

Dueling for Dollars

By Amy Stahl

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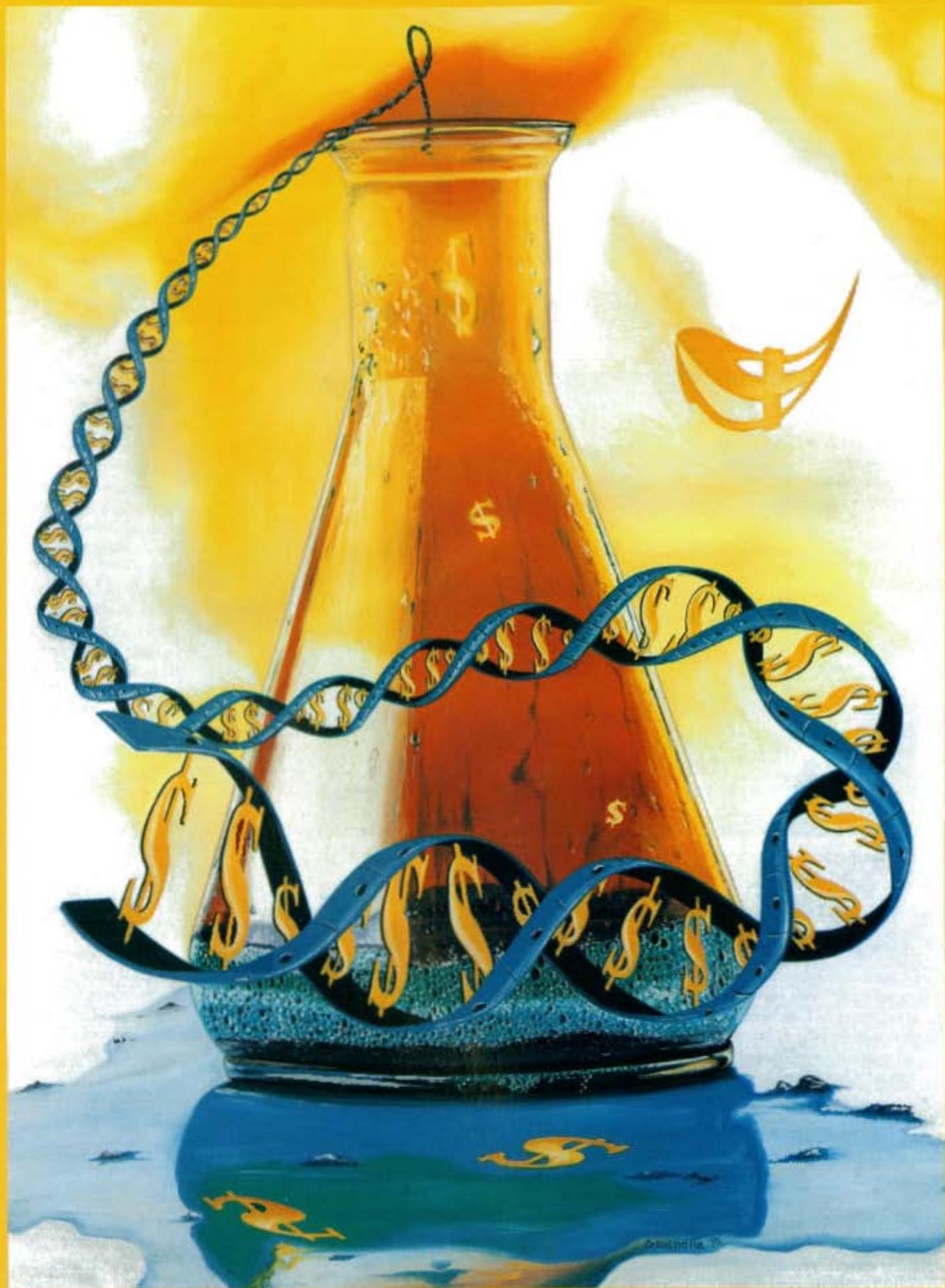
Gary Moncrief is nearing the end of an exhaustive study of campaign financing in 23 states.

The multiyear project, a massive undertaking by the BSU political scientist and several colleagues, was funded by a \$193,000 grant from the National Science Foundation and \$15,000 from the Idaho State Board of Education.

Yet money was running low when Moncrief, fascinated by surprise results of the 1994 campaign, wanted to extend his study. His wish was granted thanks to a one-year BSU Faculty Research grant. The \$3,700 award paid for undergraduate students to analyze the 1994 data.

You could say that Moncrief is lucky. But it's much more than that. Since joining BSU 19 years ago, he's worked very hard to build a national reputation — one grant at a time.

Moncrief is but one of several BSU success stories in an increasingly difficult quest for grant money. In 1995 BSU received more than \$10 million in external funds, an increase of nearly \$3 million in just two years.



Provost Daryl Jones says that success "reflects the growing research maturity of the institution. Faculty are competing more successfully in spite of an environment that is more competitive."

"We're developing a track record," says Larry Irvin, BSU director of research administration.

BSU researchers are getting more savvy about their grant proposals and the dollar volume awarded has increased, Irvin says.

