

Recommendation from the Faculty Senate

The lyrics for the Texas State University school song, titled "Alma Mater," were written in the early 1900's by one of the first Texas State faculty members, Jessie Sayers, to the tune of "Ancient of Days," a Presbyterian hymn written in 1896 by J. Albert Jeffrey. Sayers was a respected faculty member and the sister of Texas Governor Joseph Sayers. The song's lyrics harken back to the golden era of school tributes and paint a classical and idyllic portrait of the hilly campus above the San Marcos River.

The Faculty Senate voted on January 27, 2016, to recommend a resolution initiated by the Department of Psychology in Fall 2014 to change the word "cheering" in the second line of the last verse of, "Alma Mater" to "aiding."

On February 10, 2016 President Denise Trauth met with the Faculty Senate to discuss the recommendation. Dr. Trauth asked the Faculty Senate to contact the following stakeholders to seek their input on this question: 1) Staff Council, Vicki Brittain; 2) Student Government, Joanne Smith; 3) Council of Chairs, Mary Brennan; 4) the Council of Academic Deans, Gene Bourgeois; and 5) the Alumni Board, Barbara Breier. President Trauth requested that each entity send written notification to her of whether they support or do not support the revision.

"Alma Mater"

O, Alma Mater, set upon the green hills,
With turrets pointing upward to the sky;
We yield to thee our love and our devotion;
Mother of hopes and aspirations high.

Thy spirit urges us to deeds of valor,
Raising the fallen, cheering the oppressed;
Thy call will echo clearly down the ages.
Dear Alma Mater, mother loved and blessed

Rationale for Recommendation

Webster's 1857 American Dictionary, available at Texas State's Alkek Library, was consulted for possible meanings of "cheer" in use at the time Ms. Sayers wrote the Alma Mater. The most relevant of the definitions was the second, "To dispel gloom, sorrow, silence, or apathy; to cause to rejoice; to gladden; to make cheerful."

The original wording, "cheering the oppressed," has a different meaning today than when the lyrics were written. In the contemporary collegiate setting, the word "cheering" most strongly elicits cheering in support of athletic teams. The original intention of offering cheer to the oppressed may be lost to our current students and recent alumni.

The intervening years since the lyrics were written have brought significant changes to society and to Texas State. Approximately 60 years after Ms. Sayers wrote the Alma Mater lyrics, Texas State was integrated for the first time. Our most illustrious alumnus, President Lyndon Johnson, designed the "Great Society Legislation" and signed several nation-changing bills, including the Civil Rights Act and the Economic Opportunity Act, providing for Johnson's "War on Poverty" programs. The Higher Education Act, signed at Texas State University, provided scholarships and financial assistance to students who otherwise would not have been able to afford college.

The U.S. Department of Education has granted Texas State University official recognition as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) by surpassing the 25 percent Hispanic undergraduate enrollment level.

All these changes at Texas State would not have been achieved without the help of alumni and the efforts of many individuals in the university community who are fully engaged in recruiting, retaining and providing exceptional educational opportunities for all students.

Moreover, the student body engages in many service activities for the San Marcos and surrounding communities throughout the year. Most notable is Bobcat Build, the largest service activity for Texas State organizations involving over 4,000 students giving back to the community in over 250 jobsite projects. The Student Volunteer Connection is another notable project by students that recently provided relief resources to flood victims in Hays County. And, this past fall a signature event for student involvement was the Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week held in November. These are just a few examples of students making a difference in the lives of others, particularly those in need.

The 2015-2016 and 2014-2015 Common Experience themes make a change to the Alma Mater at this time particularly appropriate. The 2015-2016 Common Experience theme is “Bridged Through Stories: Shared Heritage of the United States and Mexico, an Homage to Dr. Tomás Rivera”; the 2014-2015 Common Experience theme was “Exploring Democracy’s Promise: From Segregation to Integration” in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of integration at Texas State University. Both of these themes focus on experiences of the oppressed and the connections that Texas State has to society’s journey toward recognizing disparities and efforts initiated to alleviate such disparities.

Last year, Falls Sayers Residence Hall was dedicated to commemorate Jessie Sayers' contribution to our university's heritage. In recognition of Ms. Sayers' inspiring words and to clarify the intent of the wording to more clearly express the noble sentiments calling us to “deeds of valor” to help the oppressed, the Faculty Senate supports strengthening the meaning of the second line of the last verse by changing the word “cheering” to “aiding.” The true purpose of Jessie Sayers' Alma Mater is reflected in this minor revision, the desire to provide aid to those who suffer under oppression.

Resolution

Whereas people throughout the world continue to suffer under the chains of oppression, and

Whereas the 2015-2016 Common Experience theme is “Bridged Through Stories: Shared Heritage of the United States and Mexico, an Homage to Dr. Tomás Rivera,” focusing on hardships of immigrants, and

Whereas the 2014-2015 Common Experience theme, “Exploring Democracy’s Promise: From Segregation to Integration” highlighted the 50th anniversary of desegregation of Texas State University, and

Whereas the University dedicated the Falls Sayers Residence Hall in Fall 2014 to keep alive the spirit of Jessie Sayers, author of the Alma Mater, and

Whereas the final verse of the Alma Mater calls members of the Texas State community to meaningful action,

Therefore, be it resolved to reaffirm Texas State’s commitment to fight oppression in all forms by strengthening a single word in the Alma Mater lyrics written by Jessie Sayers: from “cheering the oppressed” to “aiding the oppressed.”

Contact Persons: The following individuals had agreed to be “point persons” for the proposed amendment: Bill Kelemen, Roque Mendez, Augustine Agwuele, and Shirley Ogletree