

# TAs must often 'drag a student back to sanity'

*Duties vary with departments — so do work loads, pay scales*

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Often the person grading your paper will be the teaching assistant (TA). He or she is a graduate student employed by the University to aid professors in teaching classes and conducting research as well as grading papers.

Duties of TAs vary from department to department. In the humanities departments such as English and foreign languages, they do much of the actual teaching of lower division courses. In science departments, the TA usually helps conduct lab sessions and in history and government, grading of papers and leading discussion sections are the jobs of TAs.

TAs view their jobs in varying lights. Some are quite content while others are disturbed by the amount of work and pay scales which vary between departments.

Steve Felman, chemistry TA, is fairly happy with his job. He is classified as a TA III, working on his PhD and has taught five straight

semesters in organic chemistry, a sophomore course.

"You're often faced with having to drag a student back from panic to sanity," said Felman.

Felman also feels he is paid "not extravagantly, but, for a 20-hour-a-week job, decently."

Dan Miller, French TA, has a different opinion.

"I don't feel we're overworked, but I do feel we're underpaid," said Miller.

He teaches French 406 and 312 classes, both lower division courses.

"I feel I've learned twice as much as any of my students. I'm about the same age as most of my students and that makes it even more rewarding. It's very demanding but one good class makes it all worthwhile," said Miller.

Psychology TA Steve Saltwick feels that his experience of occasional lecturing in a 301 class has been "very beneficial."

Saltwick enjoys having a chance to lecture, especially

to 500 students. "That opportunity doesn't come up too often," said Saltwick.

His job with the 301 class involved going to class every day, grading papers, administering quizzes and lecturing at least five or six sessions a semester.

Mike Rush, president of the Graduate Student Workers Union and an English TA, thinks that TAs are underpaid and overworked and he has several solutions.

Rush said he wants to see the TA's workload reduced. He is pushing for TAs to have designated periodic time off from teaching to enable them to study on fellowships. Also, Rush would like to involve TAs in a system like an apprenticeship in which the graduate student would work closely with the professor and learn what is required to run a class.

"A TA-ship is not only a source of financial aid, but a training process as well," said Rush, "the TA is both a grad student and an employe."

While Rush is concerned with the financial situation of

the TAs, Dr. James Sledd of the English department wants to keep TAs from teaching altogether.

Sledd believes that faculty too often pass on the responsibility of teaching freshman and sophomore courses to TAs who are not experienced enough to handle them.

"They (the TAs) teach courses the regular faculty doesn't want to teach and that the administration doesn't want to spend much money to have taught by those better qualified," writes Sledd in the March/April edition of *Alcalde*, the Ex-Students' Association magazine.

Sledd maintains the problem is one that applies not only to the English department, but to every department on campus.

He goes on to point to a survey he conducted in spring, 1975, which indicates that of nearly 500 TAs surveyed, 326, representing more than 40 departments, said they were fully in charge of the courses they taught.

Sledd says that the TAs do not have the experience need-

ed to teach the classes and that the University does not allow them a "fair chance to be good teachers." He also argues that this inexperience has had damaging effects on the writing ability of lower division students.

English TA Kathryn Green has a different opinion of the abilities of TAs to teach lower division courses. "I am eminently qualified to teach the course (English 306)," said Green, who will be teaching the course in the fall.

"I've taught three years in a Houston high school and that has put me in touch with the background that these students have in the subject," said Green.

She also said it would be good if faculty did teach some lower division courses, "if for no other reason than to put them in touch with reality."

Rush also feels TAs are qualified to teach the lower division courses.

"TAs by and large do a good job. They are an indispensable part of the University as it is now constituted," said Rush.

Rush does acknowledge that if the TAs are inexperienced



Audio-visual equipment may ease TAs' load

in teaching, it is largely the fault of the faculty for not instructing the graduate student in methods of teaching.

"I tend to agree that faculty members are not willing to teach the lower division courses," said Rush, "but I

partly understand their reluctance. Not many tenure appointments are made on the basis of teaching experience."

Sledd has pushed his investigation to the Texas Legislature where House Speaker Bill Clayton has ask-

ed two committees to examine the issue.

A spokesman in the office of Rep. Fred Head, chairman of the Higher Education Committee, said that a subcommittee would be appointed in mid-August to make a report.