

Cookie crumble

Shutting down affirmative action bake sale violated students' free speech



PAUL WILSON • THE BATTALION

It was like any other bake sale, with one exception. Prices were not based on items sold but on the race of the person buying them. It was unfair, discriminatory and capricious, and that is exactly the point the Young Conservatives of Texas at Southern Methodist University were trying to make.

The idea of an affirmative action bake sale originated at the University of California at Los Angeles and has been imitated by conservative groups at college campuses across the country, including Texas A&M. However, administrators at SMU shut down the Sept. 24 demonstration, claiming the practice was discriminatory.

Administrators and the two students who filed complaints against the organization missed the point. The idea behind the bake sales is to demonstrate the unfairness of race-based admission procedures, and the sales illustrate that in a clear way. The price of a cookie is higher for those seen as less desirable for entrance into colleges by admissions offices. SMU students charged \$1 for white males, 75 cents for white females, 50 cents for Hispanics and 25 cents for blacks.

If the administration protests the student organization's practices, it should also criticize its own. Instituting race as a deciding factor into the admission process invokes a reversed form of discrimination that hurts those who are not minorities, potentially leading to a decreased standard of academic excellence at universities which admissions personnel are just trying to meet their quotas.

SMU's decision to shut down the protest reiterates the biased practices of university administrations. When a protest gets out of hand, the logical solution is to enforce prior-stated rules to allow for police control or to provide an avenue for those disagreeing with the protesters to express their ideas. Eliminating the option to express one's beliefs only stifles the problem. Young Conservatives of Texas at SMU chairman David Rushing said the event didn't get out of hand, which was the reason cited by the student center director for closing the event, according to The Houston Chronicle.



SARA FOLEY

Young Conservatives at A&M held a similar sale on Sept. 5 outside the Memorial Student Center, but the group encountered numerous obstacles as well. Mark McCaig, communications director for Young Conservatives, said administrators told members they "had no free speech rights," and the director of the scheduling office in the MSC told them they could not hold the bake sale or distribute literature. The group continued with the activity nonetheless but had administrators from the Department of Multicultural Services monitor it.

Administrators at SMU and A&M ignored the fact that each student group has the right to express its opinions, regardless of the potential for people getting offended. Protests, demonstrations and political groups serve the purpose of sending a dramatic and impacting message, and to blindly assume that no one will disagree is ignoring the nature of the situation.

Young Conservatives of Texas chairman Rushing stated in a press release that the event was purely symbolic and the intent was not to set up a bakery, but to prove a point. But for SMU, along with schools around the country, the discrimination is not symbolic. Race-based admission policies award or punish applicants based on their race. More than just a cookie is at stake.

Minorities not only get preferential treatment for admission, but their ideas and organizations are taken with special consideration as well, as evidenced by the discrimination and censorship of the Young Conservative's ideas. SMU hypocritically reprimands the basis of race for the price of things, but simultaneously gives minorities special privileges and considerations when applying to college and when they express their ideas on campus. Furthermore, if other organizations recruit members solely based on race, they should be subject to the same supervision and punishment as the Young Conservatives have been.

The incidents at the affirmative action bake sales raise questions that remain unanswered. Universities suppress and ignore the message the demonstrations send while choosing to implement a racial discrimination double standard.

Sara Foley is a junior journalism major.

Universities should rethink emphasis on athletics

"The trouble is," Groucho Marx tells his university colleagues in 1932's "Horse Feathers," "we're neglecting football for an education ... Have we got a football team? Have we got a college? Well we can't support both. Tomorrow we start tearing down the college." "But professor," his colleagues remind him, "where will the students sleep?" To which Groucho replies, "Where they always sleep — in the classroom."



MICHAEL WARD

And with mercurial wit, Groucho sums up not only the relationship between sports and academia of his time, but sadly, the present as well.

Intercollegiate athletics today are precisely what they were never supposed to become: big, bulky and increasingly out of control. Their original intent — to give the academic student a chance to compete athletically — has perversely morphed into just the opposite. The athlete now furthers his athletic career and, on the side, receives an education.

But who can blame him? When academic institutions are willing to exploit their resources for athletics rather than intellectual pursuits, it is time for these institutions to either refocus their goals or re-evaluate their place in academia.

Tulane and Vanderbilt raised eyebrows earlier this summer when they critically reviewed their sports programs. Vanderbilt dismantled

its athletic department, though the president stressed that the school would remain competitive in Division I-A. Tulane similarly decided to keep its football program but is taking to task collegiate institutions such as the Bowl Championship Series.

Both schools danced around the issue rather than facing it head on. They took the first step in refocusing or re-evaluating their place in academia but failed to continue the journey.

The next step of this process begins with removing the preferential treatment given to intercollegiate athletes, which is most grossly illustrated by the athletic scholarship, a blatant oxymoron that sends the wrong message to both current and prospective students.

Students should compete for college admission based on scholastics. Of course, extracurricular activities such as sports denote a more three-dimensional student — something college admissions officers should be looking for. However, too often the desire to contend athletically has overshadowed the desire to excel academically.

