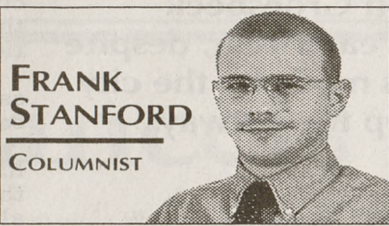


OPINION

12th Man Plaza project overshadows academics

A couple of weeks ago a recent study brought to my attention that the average salaries of professors at other universities are nine percent higher than those at Texas A&M University. During the 1994-1995 academic year, many of the professors whose classes we attend made about \$6,000 less than the average of their peers at similarly-sized schools.



FRANK STANFORD
COLUMNIST

"Well, boo hoo," you might say, "If those eggheads were in it for the money, they wouldn't be professors to begin with." And I would say you're probably correct. However, one must still wonder why good ol' Aggieland has to skimp on professors' salaries relative to the current market value.

Is it because our teachers are less qualified than the market demands? Not at all. A&M seems to insist on "pedigreed" professors from well-regarded schools across the nation. This is an employment characteristic A&M takes great pride in as a student recruitment device. However, with below average pay, it may become more difficult to keep these "purebreds."

Is it because A&M is a little low on cash and, in trying desperately to keep the electricity and water turned on, has decided to cut corners on professors' salaries?

Ummm ... no. Anyone is welcome to peruse the University budget available in the library and see just where all the money goes. It's quite clear that with the hundreds of millions of dollars swirling around The Texas A&M University Corporation, it's largely a matter of internal bureaucratic decision-making as to how the money is spent.

Is it because professors' salaries are not as important as other stuff around here? I suspect it is.

Now, in the interest of fairness, we have to remember our school is a business, a huge one. And there are certainly some budgets for our school that are decided by elected officials in Austin. But for the most part, the state allocates plenty of money based on many factors, including student enrollment and possibly cotton futures in Bangladesh, for all we know.

So, besides parking spaces, what else is more important than professors around here? Stumped? It's sports! That's right, we're not an academic university with an athletic department attached for fun and rivalry, we're an athletic university with an academic department attached for research money and, uh ... well, research money.

A May 24 article in the Bryan-College Station Eagle quoted Bill Perry, the associate provost and dean of faculties as saying, "The faculty have re-

mained loyal to Texas A&M during these lean budgetary times, but I fear that if we fall further and further behind, the outside world is going to start looking more attractive."

Whoa. The third-largest university in the country, behind other schools? Not in football, by golly. OK, our library isn't even in the top 50, but what's this "lean budget" stuff? Why are some budgets lean and others not?

Although Perry's allotted budget for professors' salaries may be lean, there's nothing he can do about it. However, the only things lean about athletics around here are the steaks and the athletes who sweat for Aggieland. In fact, just the other day, while driving down Wellborn Road, I was admiring the new \$36 million Rec Sports Center. "Sure looks like a lean budget was at work here," I thought to myself.

And then there's the Twelfth Man Plaza project. This project accepts \$100,000 donations in the name of each offensive and defensive position on the football team and a \$3 million contribution to represent the head coach position.

Each contributor buys themselves part of an immortal memorial etched in granite next to the Twelfth Man statue, giving A&M one more much-needed monument. Soon we will certainly surpass even Washington, D.C.

Try as I might, I can't begrudge Aggie athletics of all its money. If "rich ol' Ags" want to give their

millions to the football team or the athletic department, then they should be free to do so and even congratulated for their gifts.

But I also must congratulate those responsible for thinking up new ways to extract these millions from former students.

An underpaid professor would call this tactic "creating a market."

What bothers me is that while so much money is being obtained and spent on athletics, we seem to be having trouble keeping professors' salaries competitive. There is no real answer to satisfy both issues. It's just a matter of what a budget committee, a student body and the Association of Former Students' endless fund fountain perceive as being important.

How important are well-paid, quality professors to you?

It's not a question of where the money is coming from, it's a question of where it's going. Aside from the fact that an athletic department and a winning football team can enhance a university experience, take a moment to ask yourself ...

- Would I be here if A&M had no football team?
- Would I still donate money years later?
- What if the team was only mediocre?
- Am I a student and a fan, or a fan and a student?

Frank Stanford is a philosophy graduate student

BACKWARD ACTION

Affirmative action promotes what it seeks to eliminate

Thirty years ago this nation embarked on what has become an arduous journey to ensure equal opportunity among our country's minorities.