"In the past we asked for smaller amounts. Now we're getting brave and asking for whatever we need," says Irvin, whose three-person office helps faculty navigate the "sponsored-project process" — from proposal to award.

Some of the larger "external" grants received recently by BSU scholars include \$371,000 from the National Science Foundation, \$168,512 from the Bureau of Land Management, and \$259,000 from U.S. Windpower.

Certainly, big-dollar grants are commendable, says Moncrief. But several small grants helped get him started on the funding fast track. Especially for younger faculty, modest grants "really are a very important element in building a research component," says Moncrief. "They help you build your reputation and get into the door for larger grants."

While BSU is making headway, more could be done to help researchers, says Irvin. More money to fund student assistants and a mentoring system would give professors a boost when they are applying for grants.

"We're new in this arena," Irvin says. "We've got some quality people but as an institution we need to develop resources to support these activities."

Much of Boise State's research is directed at specific problems or questions. The trend toward that type of applied

research has been evolving over the last five decades, says Robin Dodson, chief academic officer at the State Board of Education. Before the start of World War II, teaching and service were the primary focus of the nation's universities. The war, however, ushered in a new era when federal grants were awarded to develop key projects, such as the bomb-building activities at the University of Chicago.

"That changed everything about how we

Endowment for the Humanities and the NEA are but two agencies currently under siege by budget-slashing legislators. The NEH, for example, recently cut its summer research stipends and expects to see a \$67 million decline in its annual budget.

Even relatively stable agencies like the National Science Foundation, National Institutes for Health and the Department of Education are tightening their belts.

Higher education is at least partly to

blame for the decline, Dodson says. "Universities have not been paying attention to the public's problems."

The public and politicians alike began asking why the universities aren't doing more to solve the problems of society or to stimulate economic development.

"Big-time institutions really haven't been very interested in that," he says.

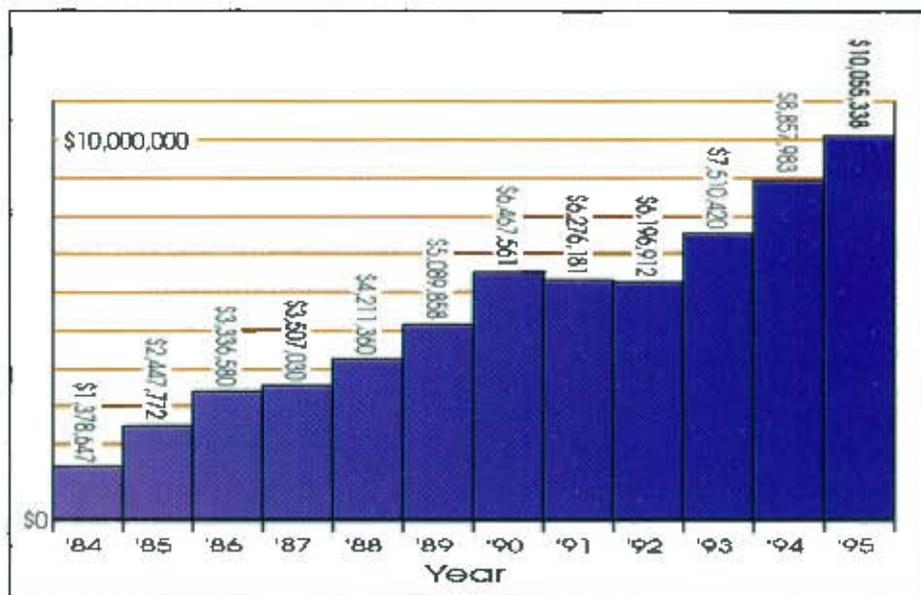
What can researchers hope for in the future? "As

changes in the national political environment are implemented we can expect funding sources to remain stable or decline," says Jones. "Overall we are going to have to recognize that we cannot be overly dependent on federal sources of support."

"We're going to have to re-orient to the private sector," says Jones, citing an increase in cooperative ventures, technology transfer and applied research activities at the university.

Applied research projects at Boise State have ranged from a study of burrowing owls for the BLM, to seismic studies for the Union Pacific Foundation and a survey of minorities in the juvenile justice system for Idaho lawmakers.

Although applied research is attractive to potential funding sources, Irvin worries that basic research will be overlooked. "Basic research is important," he says. "It's new knowledge that ultimately will be applied knowledge." □



At BSU, grants, contracts and other external funding have grown steadily since 1984.

do business," he says.

It spawned the creation of the NSF, Human Services and other federal programs that awarded hefty grants. Most of the funds have been targeted to research heavyweights like Johns Hopkins, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford. In 1991, the California Institute of Technology alone raked in \$1.2 billion in federal contracts and grants, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Government largess slowed down about four or five years ago, Dodson says. Several well-publicized cases of scientific fraud, price gouging and misuse of funds corked the funding flow. The public grew increasingly skeptical and critics grew more vocal.

From the looks of things, an even stingier future is in store. Declining state revenue and a Congress intent on easing the federal deficit are cutting into traditional funding sources. The National