CHAPTER THREE

A TIME OF CRISIS

As changes in the University’s academic side took place in the opening years of the thirteenth decade, paralleled by changes in student interests and activities, there were many things about the University that remained essentially the same. Indeed, general continuity in institutional structure and operations followed President Watkins’s taking office in 1977. To be sure, adjustments in administration were made to accommodate the University to changing circumstances. For example, in late 1977 Judy Smithson was appointed coordinator of handicapped services (renamed later as disability concerns) to bring the school into compliance with federal and state regulations and to direct programs for handicapped students and staff; David Strand came from Southwest Missouri State University in 1978 to fill the position of executive officer to the president; the office of secretary of the university, held by Charles Morris, was renamed vice president for administrative services in 1980 to more accurately reflect the responsibilities of that part of central administration; in 1981 a single director of intercollegiate athletics, Dan Ghormley, was appointed in place of the separate directors of men’s and women’s sports. Then, too, major appointments in central administration and the colleges were required to fill vacancies created by resignations or retirements. Two vice presidencies fell vacant in 1979. Dr. Jack Horner resigned as vice president and provost that spring to become president of Central Missouri State University, and Dr. Leon Boothe, historian and dean of arts and sciences of George Mason University, was appointed to fill that important position. The new provost began his duties on February 1, 1980. After 32 years with the University, Dr.
Francis B. Belshe, vice president for business and finance, retired in August, 1979 and later the next year Dr. Strand was named to succeed him in that position. Another retirement in 1981 was that of Dr. Joe Kraus, longtime director of Milner Library, whose place was filled in 1982 by Dr. Fred Peterson, formerly library director at Catholic University of America. When Dr. Stan Rives left at the end of 1980 to be provost of Eastern Illinois University, Dr. Gene Jabker was promoted to associate provost and dean of instruction. In 1980 it was necessary to fill several college deanships. For continuing education and public service, Dr. Ed Anderson of industrial technology succeeded Harold Crouse; in the college of education, Dr. Ben Hubbard, chairman of educational administration and foundations, took over from Robert Burnham; in the college of business, Dr. Andrew Nappi, from St. Cloud State University, replaced Dr. Frank Harrison. Dr. Virginia Lee Owen, former chair of the economics department, was appointed arts and sciences dean in 1982 when Dr. Edward Streeter returned to teaching.

Unlike the disruptive institutional experiences of the early '70s, these major appointments in the first years of Dr. Watkins' presidency, and others of lesser importance, maintained the continuity and stability of the University's administrative and collegial structure. They were not, however, the only elements of continuity. As the decade of the 1980s began, continuity also prevailed in less desirable ways. The critical issues of budget and student/town relations remained and indeed would become far worse before there was any relief. But while the period 1980 to 1984 was in some respects a time of institutional crisis because of those problem areas, the basic educational functions of the University — teaching, research, and public service — continued to develop and expand in positive if limited ways, contributing to the progressive improvement of the University.

A budget crisis hit the University in 1981, as it did all state schools, as a result of a decline in state revenue and a corresponding reduction in state spending. While the immediate cause of the state’s fiscal problems and thus ISU’s budget crisis was the economic recession of that year, it had been
clear for some time to President Watkins that the University's financial condition was precarious. When past budget increases failed to equal the rate of inflation, which occurred in fiscal years 1978, 1979, and 1980, the University was forced to reallocate scarce resources as best it could to cover rising electricity and heating costs and the higher prices of everything else required to operate the school. Dr. Watkins repeatedly informed the Board of Regents of the consequences of ISU's underfunded condition and the inadequate level of state support of higher education. To stay within its budget, the University had to make real sacrifices. In addition to foregoing much needed maintenance on buildings, salary increases for all were less than the inflation rate, and positions were even in danger of being cut. The popular notion must be rejected, he warned the Regents, "that there is in the budget of ISU or any of our universities any fat that can be pared out... They do not know where they can scrape more out without damaging the quality of instruction." When it was claimed that universities could help themselves by increasing faculty "productivity," President Watkins answered with data showing that ISU faculty already carried the heaviest teaching load of any state school. During the fall of 1979, President Watkins pressed the University's case for greater funding in speeches to business organizations, professional groups, and alumni, and in meetings with Central Illinois legislators.

In 1979-1980 an added financial concern was thrust on the central administration. The Board of Higher Education directed that over a period of time all Illinois public universities must cease using tax revenue to pay the utilities and fringe benefits of employees working in dormitories and student unions. Instead, those "auxiliary" components of the University's operation had to become entirely self-supporting, which meant that ISU students would have to pay an estimated additional $300 per year in higher room and board rates and fees. The concern of administrators like Neal Gamsky, vice president and dean of student affairs, as well as President Watkins, was the potential negative impact on enrollment and dorm occupancy levels because of the added cost to students and their families. An increase of residence hall rates could not be
avoided, and although ARH student leaders helpfully suggested cuts in services to keep the increase down, room and board costs jumped nearly 36 percent from 1978 to 1980.