ALEX MILLER
COLUMNIST

Somewhere along the way, the principal leaders of this quest donned dark sunglasses and striped canes and led affirmative action into the ground.

The greatest of all political detours occurred when the phrase "equal opportunity" became synonymous with "equality." Understanding the difference between these words is intrinsic to understanding the problem.

Affirmative action was created to promote "equal opportunity" - the levelling of the playing field. It has since evolved into the promotion of "equality," the idea that we were all created equal and therefore should be equally successful.

The approach of creating an environment in which those discriminated against regain the opportunities they so readily deserve is, and always will be, a noble and just task.

Affirmative action programs have struggled to achieve this goal. However, in the effort, they have lost sight of a most-basic premise: Treating individuals differently because of their ethnicity or numerical status is wrong.

We, as a nation, have not yet achieved our dreams of equal opportunity, but the so-called affirmative practices of the last two decades are now spawning the very quality they were created to destroy, as well as undermining the unity of a nation.

Affirmative action has been manipulated and contorted into gender and racial preference programs, which have permeated much of our lives. Quotas and discrimination lawsuits have become the unspoken norm in our society.

A whole new class of citizens has traded

pride in personal achievement for a belief that the system is responsible for its success. The victimization of minorities has established the thought that somehow, because of past inequalities, minorities are deserving of special treatment and, barring special treatment, they are destined for failure.

The result of preferential treatment is stigmatizing.

According to an article in Newsweek magazine, in 1992, only one of the 280 African-American applicants to the University of Texas Law School scored high enough to be admitted without the consideration of race.

It is not to say minorities are less intelligent; however, to excel because of a characteristic of one's self rather than the quality of one's self is certainly not "affirmative."

Whatever happened to good ol' "American rugged individualism," where hurdles were seen as chances for improvement? To rob someone of their failures is to rob them of an education and a chance for meaningful achievement.

The true victims in all of this are those who have been passed up in the name of social progress. Destined to criticize those who have usurped them, these are the new racists. Like their minority counterparts, they are quick to blame racism for their failures.

In this sense, affirmative action is fostering a generation of Americans who compete only along racial lines. This bigotry proliferates race supremacy and allows previously-voiceless extremists an audience.

The solution no longer lies in stringent government regulation. It is time to dismantle a system that has cost us the integrity of a work ethic. Blindness to color and gender can be achieved; it is only a matter of realization and effort.

Last week the Supreme Court let stand a lower court ruling that scholarships reserved for specific ethnic groups were unconstitutional, thereby starting all students on the same step.

In California, Gov. Pete Wilson has promised to remove all state policies that extend preferential treatment based on ethnicity or gender. No longer in California will the minority businessperson be used as a pawn in the pursuit of state contracts.

Reform like this is vital if we are to equalize opportunity for everyone. There is no greater opportunity for improvement than on this country's college campuses.

Student equity in our universities can be achieved simply by removing all references to race from entrance applications. Universities should be equally as color blind when hiring faculty. Their only concern should be hiring the best possible professors for the job, bar none, and let the racial chips fall where they may.

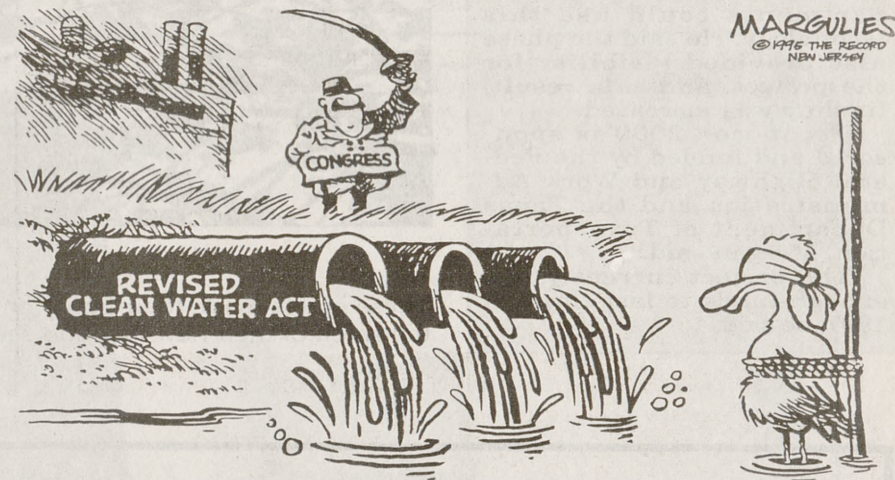
It is not the duty of the university to pad statistics or increase graduation rates. It is up to individuals to study, and it is their responsibility to graduate.