In "The Game of Life: College Sports and Educational Values," President Emeritus of Princeton University William Bowen argues, "Say you're an admissions officer and you

have two applications from tennis players with the same SAT score. One says, 'Tennis is my life — this is it.' The other says, 'I love to play tennis; it's a great sport, but this college has a great philosophy program, and I want to major in philosophy.' (The admissions officers and coach) will pick the first but I would argue student B is the one you want."

While Bowen's report is largely an indictment against the Ivy League, public institutions are the main culprit. A glance at the current ranking of various collegiate sports reveals a prevalence of public rather than private institutions.

Blame it on the cult of celebrity, but notoriety and prestige have poisoned these academic institutions. It's as if they are in Kubler-Ross' third stage of grief: bargaining. Having acknowledged, for whatever reason, an inability to compete academically with private institutions, they have chosen instead to carve their niche out of athleticism.

Granted, while President Robert M. Gates says Texas A&M is lucky enough to have one of the few athletic programs that pays for itself, the institution is still shelling out free

tickets for an A&M education to students who too often could not compete on their scholastic credentials alone.

This is not to say that all — or even most — intercollegiate athletes are subpar students. Nonetheless, even if athletes were stellar students, they would still be granted a scholarship based on their athletic prowess and not their mind. And that is just not what college is about.

Academics are an exercise of the mind. And while we recognize that the body must be powerful and capable, it need not be proven to be so with a Big 12 or National Championship. Intercollegiate college athletics needs to be brought home. The fame gained by facing top opponents across the country is illusionary and corrupt if only insofar as it diminishes the focus on academics.

Athletics do have a place in academia — on the intramural field, for instance, pitting scholars from Southside against those from Northside. The concrete coliseums aren't needed to espouse the virtues inherent in athletics. All one needs is a weathered track or a used pigskin and a bunch of college students who want a break from their studies. The Aggies don't need to play the Nebraska Cornhuskers to learn the life lessons found between the hashes. They just need some more Aggies.

When academics institutions are willing to exploit their resources for athletic rather than intellectual pursuits, it is time for these institutions to either refocus their goals or re-evaluate their place in academia.

Michael Ward is a senior history major.

MAIL CALL

Diversity about more than race

In response to Sarah Szuminski's Sept. 29 article:

I agree with Dr. Gates that diversity is necessary for Texas A&M to improve the quality of education provided. However, I disagree with the terms that are carelessly flung around to define the goal.

Obviously diversity is necessary for students to be able to take from a wide variety of perspectives that they otherwise could not encounter. This means that skin color should not be the decisive factor; rather the new cultural perspective one could contribute to Aggie culture is important.

Why not say that A&M is lopsided with traditional suburban and rural students and needs more students from urban backgrounds or with immigrant parents that still practice their culture: brown, black, white or pink? Is not a black student that grows up in subur-

bia and has suburban perspectives no different from his white counterpart? Are my white friends who grew up in urban neighborhoods and have the accompanying culture unable to add to A&M's diversity? Would not the students laugh if Vision 2020 required more red-haired students because they are a minority? And please do not say that my white skin gives this great University an unacceptable status.

Let's set ourselves apart by not making these superficial judgements.

Nathan Blalock
Class of 2005

Frivolous lawsuits driving up drug prices

In response to Lauren Esposito's Oct. 2 column:

I would simply like to point out that another cause in the rise of drug prices is the increase in the number

of lawsuits involving drug companies, as well as malpractice suits. Frivolous lawsuits have become an increasing problem in the medical community as a whole and are driving the prices of health care upwards at an alarming rate.

Dan Marek
Class of 2003

Bonfire is about building Aggie Spirit

In response to Oct. 2 mail call:

Student Bonfire (formerly known as Unity Project) would like to thank Mr. Cleland for bringing up the important issue of Bonfire and the grass-roots effort to rebuild the tradition, despite his misunderstanding of the facts involved.

Mr. Cleland must not have any experience with building Bonfire since he claimed that it is all about one night. Bonfire is and has always

been about building camaraderie, building friendships and building the Aggie Spirit through months of work.

Bonfire is not just about the fire itself, but what it takes to get to burn. Mr. Cleland falsely asserts that the \$26,000 in donations required to build Bonfire last year was too steep a price for saving one of A&M's finest traditions.

Lastly, Mr. Cleland is wrong when he states that Student Bonfire is working against the administration. We requested to meet with President Gates last year and were turned down. Student Bonfire is always willing to work with the administration to return Bonfire to the students of Texas A&M.

Kerri Ward
Co-Leader, Student Bonfire

More important issues to focus on

With the continuing hostilities in Iraq, the nuclear provocations from North Korea, economic problems on the homefront, unemployment, the ever-present threats of terrorism and the upcoming presidential election, it was great to see the majority of students chose to focus on the really important issues — uncovering for yells, booing the referees and leaving football games early.

It is refreshing to know that students still get passionate about the things that really matter.

Jon Apgar
Class of 1999

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