Placing the union/auditorium's financial condition on a solid basis was a greater challenge, only complicated by the end of the general revenue subsidy. In plain fact, the union's total revenue from all sources did not allow it to offer services to the university community as expected. Greater revenue was needed. The student union fee could be raised, as it was in 1979 and again in 1980, but only increased student and public utilization of the union's facilities would solve the problem. Under Dean Gamsky's leadership, Chris Schwelle, appointed director of the union in 1979, chaired a university-wide task force appointed in 1981 to explore ways to increase student and public use of the union. Among the many recommendations made, the most important were to make the union's focus that of a student center (including a name change), to redecorate public areas to make them more attractive, and to establish a variety of revenue-generating services as the primary source of additional income. Corridors and public rooms were painted in light colors, new lighting was installed, and more study areas opened to make the building appealing to students. During the celebration in February, 1982, of the University's 125th anniversary, the union was renamed the Bone Student Center, in honor of ISU's eighth presidential couple, Dr. and Mrs. Robert G. Bone; the auditorium was dedicated to Dr. and Mrs. Samuel E. Braden, ninth presidential pair. An electronic carillon located atop DeGarmo Hall, a gift of Marie Jessa, was also dedicated that day. By the fall semester of that same year, a bookstore, video arcade, travel agency, and a McDonald's restaurant opened for business, providing that extra income to assure the union's financial stability.

A particular concern to President Watkins was the state's failure in 1979 and 1980 to provide adequate salary increases for faculty, staff, and civil service. The state's penury, needless to say, was of even greater concern to ISU employees. The salary problem was a product of both long term underfunding and an immediate loss of purchasing power to inflation. A bewildering array of figures can be cited to show the disparity, but it is
enough to rely on an estimate made in 1980 by the Board of Regents's staff that since 1973 price inflation exceeded salary raises by 30 percent, and in the immediate period alone the figure was 8 percent. As President Watkins liked to remind public audiences and the Regents, a *Time* magazine economic analysis in early 1979 concluded that among national occupational groups, university professors had lost the most to inflation. The administration's efforts to gain extra funds to make up some of the difference were generally unsuccessful. Beginning in 1978 and repeated through 1980, substantial funding requests were submitted to the Board of Higher Education to adjust the pay scale of civil service employees, but to no avail. While the Regents accepted the principle that salary increases should equal the inflation rate, President Watkins in April, 1980 argued for more to compensate in a small way for past disparities. But the reality of state finances was that by the time the University's appropriation passed the legislature, what had been initially approved for pay raises was reduced to less than the inflation rate. President Watkins was able to provide some extra funds — he called it "operation bootstrap" — by allocating to salaries some formerly used to subsidize auxiliary enterprises, but these monies were not enough and did not last very long. In spite of the University's best efforts, both civil service and faculty took action on their own to win greater pay raises. By the fall of 1978 a number of clerical workers formed themselves into the ISU Employees Bargaining Association for the purpose of establishing a collective bargaining unit for over 500 clerical, technical, and medical employees of the University. The group, however, was unsuccessful in winning recognition. In the spring of 1980 a group of 100 faculty and staff organized the Ad Hoc Committee for Salary Improvement to lobby the governing boards and the General Assembly to raise salaries. Both efforts, however, were no more successful in gaining higher pay raises than the efforts of the Board of Regents or President Watkins.

It cannot be said that the governing boards were unaware or insensitive to the University's budget problems. The Board of Regents agreed that ISU was underfunded and approved requests for additional funds beyond the ordinary increases. The Board of Higher Education, judged by administrators and
faculty to be less sympathetic than the Regents, did include extra monies for ISU in its budget recommendations to the Governor in the late 70s. The University's budget problem was the result of the state government's inability or unwillingness to adequately support public higher education. As every administrator in the University was painfully aware, inflation each year from 1977 through 1981 exceeded the increase in the state's appropriation of general revenue money for higher education. With fewer "real" dollars to work with each year, the BHE's allocations to the state's twelve public universities tended to be even handed, each receiving about the same incremental increase as the others. As President Watkins told the faculty on several occasions and then forcefully pointed out to the Regents in September, 1981 the BHE's allocation practice meant that the gap between the "rich and the poor" universities only grew wider.

One way the Board of Higher Education sought to offset the shortfall in general revenue funds was to recommend tuition increases to the governing boards, a policy which has continued to the present. For the first time since 1971, Illinois State's tuition increased in 1977-78, with further increases every year thereafter except 1978-79. From $404 in 1976, tuition rose to $680 in 1981, a 68 percent increase. The whole matter was a sensitive issue, involving the working relationship between the Regents and the BHE over who should set tuition policy, and between student leaders, university presidents, and the governing boards. From the first tuition hike, students sitting on the Board of Regents and officers of the Student Association voiced their opposition, arguing that the increased cost would force some students to drop out of the University. During board discussions in the spring of 1979, Heidi Vorhees, student regent, and Mike Donahue, SA president, told of the frustrations felt by ISU students over the rising costs of getting an education and the difficulty they experienced in receiving financial aid. President Watkins also disliked raising tuition, but he went along with the increases because the University had to get the money from some source to raise faculty salaries. When they were unsuccessful in preventing board approval of a 10 percent hike for fall, 1979, Vorhees and Donahue joined student leaders from other
state universities in planning campus protests and a demonstration in Springfield. While only a small number appeared for the rally at the state capitol, ISU "Lemon Day" on April 25, 1979 was more effective. Eight hundred ISU students came to the Quad to sign their names on lemons, symbol of protest, for delivery to the state legislature to remind the members to reject the tuition increase. But it didn't work, and tuition revenue became an increasingly vital part of the University's budget.