We all have the ability to achieve in some areas of life; failure and success determine the paths we will walk.

It is every American's obligation to ensure these checks and balances are a part of every citizen's life. In this day and age, it is no longer practical to discriminate based on gender or race.

Many future successes will be engineered by the minds of people as diverse as their own dreams. As Martin Luther King said, now is the time "to judge all people not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Alex Miller is a senior bioengineering major



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UNFAIR DISMISSAL

Sexual orientation should not be grounds for job termination.

For every change, something else seems to remain the same.

Discrimination, prejudice and fearful hatred are as alive today as they ever have been. Today's social climate makes constant strides toward better liberty and equality, but countless people and institutions improve the rest of society's progress.

The most recent example being Abilene Christian University's dismissal of theater director Robert Neblett from a production of *The Merchant of Venice* based solely on his homosexuality.

Neblett, an ACU alumnus, was invited to direct the production but was quickly dismissed when school president Royce Money learned of Neblett's sexual orientation. Money was quoted as saying, "We appreciate his tremendous talent and find it unfortunate that his choice of lifestyle has resulted in this situation."

The school determined that Neblett was unfit to represent the university because his lifestyle violated its moral code.

This kind of ignorant intolerance should be ended.

The university had an agreement with Neblett; he was to direct a Shakespearean play to the best of his ability, and they were to give him the honor and credit for his production. Instead, ACU humiliated and degraded Neblett in a public forum. Neblett responded to the incident, saying he was "crushed" and that he felt, "Abilene Christian University has 'outed' me and pushed me out of the closet in a public way."

In a number of similar situations, this incident could be considered a case of wrongful dismissal. For instance, at a public university like Texas A&M, dismissal based on race, sex or religion is illegal, and that umbrella could come to include sexual preference.

While the dust settles from the ACU incident, it is interesting to note that the real theatrical irony comes from the fact that *The Merchant of Venice* is a play spoofing mindless racism and prejudice, but that probably doesn't make Robert Neblett feel any better.



MAIL CALL

People do not choose sexuality

This letter is in response to Kathy Carson's letter to Mail Call on June 5, stating that homosexuality is merely a choice.

Carson has no understanding of the issues that a person deals with regarding their coming out.

I know from personal experience that homosexuality is not just a choice. No one can tell me, or any other gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered person that we simply chose to be attracted to the same sex. How can

a person choose to be attracted to someone else?

A person either is or is not attracted to the same or opposite sex. I can no more make myself attracted to the opposite sex any more than she can make herself attracted to the same sex.

Although Carson may believe that following the Lord will clear up any doubts one has about their "simple choice," I suggest that she talk to some people about their "decision to be gay."

Alex Rigbsy
Class of '95

This letter is in response to Kathy Carson's Mail Call letter

on June 5. Her belief that homosexuality is a choice is her own opinion, and I respect that. What I totally disagree with is how she does not consider herself homophobic and how she claims to know that the only answer to a perfect world is through reading the Bible and through Christ.

How dare she assume that her world is the only perfect world? It is so blatantly phobic to anyone and everything not included in Christian teachings that she has systematically eliminated most of the people in the world.

She says she is not homophobic. I think she is ignorant to the fact that many gay men and lesbians - we don't really use 'homosexuals' anymore - in this world do not follow the Bible and still have perfect lives according to their own opinions.

How dare she say I am not happy, full of joy or at peace because of who I am and what I believe.

Paula Fedirchuk
Graduate student

Block grants will not starve children

It's nice to know that Chris Stidvent is concerned about children going hungry. The national government is trying to give more power to the states by consolidating block grants, but there still will be some restrictions, so starving children will get their fill. As for his comments about separation of church and state, I would like to remind him that the First Amendment clearly states that Congress cannot prohibit the free exercise of religion.

Voluntary moments of silence are constitutional. As a compromise, though, to keep from dividing religious students from non-religious students, I would encourage parents to pray with their children before school. It would be an excellent opportunity for parent-child bonding.

Erik Walsh
Class of '98

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