



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
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May 23, 1985

Ted Koppel / *Nightline*
ABC Television
New York, NY

Dear Mr. Koppel:

I found it ironic that among the statistics you used to dramatize the dimensions of the adult illiteracy problem in the United States (*Nightline*, May 20, 1985) were some produced by researchers at the University of Texas at Austin--an institution which recently permitted its English Department to fire almost fifty teachers of writing. This large-scale dismissal of non-tenured faculty underscores a national problem with instruction in writing (and other basic courses) at our universities: more and more, academic institutions are relying on cheap, powerless, and exploitable "temporary" faculty to teach the bulk of their undergraduate courses. These instructors have no voice in their departments, no academic freedom, and as the Texas experience proves, no job security.

At the University of Texas, the writing teachers were dismissed in part because their sheer numbers were beginning to threaten the security of the tenured and tenure-track literature faculty. Given a choice between faculty security and literate students, the administration of the English Department predictably choose faculty security. Writing, after all, is a subject many professors in Departments of English across the country would rather not teach. And so the problem festers, with the responsibility for teaching writing tossed like a ticking bomb between the administrators who fear what writing programs cost and the traditional faculty who resent the time and expertise it takes to teach writing well.

I am enclosing several recent articles on the controversy here. Perhaps they will give you additional insight into one of the sad political dimensions of America's literacy crisis. Thank you for an informative and important program. Educational problems are rarely as "sexy" as bombings, political scandals, and natural disasters on the network news, but they are often of greater and more enduring consequence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John J. Ruszkiewicz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

John J. Ruszkiewicz
Associate Professor
Director of Freshman English