Another way the Board of Higher Education tried to deal with the state's insufficient funding of higher education was the policy of "targeted enrollment," adopted in January, 1980. According to this policy, universities judged to be underfunded by BHE's cost analysis — Illinois State, Northern Illinois, and Eastern Illinois — would lower their enrollments a prescribed number of students but be permitted to include in their budget requests the tuition monies of those "lost" students. For the fall of 1980, Illinois State's target enrollment was to be 385 less than its projection. Interestingly, the University was just as concerned about enrollment but in the opposite direction of the new BHE policy; it wanted to maintain enrollment stability. Since the early 70s, demographic experts had been predicting that enrollments in higher education would decline well into the '80s because of smaller high school graduating classes, raising the possibility of cut-backs in programs and faculty positions, and placing bond revenue obligations in jeopardy. Illinois State no less than other colleges and universities searched for ways to keep its enrollment up. Staff of the office of admissions actively recruited students in high schools and community colleges throughout the state with special attention to minorities. The college of continuing education as well as academic departments scheduled evening and weekend courses for the convenience of working adults. Greater emphasis was placed on academic counseling and assistance to students, especially freshmen, to improve their chances of remaining in school. Art White, dean of the Graduate School, with the cooperation of college deans and departments, pushed recruitment to increase the ratio of graduate students to undergraduates on campus. By all these means, plus a favorable geographic
location and improved academic standards, the University’s enrollment, still 90 percent undergraduate, remained stable at slightly more than 19,000 and then inched upward to 19,576 when the BHE announced its enrollment policy.

President Watkins disliked that policy because it was at best only a partial solution to the University’s budget problem. As he told the Regents at the time, “Faculty do not have reasonable loads. The student-faculty ratio is not reasonable. We are operating at a level of funding not conducive to quality education.” Instead, as was forcefully stated in the Academic Plan of 1980 and in his September, 1981 letter to the Board of Regents, he wanted the BHE to reconsider its allocation procedures and develop a more equitable scheme for distribution of available resources among the state’s public universities. Only when that happened would Illinois State University be treated fairly. Meanwhile, the University tried to follow the BHE’s directive. An “enrollment target committee” was appointed and freshman admissions for the fall were closed in early May, 1980, for the first time since 1972. But enrollment still increased by 141 to 19,717, because of retention. It wasn’t until 1982, with an even earlier closing date, that enrollment finally declined and then by only 238 students. By that time, however, it didn’t matter: the nation and Illinois were in the depths of an economic recession, and the University faced a budget crisis that transcended the problem of underfunding.

The budget crisis of Illinois higher education and of ISU ran from early 1981 through the summer of 1983. It began with the BHE’s budget recommendations in January, 1981, which provided that ISU would have to cover 10 percent of a planned salary increase, pegged at 10.5 percent, by reallocating monies from other places in its budget. Although the Academic Senate immediately passed a resolution criticizing the BHE’s method by which the faculty would receive a raise, it was announced that in order to comply with the BHE’s directive, the various units that comprised the University’s six major administrative areas would have seven and half percent less money in the coming year. A warning was also issued that deeper cuts might be necessary. Within a month further reductions became a reality. While the University budget as presented to the state
legislature increased by slightly more than seven percent, part of the increase resulted from a 14 percent tuition hike and part from “productivity” cuts in certain areas of university operations. As President Watkins informed the university community on May 1, the University’s base budget had been reduced by over $815,000.

What happened in Illinois that spring and summer of 1981 was, of course, little different from the experience in neighboring states and the common effects of a lower level of federal support of higher education. The prospects for the immediate future did not look good. To cope with the bleak realities of declining state revenues as the nation’s and Illinois’s economy continued to weaken in 1981, President Watkins appointed a “Needs and Priorities Committee” on May 1 to make recommendations on how the University could best balance its needs with its resources. The Committee (consisting of the four vice presidents — Boothe, Strand, Gamsky, and Morris — Ed Streeter and Jack Razor representing the college deans, and Ira Cohen, chair of the university financial exigency committee) was to evaluate and coordinate institutional priorities for the University’s development as a basis for making budgetary decisions. The Needs and Priorities Committee, meeting weekly throughout the summer and fall, attacked the related problems of setting institutional priorities and the likelihood of a budget reduction. But while that work went on, the University made known its financial needs to the Board of Regents. For 1982-83, to attack the old problems of underfunding and space deficiencies, it asked for a 15 percent increase in its operating budget and nearly $19 million in capital money for projects previously approved but not funded, including a major remodeling of Cook Hall, oldest building on campus. In a letter to the Regents, President Watkins made it clear that ISU’s long-term financial problems resulted from the BHE’s practice of giving each university a similar incremental increase in funding. The Regents agreed with the University’s contention, he wrote, but regretably few dollars followed expressions of support.

It was, of course, a forlorn hope in the fall of 1981, considering the state’s deteriorating economy, that anything like what
the university needed would be immediately forthcoming. Plans were made to close the university offices over the coming Christmas-New Year holidays, and measures to conserve energy, already in place, were vigorously pushed. It was at this time that timer-switches were installed in classrooms as part of energy conservation. Both President Watkins and Provost Boothe discussed the possible difficulties in talks to the university community, conveying a “chilling message” about the state’s revenue problems. “If the budget scenario develops as it seems to be,” Boothe told a AAUP audience in mid-November, “this university faces the hardest years it has had since the Depression.” Perhaps that was too strong, though the pessimism of the central administration was justified, and the Needs and Priorities Committee, which the provost chaired, prepared for the worst.

