

VOICES

THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The criteria for excellence have been lost in the U.S.

We have lost our standards of quality and excellence. Examples follow.

Recently changes have been made in the grading of Texas high schools by the University Interscholastic League. A new category was added. It was at the lowest rung so it was admitted into the bottom which, according to the criterion used by the UIL, meant every other group had to be bumped up.

We used to have 5A at the top (the largest high schools) and the levels went down to the smallest teams which were 1A. This latest addition of even smaller programs into the league meant that with their admittance there had to be a newly created, even more modest, 1A. Ergo all the others had to be raised.

Thus we now have 5A



J. RONALD CAREY

Guest columnist **J. Ronald Carey** is an emeritus professor at Our Lady of the Lake University.

schools gratuitously becoming 6A. Just like that.

You see what also is happening in the process. Every school has to be some kind of A.

(Parenthetically, may we also wonder why an organization that has university in its name has anything to do with assigning high

school categories?)

If logic were to prevail, the letters designating high school levels would be A, B, C, etc. But we can't have that. We (they) do not want any school to be degraded, so to speak.

The system may have been learned from professional baseball, where there are triple-A and double-A clubs in the minors.

The point is that everyone these days has to be some element of A.

It is also happening in education where it is becoming increasingly difficult to assign a grade below A. The teacher is often put on the defensive. "Why didn't you give me an A?"

There are two possible responses to that student. One is that grades are earned,

they are not given. That never assuages. The other, which is the deserved reply, and one which educators have always wanted to say but can not bring themselves to because of parental wrath, "Your grade is not A because you are dumber than a cinder block."

But back to the main point, which is that the criteria for excellence have been lost.

Pictures of sports teams and other competitors show all of them holding up their index finger as though they are No. 1 — even though for some their last victory was during the Eisenhower administration. (We won't even get into the phenomenon of every team member in every league receiving a trophy regardless of their standings.)

Athletic conferences feel

the need to give themselves exaggerated names. They are BIG. Examples are the Big 12, the Big Ten and the Big East. Apparently, all their members are huge. Are there no averaged-sized universities out there?

How about a Normal Nine or perhaps a Slight Seven conference?

All college sweatshirts that have their sizes on the front say just one size. The wearer may be petite at 105 pounds, and the shirt may fit perfectly but the printed size is XXL. Heaven forbid the wearer might tell the truth and advertise being an M. Or even, egads, an S. That sends the wrong message.

Back to those large college conferences. They are all misnamed.

Work with me on this:

- The Big Ten conference has 12 schools.

- The Big 12 conference has 10 schools.

Huh?

Look at that again. Is this the result of New Math?

Wait, there is more.

The Big East is neither all that big — nor is it east. It has schools from Illinois, Nebraska and Wisconsin.

These days nothing is what its name implies it to be.

In an effort to make ourselves grand, we deceive ourselves by assuming undeserved and unearned titles hoping others will accept the ruse. The disheartening part is that it seems to be working.

■ J. Ronald Carey is a Canyon Lake resident and an emeritus marketing professor at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR