

March 23, 1984

To: W.D.S. Sutherland

From: Maxine Hairston

Unfortunately I and most other members of the rhetoric interest group will be out of town to attend the CCCC convention in New York when the Senate meets on March 28, but I believe that the issue of the lecturers in the department is so important that I need to speak to it even if I cannot be at the meeting.

I know that you and the executive committee are deeply concerned about the lecturer problem and the general problem of staffing our courses, and that you have worked hard on the proposal that has been submitted to the departmental senate. I am also aware that the problems are extremely difficult and tangled and that there are no good solutions. Anything we do or propose will have serious disadvantages, and there will be even more serious consequences if we do nothing.

In spite of these difficulties, however, I cannot endorse the proposal to reduce to part-time status those four lecturers who have served full time in the department for six years. They have done a good job for us, we still need them to teach courses, and I think we should ask that they be given tenure and recognized as regular members of the department. The administration can promote any faculty member when it serves their purposes to do so; they have done so more than once. Now we should ask them to recognize their--and our--commitment to these lecturers. We have used these people for our purposes without worrying about their future, and now we should face the consequences of that action. If we now dismiss them or reduce them to part-time employment at lower salaries, we will not only be violating AAUP guidelines, but we will be acting in flagrant bad faith. I realize that my proposal is radical and controversial, particularly when several of our assistant professors were denied tenure this year, but I still believe we have incurred an obligation that we cannot renege on.

As for hiring lecturers in the future, I suggest the temporary compromise of giving new lecturers a three-year contract and instituting comprehensive and thoughtful review procedures that involve much more than looking at student evaluations. If at the end of three years we judge them to be doing an excellent job--not just a satisfactory job--that contract can be renewed for another three years. At the end of six years their complete record should be exhaustively reviewed and if we judge that they have done an excellent job, we should recommend them for tenure. Criteria for judgment could be worked out later.

It seems to me that we should our previous policy of giving new U.T. English department Ph.D.s first priority in hiring should be dropped. I do not think it has been practical or wise,

and in fact most of our Ph.D.s do not seem to have used their years of service here for job hunting. Our graduates who have done best in the job market are those who sought jobs as soon as they completed their degrees.

I think we should reject any suggestions that we institute a policy of hiring lecturers on non-renewable three or four year contracts. If we do so, we will be endorsing and institutionalizing the concept of a two-tiered faculty of first and second class citizens. We already have such a faculty, but we should be trying to abolish rather than perpetuate it. I also believe that the department must start immediately to work out a long range plan that will in five to ten years completely eliminate lecturers from our teaching staff.

I know the practice of using temporary faculty to teach lower-division courses--especially writing courses--is widespread and that administrations justify by the argument from circumstance, citing financial exigency. I don't think there is any evidence that financial exigencies are worse than they have been in the past, but now the people who allot instructional money have discovered that there is a cheaper way to staff courses in the humanities than to hire regular faculty. In order to counteract that tendency, I think it is time our department and other departments in major universities all over the country take a strong stand against the practice and work together to start eliminating it. I think that as a group we have not given enough thought to the serious consequences of hiring more and more temporary faculty and allowing from thirty to forty percent of our classes to be taught by them. I'd like to spell out what I see as some of those consequences.

First, I think the practice seriously threatens the institution of tenure. Staffing more and more courses in English with temporary, non-tenurable faculty has strong elements of union-busting. As tenured faculty leave or retire, their lines are eliminated--we have lost at least 20 lines in the last 20 years although we are teaching more students than ever. The gap between our teaching capacity and our staffing needs is filled in from the bottom with temporary faculty who are cheaper, are powerless, and are not eligible for expensive fringe benefits. To the outside observer--a business person or legislator, for example--these faculty seem to work harder than regular faculty and contribute more teaching for less money. And since we claim that they do an excellent job, why bring in any new tenure-track professors? Since there is a glut of Ph.D.s in English on the market, why not hire everyone on renewable five-year contracts and get rid of them if they don't produce? That's what they do in business and it seems to work.

We don't have a very good answer for such questions because by allowing large numbers of our classes to be taught by non-tenured paraprofessionals, we have jeopardized our professional claims that one has to have special credentials and a protected

posidon to teach effectively in a university.

Second, it is the practice of using temporary faculty to staff university and college courses in the humanities that is causing the job shortage in the humanities. Despite predicted drops in college enrollment, the number of students in college continues to grow. If administrators were to start hiring enough regular faculty to teach those students, the job market would boom. We, by passively cooperating with the policy of using temporary and part-time faculty, are helping to cause the shortage. And because of the shortage of regular, tenure-track jobs, fewer and fewer students are going into graduate programs in English. Thus we stand to lose our graduate programs and diminish our own jobs, protected though we may think they are. Although it may seem comfortable now for us not to have new tenure-track faculty coming into the department to compete for the limited number of graduate courses, that lack of competition is an illusory and short-term benefit. Eventually we'll lose graduate courses.

Third, we also hurt our undergraduate courses by allowing most of our lower-division courses to be taught by temporary or part-time faculty whom we have relegated to second-class status. Un-doubtedly some of them do a good job, although I think we know much less about that than we like to admit, but if we want to recruit future English majors from the lower-division classes, those classes should have the best teachers we can put in them. Most students make up their minds about their majors early, and we shouldn't complain about the caliber of our English majors if we were not in the freshman and sophomore classes to excite and inspire the students. We also shouldn't complain that they can't write if we have left the teaching of writing to overworked and ignored temporary faculty.

Finally, I think we have a responsibility to strengthen our profession by insisting that courses at our university be taught by fully-credentialed people with professional responsibilities and professional status. If we and our administrators are honestly concerned with promoting excellence at this institution, then this is the time to start doing something about a teaching situation that has become morally and professionally irresponsible. I think we should start by asking to double the number of new positions in the department each year, and perhaps in ten years we will be able to meet our obligations to our students. I don't suggest that it will be easy either to convince the administration of our needs or to make internal adjustments in the department, but I think we must begin. The dilemma we have gotten ourselves into is so potentially destructive that we cannot continue to temporize with it.

Maxine Hairston

copies to James Kinneavy, Neill Megaw, and John Ruskiewicz

Maxine