The worst came true in the first three months of 1982 when the BHE’s and the governor’s budget allocations for higher education were announced. Governor Thompson had already ordered a general “belt tightening” by all state agencies and halted all new construction by the time he submitted his budget message to the General Assembly. In plain terms, the governor reduced support of Illinois public higher education by 2.8 percent from the previous year. For Illinois State University, it meant that $1.3 million in reductions and reallocations in its operations became necessary; for the faculty, staff, and civil service, it meant the hope of only a token raise on January 1, 1983. Even before the governor sent his budget to the legislature, President Watkins reported in detail to the university community the recommendations of the Needs and Priorities Committee. Administrative leaders had suspected since the fall that some reductions would be necessary and had expressed their wish that they be selective rather than merely across-the-board, a view shared by the Needs and Priorities Committee. Most of the reductions/reallocations came from administrative, maintenance, and custodial areas, thus protecting academic programs as much as possible. In addition to leaving many things undone, thirty-seven positions in all categories were cut or left unfilled, affecting such supports areas as Administrative Services, the Graduate office, Media Services, and the campus
radio station, WGLT. Some positions were merged, such as having a single director of museums and galleries and combining the separate directors of men's and women's athletics into one position. The Illinois Quarterly was dropped. Several intercollegiate sports were included as part of the economy move: women's badminton, and men's gymnastics and swimming were dropped, while men's and women's tennis were combined. Other programs affected by the reductions were: International Studies, Instructional Development, colleges of education and fine arts, Shakespeare Festival, and the Center for Ethnic Studies. All of these decisions represented substantial reductions, and as President Watkins reminded the campus, Illinois State was "already 'cost effective' everywhere and when we cut, we cut into muscle, not fat."

The campus was stunned by the extent of the required cuts, and some elements expressed criticism of specific decisions. Supporters of WGLT complained that the administration was gutting the radio station's operation. Minority faculty and students saw something sinister in the elimination of the Center for Ethnic Studies as a unit, and 30 black students showed their opposition by staging a short sit-in in the president's office and a demonstrating the next day at the ceremonies commemorating the University's 125th anniversary. As was made clear, however, only the position of director was cut, not the many and vital activities sponsored by the center, such as Black History Month, Greater Performance Cultural Series, Interdenominational Youth Choir, and Black Student Union, which were simply transferred to an assistant provost. The Student Association, with Peter Kroner and Steve Henriksen in the lead, organized student rallies and a letter writing campaign to protest the proposed state and federal cuts in financial aid which could reduce access to a college education for many young people from low income families. The largest gathering came during "Financial Awareness Week," April 12 to 16, when about 200 students and faculty marched from the union to the quad at noon to hear a talk by President Watkins. His message was clear: he joined with President Ikenberry of the University of Illinois in calling for a tax increase to produce greater general revenue to support higher education and other state programs.
In contrast, on another part of the quad that noon, a larger group watched the annual milkmaid and milk-chugging contests sponsored by the Ag Club. Later in April, clerks and typists who were members of the Employees Bargaining Association staged a “balloon” protest over the pay freeze expected in the coming year. The Ad Hoc Committee for Salary Improvement, chaired by Hibbert Roberts of political science and now grown to 300 faculty and staff, sent letters to Springfield in support of a tax increase to end the rapid downward slide of higher education. But in the end, these protests in the spring semester could not alter the fact that the state was short of general revenue. The University’s budget for the coming year, despite inflation, was to be nearly the same as for the year ending. A salary increase of only three percent would be available on January 1, 1983 rather than August 15, 1982, if funds were available.

At the same time that the Needs and Priorities Committee faced the daunting task of recommending reductions and reallocations in university spending, it also began in 1981-82 the equally challenging work of identifying and spelling out goals and priorities to guide institutional development. Planning for the future was nothing new, as the University’s history testifies. In the more recent past, there were the elaborate documents of the 1950s and 1960s which charted the University’s physical growth and transition from single to multi-purpose. Beginning in the early 1970’s, to comply with requirements of the governing boards, annual academic plans covering a five period became the focus of institutional planning. Prepared by a large administrative-faculty committee and reviewed by the Academic Senate and approved by the president, the academic plans defined the University’s mission, stated general academic objectives, specified new programs for which the University would seek approval, and reviewed existing programs. To the faculty, the academic plans were the University’s most important planning documents, for they reflected the aspirations of departments and colleges, a sort of “wish list,” for new program development. There was, of course, the larger question of the University’s identity and essential character, which the labels “multipurpose” and “diverse” contained in the planning documents did not reveal; nor did those designations provide much
help in charting the future. But agreement on more meaningful alternatives was not easily accomplished. In the summer of 1980 a faculty "seminar," chaired by John Sharpham, examined the problem of identity and mission from various perspectives without much success. The group did little more than to uncover a diversity of faculty views and conclude that a clear statement of institutional purpose and scope would be helpful in planning. Other segments of the University also had planning documents, and even before the budget crisis broke in 1981, President Watkins saw the need to bring together the various parallel planning efforts to give greater clarity to the University's identity and objectives. In early 1979 he appointed a "long-range planning steering committee," chaired by David Strand, then his executive assistant, to review planning statements from all major non-academic units and then meld them into a single document, compatible with the academic plan, for the whole university. But before that work could be completed, the budget crisis broke and the necessity of establishing institutional priorities became paramount.

