

# Legislators, please send money

BY THOMAS G. PALAIMA

College students send their parents letters like this: "Dear Mom and Dad, Having a great time. Learning a lot. Love. Please send cash." Here's what a letter from University of Texas faculty might look like.

Dear Fellow Texans:

We know you are concerned about the level of state funding for higher education. You pay the bills. We do also, because we are taxpayers, too. You want your money to be used wisely for your children and for the future of Texas, and we can assure you that it is.

You might have read that a key legislator wondered why some of the millions being lavished on new stadia and coaches' salaries could not be used to address the longstanding staff and faculty salary inequities that UT President Larry Faulkner has firmly committed himself to remedying. We have wondered that, too, at meetings of our Faculty Council. The sad answer is that since well before the time of the Roman historian Tacitus' food and circuses' have appealed more to the imperial mind and popular tastes than books and libraries.

We are proud of our student athletes,

but what cultural values are the university and its supporters setting when our football coach makes nearly three times the salary of the presidents of UT and the U.S.A.?

But please do not hold against the hard-working staff and faculty and students the fact that the men's intercollegiate athletic budget for 79 coaches and administrators is nearly



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\$5.5 million, while the English department is allocated barely more than \$4 million for the like number of faculty. Just take comfort in the fact that your son or daughter can study abroad with UT professors in their acclaimed Oxford program, can produce and act in the plays of Shakespeare at Winedale and can be taught by distinguished teachers like Betty Sue Flowers. And note that the average faculty salary in English is slightly more than \$50,000. Men's athletics has 23 coaches and other positions at \$80,000 or more. The English department has two. Yet they yearly rank in the top 25 and perform to packed classrooms in an antiquated building.

Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo, was right to express concern about the

application, retention and graduation rates of minorities. We are trying to improve these post Hopwood. But we do need higher funding commitments to do this. Case in point: Three programs in Liberal Arts pooled resources to hire a superb minority faculty member from Harvard to teach in all three programs. Two years later he has been hired away by the University of Michigan. Why? Just take a look at the 0-3 percent faculty merit raises yearly for the last decade and project it forward. He would have been an unwise father and husband to accept our matching offer. His wife also wanted to join the university staff, and Michigan pays its unionized staff competitive salaries that let them know their skills and talents are appreciated. Lesson: We need to be compensating staff and faculty competitively for their hard work in order to preserve quality and retain the faculty that will help us address Rep. Cuellar's valid concerns.

You may have read that \$84,000 is the average UT full professor's salary. This is skewed by the schools of business, engineering and law. Most of us would love to be making that much. In three randomly selected Liberal Arts departments, only six of 168 faculty members make as much as \$84,000 and in one the average assistant professor makes \$37,382. These are dedicated teacher-scholars who have foregone

earnings and incurred an average debt of more than \$15,000 while in graduate school. We are all lucky so many wise fools love learning and teaching.

Is more money for higher education justified? If you missed UT Interactive, come visit the UT campus and talk to Sara Kimball about the new ugrad writing center or Bob Abzug about the expanded and improved Plan I honors. Talk to Barbara Myers about study abroad opportunities for the average student and Larry Carver about the faculty mentoring program. Talk to Michael White about the Religious Studies and Nick Shumway about Latin America.

Stop by any other of our many nationally Top 25 departments and sit in on a course. If you are not impressed by what we are doing without a sabbatical system, with almost no replacement positions for faculty on research leave and with dedicated teaching assistants who spend every dime of their stipends in the state of Texas — talk about an economic multiplier effect! — you can then support the policy of spending five times as much on prisons as on higher education.

If you are impressed, write your legislators and tell them please send cash.

Palaima is Dickson Centennial Professor of Classics at the University of Texas at Austin.