

Aesop and the UT budget

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These are troubled economic times for our country and our University. We heard in President William Powers' State of the University address of a severe downturn in Permanent University Fund investments. This will affect the spendable endowment in the Available University Fund for at least the next three years.

The Texas Legislature has tried to provide relief to financially strapped students and their families by capping tuition increases in the immediate future at 3.95 percent. But that, too, was a major blow to the University budget, which was counting on 4.95 percent increases rising perhaps as high as 6.5 percent.

Tuition would not be the most important factor that it is if the Legislature had allocated more than a 2-percent average annual increase in appropriations to UT over the last 20 years. This is well below the rate of inflation for the basic operation of the University.

Since 1994, as first a departmental chair and then at times a member of the Faculty Council Executive and Budget Advisory committees, I have seen again and again how the University has ingeniously weathered these shortfalls by cutting excess and playing shell games with tuition, endowments and donated funds. UT staff have been falling behind for years. General faculty, too, have received less annually than even the announced below-inflation percentage increases. A good portion of the "average" increases goes into college war chests to retain targeted faculty.

Simply put, the University was running a trim and tight budgetary ship before the current economic crisis hit. What now?

In the latest US News & World Report rankings issued on Sept. 23, UT is ranked 47th nationally and is well behind not only such major public universities as the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Michigan, but even UCLA, UC San Diego, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. What hurts us most in these comparative rankings is the allocation of resources per student and our student-to-faculty ratios. What counterbalances those negatives year-in year-out is the overall strength of faculty.

US News & World Report is not talking here about the relatively small percentage of superstar faculty any of the top public institutions will have: Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winners, national academy members, Guggenheim Fellowship recipients, MacArthur fellows and Fulbright scholars. UC Berkeley far outstrips UT in most of these categories, and it is tiresome to have heard for 20 years now a succession of UT presidents declare that we will become the No. 1 public institution of higher education in the country. We are no closer now than we were 20 years ago.

There is an Aesop's Fable about a dog carrying a bone across a log over a stream. He sees a big bone reflected in the water and goes to grab it. In doing so he loses the bone he has.

Nate 10/5/09 12:58 PM
Exigence for the university's actions, and for this article. Who would dispute that these are troubled times? What expectations does this apparent statement of fact create for the article?

Nate 10/5/09 12:59 PM
Invocation of verifiable facts. Does the author seem to be passing judgment in any way on the Legislature's actions?

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How about here?

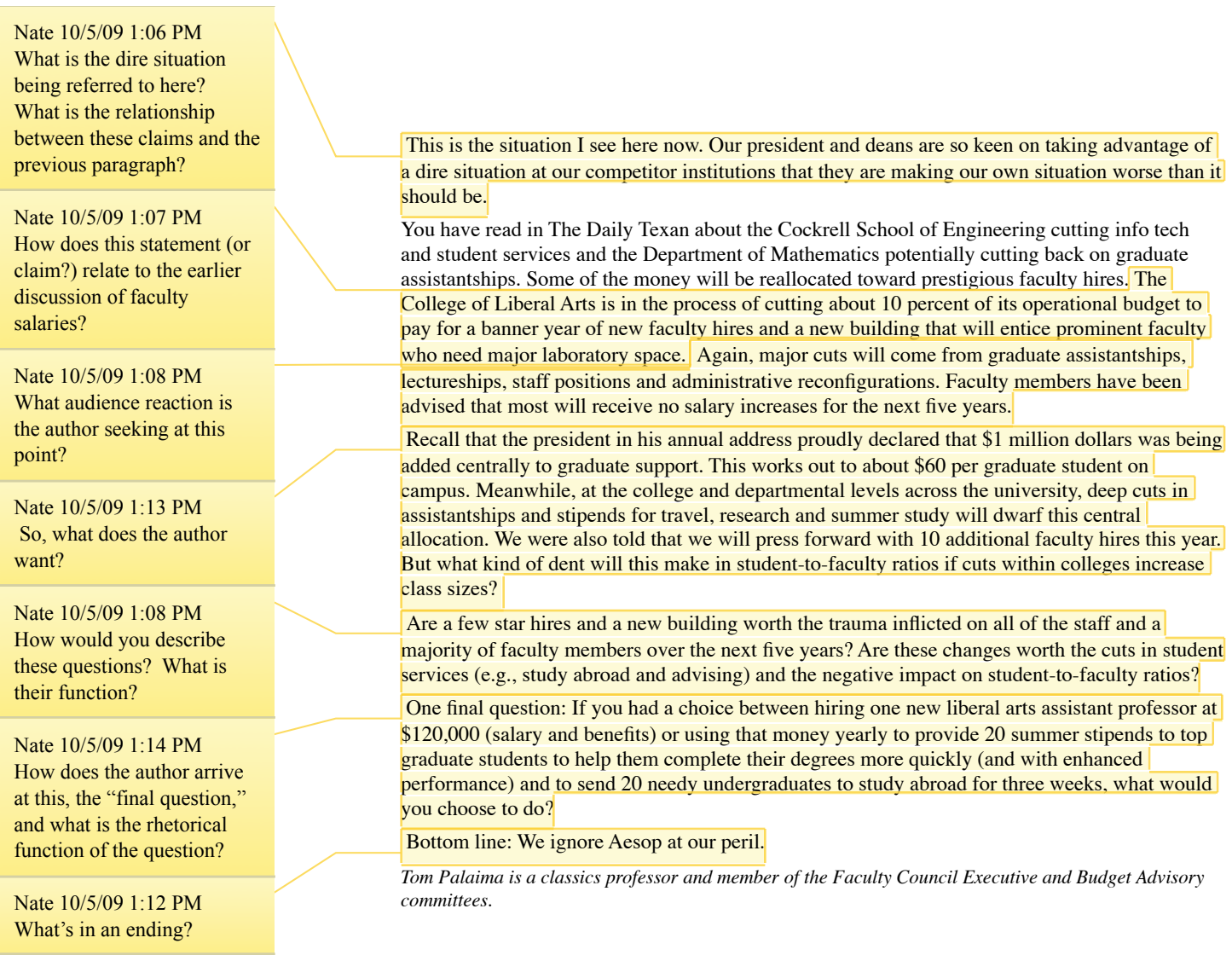
Nate 10/5/09 1:01 PM
What is the purpose of this citation of personal experience?