In order to establish priorities, however, it was first necessary to define those goals to which the University was committed. The Needs and Priorities Committee grappled with the problem, when it wasn't dealing with budgetary matters, during the 1981-82 school year. It was difficult work, separating out specific short-term objectives, which were common to most planning documents, from university-wide interests. Slowly, nine broad goals emerged from committee discussions, each with a set of subsidiary objectives by which the goal might be realized. The major categories covered instruction, breadth of programs, planning, research, public service, enrollment, university operations, employee welfare, and cocurricular activities. At the end of April, 1982, the committee's preliminary recommendations were published, with open hearings scheduled for the fall term. The eight hearings held in September and October, though sparsely attended, revealed a diversity of critical opinion on various elements of future university development. Those who presented position papers, among other things, wanted greater funding of research and graduate programs, argued for higher academic standards, insisted that
A strong equal opportunity/affirmative action statement be included, and that public service functions and cocurricular activities were as important as teaching and research; a few went so far as to declare the whole planning process as inadequate. Perhaps the most thoughtful statement was given by Michael Schermer, an assistant dean of student affairs, on the importance of a total educational environment to student growth and development, which included activities outside the classroom supplementary to academic programs. By the end of the year the committee had completed its editorial revisions, especially eliminating those references to budgetary contingencies which everyone understood, and submitted its recommendations to President Watkins. He released the "Needs and Priorities Statement" to the university community on January 14, 1983 as an "enumeration of the basic assumptions which will guide us in the months and years ahead."

The Statement was a short document comprised of eight major goals and 34 subsidiary goals, presented in a concise and summary fashion but which left no doubt about the University’s development in an era of budgetary constraints. The theme common to all the goals emphasized that priority would be given to quality of programs, faculty, students, support services, and administrative operations. The University was described as a multi-purpose institution whose programs must be broad-based and diverse. As such, its central mission was to provide high quality educational programs to its students and the people of the state. To realize that mission, quality research and public service activities of faculty were essential complements to instruction, and comprehensive programs of learning experiences and services outside the classroom were complementary to the educational mission. To sustain quality academic programs, the University must maintain certain support services for faculty and students, even at the expense of other activities. While stability in total enrollment will be sought, there should be increased numbers of minority, non-traditional, international, out-of-state, and graduate students. Finally, employee welfare in all aspects should be promoted. In a preface to the Statement, the committee stressed that what it had produced was not final, but represented instead a point on a planning continuum, an
"active process by which the University can assess its current position, identify future alternatives, [and] select ways to achieve goals and objectives. . . ." But everything seemed to hang on money. Two weeks after he released the "Needs and Priorities Statement," President Watkins addressed another message to the campus: Illinois State University was faced once more with serious fiscal problems that threatened to further diminish the quality of its operations.

The budget problems of 1982-83 were a continuation of the financial difficulties of the previous year. The University's budget, no larger than fiscal '82, yet strained by inflation and past reductions and reallocations, was stretched to the limit to cover the school's programs and operations. The state's financial condition worsened in the fall as the national recession deepened, state unemployment rose, and Illinois general revenues declined. Despite the prevailing gloom, the University administration, with resolute determination to move forward rather than remain in place, presented its funding requests for fiscal '84 to the Board of Regents, requests which called for substantial increases in both operating and capital funds. But no one was kidding themselves about the prospects of success. At the same Regents's meeting which approved ISU's budget requests, the board revised its financial exigency policy in preparation for the worst; a week later, Dr. Frank Matsler, the Regents's executive director, called for a tax increase to save higher education; and by November, rumors out of Springfield spoke of a serious shortfall of revenue. In his annual message to the university, on November 30, 1982, President Watkins tried to shrug off the bleak circumstances. "So we have problems," he said. "Everyone does, and we are no exception. Some of the problems can be helped with additional dollars; others we will solve with our ingenuity. We will give our best efforts, and . . . we have reason for facing the future with optimism."

The next day the crisis struck. Governor James Thompson announced a treasury deficiency of $200 million and asked the legislature for authority to cut state spending. The Board of Regents on December 9 deferred the 3 percent pay raise due on January 1 until sometime in the spring. On December 10 the governor "impounded" two percent of the University's budget,
or nearly one million dollars, a rescission that came to be called “Jaws I.” In the weeks that followed, top administrators kept the campus informed of budget decisions, squelching rumors of staff layoffs and a loss the 1983 summer session. Worries over funding shortages deepened with the start of the second semester. The Needs and Priorities Committee prepared for a possible second rescission. In addition to the earlier spending cuts, it now recommended a hold on future equipment purchases and unfilled positions, and discussed staff reductions and university policy on disestablishment of academic programs. Near the end of January, President Watkins told the faculty, “We no longer can assert that the quality of education we offer is ‘as good as ever’; we must admit that our effectiveness is being diminished.” The strain began to show in various ways. Students were angered by waiting lists for required business classes. College deans and department heads reported on poor faculty morale caused by the cutbacks, heavy teaching loads, low pay, and lack of public support. “It’s a matter of survival now,” one faculty member told a local newspaper reporter. “That question was never raised before. It’s not a question of how to proceed, but rather how to maintain what we have.” Faculty who could, left for jobs in other states.

