Thomas G. Palaima  REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR

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 Aegaeon 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 west-east 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 us to 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? What kind of education at UT have been quality of education at UT have been weakly top 25. And this past year, we ranked 117th in educational resources, and worst in the top 49 in education. And 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. Three years later, 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 one of prestige as good or better 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 30 in education.”

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