

Patronage Tries Campus Return

DURING the first quarter century of statehood, Oklahoma's university, colleges and normal schools were considered to be political patronage, like other state institutions.

A college president or professor needed political pull as well as an education to get a job. If he could manage for only one of these qualifications, political pull often was more potent.

Most state establishments still are politically managed but higher education became a lot better when it was decided that educational institutions should be run by educators.

A contrasting example is the state prison system, which has gone down about as steadily as crime has gone up. At times, the main prison at McAlester looks like it is the personal property of whoever happens to be state senator from that district.

Now the state is faced with an overt attempt to return political patronage control to higher education. The move is being directed through the Board of Regents for Oklahoma State University and A&M Colleges, who are political appointees.

This broke into the open in December when the regents undertook to tell the OSU football coach how many games to win and to create a vice presidency for agriculture over objections of Dr. Robert B. Kamm, president and an outstanding administrator. The actions were rescinded when a deluge of complaints resulted.

Dr. Frank H. Baker took office as dean of agriculture and director of the experiment station at OSU in November 1974 after an intensive search in which a number of applicants were considered.

Baker immediately sought counsel of hundreds of people in all parts of the state to determine priorities for agricultural research and education. He has a fine program developing.

Dr. James Plaxico, head of the OSU department of agricultural economics, was one of those considered for appointment as dean but he was not recommended by the faculty review committee, in spite of strong qualifications in his field.

The December action of the regents was an obvious attempt to move Plaxico in as vice president over Baker as a political appointment. Plaxico was identified as a

supporter of Gov. David Boren in the 1974 election campaign.

If the vice presidency had been created and filled as was obviously planned, it would have circumvented established procedures for faculty selection, upset progress of the program set out by Baker, and caused serious friction on the campus.

That move was engineered by Robert Barr of Dover, then president of the state Board of Agriculture, a political appointee of Gov. Boren. The latest attempt by the re-

gents to delve into administrative details is being pushed by Barr's successor, Jon Ford of Enid, also an appointee of Gov. Boren.

The regents blocked plans of the OSU president and dean of agriculture to organize the faculty and assign duties until its next meeting on March 26.

If the regents return political patronage faculty appointments to the campus at Stillwater, politics again may become a qualification for teaching at any state college.