Among the leaders of Illinois higher education, an increase in state taxes was the most talked of remedy for the funding plight of the state’s universities. The governing boards, including the Board of Higher Education for the first time in its history, called on the governor and the state legislature to find ways to increase state revenues. Along with other university presidents, Dr. Watkins carried the message to alumni meetings, area legislators, and local civic groups. He urged faculty and students to express their support for a tax increase. “Such a position is not self-serving,” he said, “but state-serving, for the degradation of our state universities would be a tragedy for Illinois.” Higher education’s prospects without a tax increase was revealed at the beginning of February. In his “State of the State” message, the Governor gave the legislature a choice between a tax increase package or a “dooms day” budget which would reduce all state spending. The state’s universities
would be required to reduce staff, cut programs, and turn away students. According to the calculations of the Needs and Priorities Committee, the University would lose 91 positions in all categories. One university group, the Ad Hoc Committee for Salary Improvement, was already engaged in an extensive letter-writing campaign. Similar groups at other universities were also involved in the lobbying effort. Happily, these efforts were successful in arousing the public and finally persuading the legislature at the last moment to adopt "tax reform" measures designed to increase state revenues over the coming year. By the first week of July, 1983, the University's budget crisis was over, at least for the time being.

While the crisis was over, the budget problems of those years affected Illinois State in a variety of ways. The ordinary operations of the University were cramped, and shortages cropped up everywhere. In addition to some cutbacks in personnel, salaries for faculty, staff, and civil service declined further, relative to other comparable universities. The salary issue created a serious morale problem, resulting in the loss of top people to better situations elsewhere and energizing an attempt to unionize the faculty. Purchases of equipment vital to academic programs, such as in computer science and industrial technology, were deferred or out of date cast-offs from business and industry were obtained as a stop-gap measure. Book and periodical orders for Milner Library were cut back. Maintenance of the physical plant was postponed. The rehabilitation of certain buildings, such as Cook Hall, Fell Hall, and DeGramo Hall, to relieve some of the University's critical space needs was pushed into the future. Compared to visible institutional development of the past, and despite President Watkins's best efforts to be optimistic, it seemed that the University was being forced to come to a standstill because of the state's revenue problems. One of the few bright events of those crisis months was the completion of the agricultural laboratory building, dedicated on May 19, 1982 in honor of Clarence R. Ropp, long-time supporter of agricultural education in Illinois and at ISU.

Throughout those months of financial crisis, the local community's reaction to the University's plight was mixed.
When President Watkins told local businessmen that they had more to lose from a cut in the University’s budget than from a tax increase because of the major importance of Illinois State’s spending to the local economy, the response to the President’s request for local support of the needed tax increase was hardly enthusiastic. In a survey of businessmen by a reporter for the Pantagraph, one responded that perhaps only half of the business community were persuaded by the president’s argument. The local newspaper editorialized that the University needed to demonstrate that it was using to the best advantage the money it did receive before greater taxes were justified. The public’s understanding of Illinois State University, the editorial claimed, was that the faculty was overpaid and underworked, a suggestion that the University’s financial problems could be solved by increased “productivity” rather than higher taxes. The University replied immediately in a series of essays explaining its various activities, emphasizing the heavy work load of all personnel and how falling morale resulting from budget problems affected what the University could do. It was an unsatisfactory exchange, reminiscent in tone of community judgment in the ’60s when the University changed from a sleepy “Normal” school into a major institution. Illinois State University’s local “public image” was still a compound of positives and negatives, determined by individual experiences and perceptions. On the one hand, the University’s multicultural offerings in lectures, music, art, theater, and athletics, sometimes in overwhelming number, were judged to be major assets in the community; on the other hand, the University — its people and its activities — represented a little understood world apart from the community.

That love-hate nature of town/gown relations was evident in the continuing problems of off-campus student parties. It was, of course, an issue which aggravated both sides. Following the demonstration of October 2, 1980, serious efforts were made by student leaders, the university administration, and Normal
officials to resolve the problems of noise, litter, property damage, and underage drinking. Both the Community Improvement Committee, chaired by Jude Boyer of Student Affairs, and an ad hoc committee of University personnel and Normal officials studied the problem, listening to the complaints of town residents and students about each other. It was agreed that an educational program was needed to inform students, especially new ones, how to party without violating local and state laws and to find alternative social activities. Various things were done in the year that followed. The Union Board and the town co-sponsored two concerts for students, special city buses to the shopping malls were subsidized for the spring and fall by the Normal Council, announcements in the Vidette gave the rules for “legal” parties, the Student Association’s “party patrol” worked with Normal police to control noisy parties, and the University intensified its campaign against alcohol abuse. In the early fall, 1981, always the prime party time, the informational program directed at new students was stepped up, a variety of alternative campus social activities was offered, and the town put on a weekend street dance for young people. The Student Association and the Normal Police Department sponsored neighborhood-get-togethers to bring students and townspeople together to talk out their differences. Yet the Normal Town Council, in response to continuing complaints of townspeople and with the support of the community committees, also made it clear that large uncontrollable parties would not be tolerated. It passed a noise ordinance and supported the intention of the town’s new police chief, David Lehr, to bring student parties under control.

Probably no one believed that such measures would cause student parties to disappear. Published reports showed that other university towns in the state were experiencing the same difficulties, and that alcohol abuse was a growing problem among college students everywhere. A survey of both students and townspeople in the spring of 1981 confirmed what everyone seemed to know: large majorities opposed each other on the matter. It was also learned at the same time that the consequences of too much partying could be especially tragic: a nineteen year old student, drinking at a party on Main Street,
pitched off a balcony and died. For a while, the autumn and spring gatherings of students on weekends to drink beer and listen to music seemed generally more manageable, though protests of townspeople living in neighborhoods just north of the campus continued. The student party patrol was able to handle most complaints and police arrests lessened.

