

# Assert academic priorities

By Tom Palaima

Daily Texan Guest Columnist

The Daily Texan Viewpoint "Questions for athletics" on Sept. 15 is right about the questions I raised in the official Questions to the President segment of the Faculty Council meeting for Monday.

My questions ask how our big-time sports programs affect the quality of the education UT students receive and how they affect our social values.

These issues are indeed a "tired horse." So, why do I care about them, and why should you care?

Here's why.

A national commission on higher education, headed by former chair of the UT Board of Regents Charles Miller, says we are in trouble.

The commission sees a clear correlation between income levels and success in obtaining college degrees. It says we need more educational resources and more scholarship funds.

So we should all care when money coming into our University is not going to these nationally vital purposes. Even the U.S. Congress is now investigating college athletics income and academics.

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When UT alumni are approached about donating to UT's academic mission, many tell our fundraisers that they already gave to the Longhorn Foundation. The money extorted from ticket-purchasers for the right to buy tickets in many cases would be given to the academic mission.

On the big donor level, the University Federal Credit Union has committed \$750,000 per year for 15 years to stadium renovation. It gives \$50,000 per year to the UT library. Yet, between 1990 and 2005, our library has gone from ninth nationally in journal holdings (electronic and hard-copy) to 43rd, and from eighth to 16th in serial holdings. About \$750,000 per year would slow the attrition.

But baseball beats out books. And for \$8 million, Godzillatron beat out Jumbotron.

Think how many \$5,000 scholarships that \$8 million could have funded. Instead it was used to replace a huge scoreboard with

the hugest one.

We rent out 62 football sky-boxes (more are on the way) for shameful sums of money. Eighty percent of each rental is called a tax-deductible donation to our educational institution.

Yet less than 2 percent of our sports income (now more than \$90 million) is transferred to our educational mission. Meanwhile, our science and research faculty have to pay 50 percent in direct costs on the revenues they generate. Let's stop this perfectly legal fraud.

Special admissions standards for NCAA athletes are a big problem. Some argue that they give a chance to young adults who would never otherwise be able to go to college. But if gifted athletes were not "tracked" toward NCAA sports from an early age, and if resources were channeled at the high school level to education rather than sports, many of these athletes would no longer need special exemptions.

Then look at how we present ourselves symbolically. We have three statues of living human beings on campus: a former football coach, a former football player and a big-time sports donor. We have no statue of anyone, dead or alive, symbolizing nearly 125 years of teaching and research.

Finally, we had a memorial stadium to honor the courage and sacrifice of those who have died in our wars protecting our freedoms. It is now Royal-Memorial Stadium with Joe Jamail Field and Hicks entrance gate.

Let big-time donors with big egos and sports obsessors put their names on other stadia, gates and high-dollar carpeting. Don't water down for pieces of silver the reverence we ought to have for our fallen war dead.

If UT's regents and sports directors were in charge of our national government, we would undoubtedly have in Washington the Wells Fargo Bank Vietnam Veterans' Memorial and the UFCU World War II Memorial.

If you see nothing wrong with that, more's the pity.

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