

Professor claims misuse of TAs

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Prof. James Sledd of the English department is a man with a mission. He is determined to change a system in which he believes teaching assistants (TA's) on campus, especially in the English department, are being misused by faculty who do not want to teach freshmen and sophomores.

As with all men who seek change, his words have aroused a mixed response — from "thunderous applause" at a recent Philadelphia meeting of English professors, to administration silence and faculty rebuttals on his own campus.

Despite the opposition, Sledd rejects the notion that his is a "voice in the wilderness."

"The views I express will become widespread in 10 years. And the people who resist them today will adopt them and claim credit for inventing them," he said.

'Grubby' chore

Sledd says the TA situation is abused throughout the entire University.

Basically, Sledd contends the faculty of the English department

has avoided its duty to teach freshmen and sophomores the basics of rhetoric and composition, preferring instead to concentrate on research and publication — activities that earn money, status and prestige. As one former chairman of the English department said, the English faculty has a "deep-seated detestation" for teaching composition.

For those reasons, the "grubby" chore of teaching freshmen and sophomores reading and writing has been passed on to TAs who are neither qualified nor given the opportunity to teach well, Sledd said.

Dr. Irwin Lieb, vice-president and dean of graduate studies, is not taken by Sledd's opinions. He believes TAs are vital and important to the University and considers Sledd's arguments exaggerated and extreme.

Lieb concedes, though, that problems do exist, especially in the English department. However, the TA problems in the English department are not characteristic of the whole University, he contends.

Mike Rush, an assistant instructor and member of the executive com-

mittee of the Union of Graduate Student Workers, also believes TAs are important and good teachers but that given the opportunity, they could be better teachers.

TAs taught 78 per cent

Are TA's widely used for most of the teaching?

In the English department, enrollment reports show that in the fall of '71, spring of '72 and fall of '75, TAs taught approximately 78 per cent of the lower-division classes.

Prof. James Stice, director of the Center for Teaching Effectiveness, who informed the Faculty Senate in 1974 that in the fall of 1973 TAs were teaching more than 60 per cent of all undergraduate hours at UT Austin.

Lieb said the figures are untrue as there are no records in the provost's office dealing with contact hours. Contact hours gauge the number of hours a TA actually spends with students rather than the credit hours the student receives. While it is true that 60 per cent of the contact hours in the English department are assigned to TAs, that is not true throughout the University, Lieb said.

Stice said the figures he quoted do exist because he obtained them from Dr. Gerhard Fonken, associate provost. Fonken, however, denies having provided Stice with such statistics, saying the provost's office did not have that information at the time.

Confusing dispute

Lieb said, contrary to Sledd's charges, the faculty teach nearly all undergraduates. In a March-April, 1976 *Alcalde* article, Lieb wrote, "This fall, for example, TAs taught 15.9 percent of the undergraduate student credit hours.... The remainder, nearly 80 per cent of the undergraduate student credit hours, were taught by professors, associate professors, assistant professors, lecturers and instructors...."

Sledd said Lieb's facts are irrelevant, and while they may look devastating, they are not.

"It would thus be possible, by the simple device of having a ranked faculty member sign the grade-sheet for a TA's class, to assert that the TA who had done all the teaching had done none, while the faculty member who had done none had done it all," Sledd said.