It all proved to be a short-lived reprieve for the town, the university administration, and students. By the fall of 1982, student partying was once more a major problem, with larger, noisier crowds and more illegal selling of beer than ever before. And with further tragic consequences: another student fell to his death from a balcony, in this case while celebrating his 21st birthday. To stop the illegal sales of beer, which seemed to make the parties larger and more difficult to control, the police employed undercover agents to gain evidence against party organizers and underage drinkers. And as the parties became more frequent, so too did the demands of townspeople for some kind of action. Revisions in the zoning laws were requested to prevent the spread of student housing into residential neighborhoods. In the town election of 1983, candidates for seats on the Normal Council campaigned on the issue. By the end of the summer of 1983, the Community Improvement Committee and the Normal Council were considering a mass gathering ordinance as one way to control the situation, and Chief Lehr warned repeatedly that he would continue to use undercover agents.

When students arrived for the 1983-84 school year, campus leaders expressed outrage over the turn of events. They found the use of undercover police particularly offensive and damned the possibility of an ordinance imposing regulations on parties as unconstitutional. As a *Vidette* editorial put it, residents have pushed students around long enough and they should stand up and speak out for their rights. The student newspaper followed its own advice and gave daily coverage to the situation, while the officers of the Student Association used every occasion, and perhaps a few they contrived, to publicize the issue. As the school year progressed, tension was clearly building as students defiantly organized parties, including one monster affair that attracted over 1,000 people. Meanwhile, townspeople signed
petitions (called “totalitarian” by student leaders) which demanded full enforcement of all laws against parties. The Normal Council approved Mayor Richard Godfrey’s call for a “blue ribbon” committee of civic leaders to investigate and make recommendations on the party problem. Reporting near the end of the 1984 spring semester, the mayor’s committee concluded that student parties were part of college life everywhere and the only new policy it could recommend to control them was to ban the late-evening sale of beer kegs. The University administration also studied the situation and made plans for the coming year to step up its educational programs on alcohol abuse and counseling of new students.

At that point in the spring semester a new issue arose which diverted student attention, at least for the moment. On March 20, 1984, President Watkins announced a proposal to build a $9 million arena for intercollegiate athletics and other purposes, to be paid for over the years by a special student fee; the community would be asked to contribute a small amount of the building’s cost. Students would vote in a special referendum on April 25 to approve or reject the fee proposal. At first student response seemed positive. The Vidette gave the project its approval. An informal poll of students showed good support. Perhaps the initial support stemmed from the popularity among students of intercollegiate basketball. Both women’s and men’s teams had established a winning tradition. The Lady Redbirds, coached by Jill Hutchison, were the dominant team in the state throughout the ’70s and into the early ’80s, producing such outstanding players as Charlotte Lewis and Cathy Boswell (who was a member of the gold-winning U.S.A. team in the 1984 Olympic games). Hutchison’s teams were regularly involved in postseason tournaments. Men’s basketball, whether as an independent or in the Missouri Valley Conference which ISU joined in 1981, was no less successful under Gene Smithson (1975-78) and then Bob Donewald who took over in 1978. Who can forget the teams of 1982-83, 1983-84, and 1984-85, tagged “blue collar” by national television commentators, that went on to the NCAA tournaments. Horton Fieldhouse, completed in 1963 and planned for a much smaller student population, was used heavily in so many different ways. Seating only 7,700 for
Division I competition, it was judged inadequate for a University of 20,000 students. The answer was a larger facility that could be used for intercollegiate sports, concerts, and other functions, which would then allow greater use of Horton for intramural sports and other purposes.

Despite the favorable first response of students following the March 20 announcement, the administration and athletic department left little to chance in promoting the proposed arena fee. The experience of the previous year, when students soundly rejected a fee increase intended for a much needed recreational facility, must have been remembered. Discussion sessions were held in the residence halls, a general meeting in Horton Fieldhouse, presided over by the coaches, provided information on the building's inadequacies, and Coach Donewald went on local radio to answer questions. In some ways it was a hard-sell, and as the campaign gained momentum, student opposition appeared. The *Vidette* reversing itself came out against any fee increase, a position supported by numerous letters from students; student government sponsored a “speak-out” that was tipped toward opposition and then voted against the arena fee on the day before the referendum. The turnout on April 25 produced one of the largest student votes in the University's history, and by a small margin the arena fee was approved, 2,430 to 2,217. While a few opponents tried to continue the issue after April 25 by demanding another vote, the approach of final exams and commencement suddenly became more important matters. But though the semester was over, and the main body of students were off to their hometowns, the issues of the school year were far from over.