Nate 10/5/09 1:00 PM
This seems to imply that the author approves of the university's financial creativity.

Nate 10/5/09 1:00 PM
Yet, this phrase seems to imply that the university has engaged in a dishonest ruse, shifting around various sources of funding.

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This is an important premise—even before difficult times arrived, the university was acting frugally, "trim and tight."

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What minor premises or assumptions are built into this paragraph? How many different claims are stated explicitly or implied here? How do those claims build



Nate 10/5/09 1:06 PM
What is the dire situation being referred to here? What is the relationship between these claims and the previous paragraph?

This is the situation I see here now. Our president and deans are so keen on taking advantage of a dire situation at our competitor institutions that they are making our own situation worse than it should be.

Nate 10/5/09 1:07 PM
How does this statement (or claim?) relate to the earlier discussion of faculty salaries?

You have read in The Daily Texan about the Cockrell School of Engineering cutting info tech and student services and the Department of Mathematics potentially cutting back on graduate assistantships. Some of the money will be reallocated toward prestigious faculty hires. The College of Liberal Arts is in the process of cutting about 10 percent of its operational budget to pay for a banner year of new faculty hires and a new building that will entice prominent faculty who need major laboratory space. Again, major cuts will come from graduate assistantships, lectureships, staff positions and administrative reconfigurations. Faculty members have been advised that most will receive no salary increases for the next five years.

Nate 10/5/09 1:08 PM
What audience reaction is the author seeking at this point?

Recall that the president in his annual address proudly declared that \$1 million dollars was being added centrally to graduate support. This works out to about \$60 per graduate student on campus. Meanwhile, at the college and departmental levels across the university, deep cuts in assistantships and stipends for travel, research and summer study will dwarf this central allocation. We were also told that we will press forward with 10 additional faculty hires this year. But what kind of dent will this make in student-to-faculty ratios if cuts within colleges increase class sizes?

Nate 10/5/09 1:13 PM
So, what does the author want?

Are a few star hires and a new building worth the trauma inflicted on all of the staff and a majority of faculty members over the next five years? Are these changes worth the cuts in student services (e.g., study abroad and advising) and the negative impact on student-to-faculty ratios?

Nate 10/5/09 1:08 PM
How would you describe these questions? What is their function?

One final question: If you had a choice between hiring one new liberal arts assistant professor at \$120,000 (salary and benefits) or using that money yearly to provide 20 summer stipends to top graduate students to help them complete their degrees more quickly (and with enhanced performance) and to send 20 needy undergraduates to study abroad for three weeks, what would you choose to do?

Nate 10/5/09 1:14 PM
How does the author arrive at this, the "final question," and what is the rhetorical function of the question?

Bottom line: We ignore Aesop at our peril.

Nate 10/5/09 1:12 PM
What's in an ending?

Tom Palaima is a classics professor and member of the Faculty Council Executive and Budget Advisory committees.