been in place since 2008, has meant a concomitant increase in faculty teaching load, in the form of either more classes or more students per class.

As faculty members we have striven to maintain the quality of our teaching in these new circumstances while at the same time improving and expanding our research enterprise. The Aspire 2020 planning framework has set our institution an ambitious goal: to become the nation’s foremost public comprehensive research university of our size. Our progress to date has resulted in the University of Oklahoma—being classified, for the first time in 2011, as an RU/VH (very high research activity) university by the Carnegie Foundation. We think that increased funding for research is likely to continue to be one
bright spot in the budget picture in coming years. But for this to happen, faculty members need to be free to devote time to instructing graduate students and involving them in their research projects. Since graduate courses have relatively small enrollments, and may even be one-on-one reading courses between a faculty member and a student, faculty generally have to undertake these specialized graduate instruction in addition to their regular teaching duties. Therefore we feel that, for the health of the University research mission, it’s imperative that instructional money not be further cut.

We believe that reductions should not come from staff resources, which are essential to the smooth everyday functioning of the University. Although private funding has secured new programs and facilities for research, we have not been able to grow the research infrastructure to support it, which can result in new programs cannibalizing resources from areas of existing strength.

In addition, faculty and staff are highly concerned with changes in the benefits and retirement programs. In the past many departments were able to attract highly acclaimed faculty with lure of the University’s stellar benefits program. Changes in retirement benefits and compensation have significantly restricted the ability of departments to attract and hire premier faculty.

As proposed in the Faculty Senate’s Budgetary Guidelines, we request that you clearly establish how any further permanent budget cuts are related to long-term issues before instituting them. Once they have been established as related to long-term issues then we would like to work with you to come up with measures to address them without impacting the university’s core mission.

Sincerely,

The Budget Council

Susan E. Hahn, Chair