It is clear from a later perspective that the party problem was beyond the control of all persons involved at the start of the 1984 school year. To the dismay of student leaders, the Normal Council in mid-summer enacted into law the suggestion on kegs as well as an earlier proposal to regulate mass gatherings. Jeff Charnogorsky, student body president, predicted that “Students returning from the summer will feel like they’ve been ambushed when they learn of these ordinances.” Students, whether living off campus or in the residence halls, were more determined than ever to assert their rights as equal members of
the community to party the way they wanted to. From its first issue in which it urged students, “Don’t get mad, get even . . . Flex some political muscle,” and then daily, the Vidette’s pages reported developments. Perhaps without realizing it, the newspaper’s editors added to the campus emotions by describing student-town relations in shrill editorials as a “state of confrontation” and warning that “if the [Normal] council insists on ramming this [mass gathering-keg] ordinance down the students’ throats, undesirable consequences are bound to follow. . . .” But town officials, after years of struggling with large uncontrollable parties, were just as determined to prevent students from having their way. From the mayor to the police patrols, with strong public opinion behind them, they launched a vigorous enforcement of all local and state laws relating to parties and alcohol consumption. The University administration was caught in an uncomfortable middle. Despite public demands that trouble-making students be dismissed, the University had no legal right to control students living off campus. Officials made it clear, however, that the University did not condone illegal, irrational behavior on the part of students. What it could do and had been doing over the years was to provide students with more recreational and social activities and informational programs on the destructiveness of alcohol abuse. But beyond that, off-campus students possessed the same rights and responsibilities as other members of the community.

With attitudes hardened even before the fall semester started, trouble could have been predicted. From the first weekend and then on through September, mass parties were organized, followed by large numbers of police arrests and seizures of beer kegs. In an open letter to the campus, President Watkins warned that the extreme behavior of a few students was hurting the University’s reputation as a place of education. “Nearly everyone can attend ISU and have a good time without running afoul of the law. If you cannot do so,” he told the party-goers, “perhaps you should seek another environment; one more suited to your habits.”

Parties and arrests continued, driving those involved toward a final confrontation. When the Chicago Cubs clinched the divisional championship on September 24, 1984, a happy
celebration turned into the first outburst of violence when about 2,000 students rampaged through downtown Normal, ending up at Hancock Field where the iron goalposts were torn down. The next day a guest editorial in the *Vidette* charged that "Normal is quickly becoming a police state," reminding student readers that a demonstration four years earlier had forced the resignation of a police chief who had used "Gestapo-like" tactics against parties. Several days later members of the police department's special tactical force were given "fun-buster" T-shirts by their chief, and over the weekend, which produced 40 arrests, outraged student leaders countered with "fuzz-buster" shirts of their own. Then it happened. An anonymous leaflet called for a Wednesday night rally on the quad ("bring your own signs, banners, and refreshments") to protest the town's anti-party laws. Chanting "Lehr, we want beer," and drawing courage from a beer keg purchased at a nearby liquor store, the small group of marchers grew in numbers and was transformed into a unruly mob. What followed was a destructive riot in which perhaps as many as 2,000 students, including a few who weren't, battled against 50 city, county, and university police in downtown Normal. University officials, including President Watkins and several student leaders, appeared to help restore order. With bullhorn in hand, and narrowly being missed by flying beer cans, the president twice appealed to the students to disperse, telling them that they were only hurting the University and their own cause. But the demonstrators were not to be stilled. With newspaper and television reporters taking notes and using cameras to record the scene, students smashed windows in city hall, damaged police cars, uprooted street signs and telephone booths, vandalized private property, and hurled insults and rocks at police who fought back with riot batons. When the demonstration finally petered out in the early morning hours, the intersection of North Street and Broadway was a shambles, three students and two police officers had been injured seriously enough to require hospital treatment, two students were in jail, and at least $10,000 damage had been done to city property.

The violence of that night was national news the next day, but the story that appeared on television and in news-
papers was not the kind of publicity that pleased University officials. "The university was dragged through the mud by a few people," Dr. Watkins later told the Academic Senate, and "the value of a diploma from this university is not quite what it was a week ago." Worried parents called to find out if their sons or daughters were safe; friends of the university and state officials, including a member of the Board of Regents visiting in Virginia, called to find out what was going on; and news people wanted more information. While town authorities prepared for the possibility of more trouble, the University administration moved quickly to condemn the irrational violence as the work of only a few students. President Watkins issued a statement that ISU would "seek to separate from the student body those students found responsible for this destructive behavior." Dr. Gamsky started gathering evidence to identify students responsible for committing destructive acts, and over the following months the Student Judicial Office considered charges against eleven students. The county grand jury indicted two students who were later convicted for the felony destruction of property.

The response of students was mixed, though probably tilted toward dismay and wonder. Perhaps reflecting the sentiment of a number of students, petitions expressing an apology to the town circulated on campus, and the Association of Residence Halls passed a resolution condemning the events of October 3. One sorority sent money to the town as a small contribution toward the cleanup costs. A guest editorial in the Vidette urged the student government president to drop his preoccupation with student parties because it only brought publicity to himself; the issue certainly did not serve the interests of a majority of students. On the other hand, some student activists were unmoved by what had taken place. A Vidette editor boasted gleefully that "students brought this town to its knees"! The student body president thought it was regrettable that some students, caught up in the emotion of the moment, should be arrested days later for breaking the law. One student commented, "A peaceful demonstration would be successful, but not if no one can see us. We wouldn't have gotten noticed if we hadn't gotten violent." Two others
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thought it was "great that so many people came out to show their support; they simply did the wrong thing." Indeed. And as long as the good weather lasted after October 3, large outdoor weekend parties (now starting on Thursday) continued and so too did police activity. In that fall semester, the number of party and alcohol arrests increased 300 percent over the previous year, from 205 to 615. A few student leaders continued to sound the alarm over party "rights" and police "brutality" and proposed schemes to win control of the town’s government. But few others on campus listened, or probably even cared, after October 3, 1984.