

Redirect UT's resources

By Tom Palaima

Daily Texan Guest Columnist

On Monday, President William Powers Jr. used his Tower Talk blog to praise the UT faculty for its role in making the undergraduate academic reputation of UT seventh among public universities and 27th among all universities, despite the fact that UT is ranked 96th in faculty resources and 82nd in overall financial resources.

Powers also rightly points out that our main public competitors in the race for academic excellence still outstrip us in both crucial areas, despite their recent funding woes. For example University of California, Berkeley is 33rd and 43rd, respectively, University of California, Los Angeles 41st and 23rd and University of North Carolina 47th and 30th.

While his praise of faculty is nice to hear, we have heard it before, many times, from past presidents.

Likewise, I've heard the promise that we'll get the message out to the citizens of Texas — especially legislators, regents and the governor — every year since I came to the University in 1986.

But the president knows we are in pretty much the same position, if not a worse one, regarding educational quality resources as we have been for the past five, 10, 15 and 20 years.

Powers publicly laid out that UT Austin has received annual increases in state appropriations on the average of 2 percent for the past two decades, well below cost-of-living increases.

What are our prospects? I am no Chicken Little. The sky is not falling. But we are mired in a situation where we are fooling ourselves if we think we can catch up to UC Berkeley, UCLA, Michigan and UNC given current funding levels and institutional priorities.

Other schools have raised tuition significantly and increased the numbers of out-of-state students to offset the cuts in state appropriations. UNC raised tuition a whopping 22 percent this year, Berkeley 5.85 percent.

UT's tuition increase was capped at 3.95 percent, and the number of out-of-state students was also strictly limited. It is unlikely that our phenomenally successful UT research professors can force feder-

al, foundation and corporate funding sources to magically increase their allocations — they too have been hammered by the recession. Private donors also have shrinking wallets. The sky is not falling, but things are as bad as they look.

One thing we can control is institutional priorities. We have been doing foolish things and that is demoralizing.

If the general faculty, and the staff who support the faculty, are what makes our University great, then that is where we should be putting our limited resources, not into unneeded buildings, ever-increasing administrative costs, distracting and ineffective regents' teaching prizes and entertaining a demographically privileged segment of our population at sports spectacles.

Instead we have been, and still are, cutting academic budgets to fund a new liberal arts building, cover faculty hires and even to generate meager merit pools. The growth in administrative positions, offices and salaries appears staggering and way out of line with our current plight. We at least need a systematic, independent study of this, since it is part of a national phenomenon.

Finally, the problem in increasing funding may be one of mindset.

As long as 100,000 fans pour into the palatial Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium on Saturdays and regents and administrators spend time in deluxe skyboxes, there will be no serious gut feeling communicated to the general public or the regents themselves that UT is in real need.

If I dined in a club seating lounge at the stadium, went to a reception at the Etter-Harbin Alumni Center, stayed the night at the pharaonic AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center and saw new buildings rising faster than souffles, I would think that UT had money to burn.

I would certainly not think of directing significant new resources or redirecting existing resources where they should be going: to the human beings, faculty and staff, who make this institution what it is, for the hard-working students who deserve even better than what they are getting.