

OPINION PAGES

EDITOR
Josh Funk

OPINION EDITOR
Mark Baldrige

EDITORIAL BOARD
Lindsay Young
Jessica Fargen
Samuel McKewon
Cliff Hicks
Kimberly Sweet

Our
VIEW

Steeped in tradition

Aggie tragedy should not stop event

Friday morning, one college football team played for a whole lot more than a spot in the Bowl Championship Series.

Texas A&M played for tradition and the memory of 12 fallen Aggies who died in a tragic bonfire accident, a bonfire constructed, by tradition, out of love for the A&M players and the game of football.

Friday, A&M returned that love with a rousing 20-16 upset of arch-rival Texas. It was a great victory in A&M's storied history.

Football history in College Station, Texas, isn't steeped in wins and national championships like Lincoln's is. Rather, it is steeped in memorable games, respected rivals and devoted students.

In a sense, that difference is at the core of A&M's tradition and at the core of those who died because of it. The 11 students and one alumnus were crushed under the weight of massive logs, part of a ritual bonfire constructed every two years before a home game with UT. The students signed waivers before helping with the bonfire structure, so they knew the dangers.

But now, there is talk of litigation and malpractice. There's also talk of stopping the bonfire, which would be wrong. More safety is needed, but the tradition should not stop.

A rich tradition is part of the Aggie identity and should remain so.

Parents of these students will want some compensation for their loss, though we all realize no amount of money can replace the lives of promising students and loving children.

But we doubt the A&M bonfire tradition could be stopped. These deaths will more likely strengthen the tradition for Aggies than cause its discontinuation.

It's the Aggie way. And it's right for them to continue it.

A&M should heed the call for a shift in priority. Safety in these matters cannot be ignored, and certain codes of bonfire construction may need to be adopted.

But countermeasures in the face of tragedy can go too far. A&M would be wise not to do this. No possible environment can be made perfectly safe for students, and an administration bent on creating perfect safety could easily turn into an unwelcome and unwanted "overprotective parent."

Safety issues have already been addressed at A&M; the bonfire used to be bigger. Much bigger. Forty or 50 feet higher.

And the bonfire's previous safety record had not raised concerns: Construction of the bonfires never led to this kind of accident before.

A re-engineering of the biennial event may be in order. A supporting metal structure should be considered inside the core of logs.

Maybe the whole thing needs to be smaller.

But the Aggie tradition should not go away.

Obermeyer's
VIEW

FOURTH GRADER ERIC CROUCH IS CROWNED
1989 HOT POTATO CHAMPION



Language barrier

Patience, understanding can ease culture shock



Since I am still nominally enrolled in the computer science and engineering (CSE) department, I get to take classes with people who, while they may conceivably be competent enough to teach (I haven't really seen any conclusive proof), seem to belong behind the student's desk in an English as a second (or third or 10th) language class.

It drives me up the wall. Dropping a class because you can't comprehend a word your TA says and because you're convinced they barely understand a word you say to them is just plain ridiculous.

But while I may be steamed about wasting my money in such classes, I do have to sympathize.

Nearly nine years ago, I moved to this country with my family (on the day the Gulf War started — there's an omen for you!).

I barely spoke any English. We had to stay in a motel in Queens for a week because of some lost paperwork.

Walking around Queens was utterly surreal. I couldn't get used to all the neon lights, littered streets and oddly dressed people.

I tried not to stare at black people, because until then I'd only seen a grand total of three — a man on the street (I still vividly remember people turning to gawk) and a couple of exchange students in my middle school. The famed "culture shock" hit.

For the entire week, we had to eat at Roy Rogers (a local fast food chain, similar to McDonald's). I haven't looked at fried chicken quite the same way since.

I'd been to a McDonald's twice before and felt very cosmopolitan having done so, but this was obviously a whole new level.

For the first few days (weeks, months) I just thought "OK, people, the joke is over. This isn't a real language you're speaking. I figured you out. Now drop that silly act, and speak my language!"

I won't bore you with the tales of how I acquired my legendary prowess with the English language and the smooth urbanity I display to the world.

Suffice it to say it was a pretty long and painful journey. But, hey, I'm ready to do it all over again.

I think I've gotten addicted to culture shocks. I can't wait to go to France next year (pray to the scholarship gods for me, please) and do it all over again.

If you don't fit in, why not "not fit in" in a foreign country where people get to pat you on the head and tell you how well you speak their language?

I live to spread the joy of patronizing me to the world.

I think what I'm trying to say is — try to be patient with people who obviously aren't as well-versed in slang as you are.

I know very well how tough it is. I've been on both sides of the electric fence, and I know the sheer frustration of being unable to convey any even slightly complicated thought (pointing to your mouth or crotch doesn't count).

And if you really want to improve your patience and cultural awareness, get involved in the English Conversational Partners program offered through the International Affairs office. They match you up with a "new" foreign student, and you get to spend a few hours a week trying to teach him or her all the swear words you can think of and introduce him or her to the local culture (no, I don't know the answer to "What culture?" either).

Granted, I've never made it even to the first organizational meeting, but I do think it's a great idea. It'd be even better if they offered a Foreign Language Conversational Partners program. My French is so rusty it can be used as a science exhibit.

Next time, it would be great if I got a TA whose accent and speech I could actually decipher. But I'm certainly not going to hold my breath. I know there are a lot of people out there who want to study in America, where the streets are paved with gold, and everyone speaks a funny language. Or two.

And sooner or later some of those seekers end up teaching me.

Marina Gandelsman is a junior mechanical and computer engineering major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Editorial Policy

Unsigned editorials are the opinions of the Fall 1999 Daily Nebraskan. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, its employees, its student body or the University of Nebraska Board of Regents. A column is solely the opinion of its author. The Board of Regents serves as publisher of the Daily Nebraskan; policy is set by the Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board. The UNL Publications Board, established by the regents, supervises the production of the paper. According to policy set by the regents, responsibility for the editorial content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its student employees.

Letter Policy

The Daily Nebraskan welcomes brief letters to the editor and guest columns, but does not guarantee their publication. The Daily Nebraskan retains the right to edit or reject any material submitted. Submitted material becomes property of the Daily Nebraskan and cannot be returned. Anonymous submissions will not be published. Those who submit letters must identify themselves by name, year in school, major and/or group affiliation, if any. Submit material to: Daily Nebraskan, 20 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St. Lincoln, NE. 68598-0448. E-mail: letters@unl.edu.

Our Opinions Suck!!!



We need your help. Apply for a columnist position at the Daily Nebraskan. We don't offer a 401K plan, but we are willing to pay for a piece of your mind. Seeking columnists and an Editorial Cartoonist to spout off in your student paper. Get an application at the DN offices or online at www.DailyNeb.com, and return it with two sample columns to 20 Nebraska Union by Friday, Dec. 3, 1999. The Daily Nebraskan is an equal opportunity employer and adheres to all applicable hiring guidelines.