

# UT is No. 1! UT is 52nd!

On the day of the Rose Bowl game, I was in snowy Montreal at Concordia University at a conference that brought together international scholars specializing in Bronze Age Anatolian, Levantine and Aegean archaeology, scripts and languages, and in Greek literature, history and mythical traditions.

We spent two 12-hour days looking at evidence for contacts between the



earliest high western culture, the Mycenaean Greeks of 1400-1200 BCE, and the more powerful cultures that dominated modern-day

Turkey, Syria-Palestine, Egypt and Mesopotamia. We were examining the origins of the east-west cultural conflict that still plagues our world.

Still, at dinner on Rose Bowl night, a colleague whose wife's father had been a professor, first at the University of Texas and now at the University of Southern California, got periodic Palm-pilot updates of the score from Pasadena.

When UT was down by 12 in the fourth quarter, I said calmly, "Vince Young will not let the Longhorns lose." And for the second Rose Bowl in a row, he did not.

A few years ago at UT's commencement, Nobel Prize winner Steve Weinberg created a mild stir by declaring that no adult could have a serious interest in the goings-on of UT sports teams. But, as my own experience indicates, the Rose Bowl pushed its way for a moment deep inside cutting-edge research in the most recondite subjects in the humanities. And UT's own departing president Larry Faulkner, while declaring that he is "not a sports nut," still spent lots of his time attending sporting events, shaking hands with fans and boosters, and recognizing the potential for big-time athletics to create a community.

The questions all of us should ask are: What type of community? What kinds of values does it have?

Young, the UT quarterback, has now decided to go pro. Does this mean he is withdrawing immediately from the university? That question was never asked or answered by countless sports writers and analysts, or even by head Coach Mack Brown, who simply declared that Young had nothing more to accomplish in college because he had led a national champion team and won two Rose Bowls.

All these folks assume Young is a sports mercenary, a modern college gladiator. It was widely reported that USC's star quarterback maintained

his fifth-year senior eligibility by taking a course in ballroom dancing. With such hijinks, why are we surprised at the bending of rules that leads to widespread lobbyist corruption in Washington?

Don't get me wrong. Young should not stay in college. Imagine that two years before I received my Ph.D., the faculty at Harvard had said to me, "Come right now and join our faculty with a high salary and perfect research and teaching resources." Would I have stayed at University of Wisconsin to get my degree?

Two things bother me here, though. And I can only hope they bother our next president, Bill Powers, more than they bothered our outgoing one. First, Vince Youngs are rare at UT or anywhere.

For several years now, UT Athletics Director DeLoss Dodds has claimed that UT's abysmal men's football graduation rates were the result of players leaving UT during the coaching transition from John Mackovic to Mack Brown. But this year, the NCAA gave schools credit if transferring players graduated from anywhere in six years, and UT was still lowest in the Big 12, with only 40 percent graduating in football (vs. over 70 percent for all students).

And what did those student-athletes learn while at UT? Legal privacy issues will prevent us from ever knowing what courses Young took. So men's athletics needs to do a much better job reporting to the Faculty Council on the players' education.

Secondly, while the men's sports program have amassed enormous resources and spent lavishly on facilities and coaches to become No. 1 or top 10 in many sports, the resources and quality of education at UT have been mired or sinking.

When I arrived here in 1987, UT was ranked 25th among the nation's universities in undergraduate education in the standard U.S. News and World Report survey. This past year, we were ranked 52nd (down from 46th in 2004). In 2004, we ranked 117th in educational financial resources, 120th in faculty teaching and research resources, and worst in the top 49 in faculty-student ratios (19/1).

The only reason our overall rating is over twice as good as our resources year in year out is that the reputation and quality of our faculty are consistently top 25.

The University Co-op has sold a lot of national championship T-shirts. Perhaps it should print one with an asterisk and a footnote: "but not even top 50 in education."

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Commentary