

LECTURERS: THE ISSUES

The adoption of the recommendations proposed by the Executive Committee may seem to be a trivial matter in the total departmental picture. But I would like to argue that much larger issues than the structure of this particular department, or the disposition of a few lecturers approaching de facto AAUP tenure are at stake. I would argue that four major issues of national importance are involved. They are: free speech for the majority of faculty in an English department; the quality of education for the students in a large state institution; the relative importance of composition and literature in an English department's program; and the future of tenure for everybody in this state.

Origin of the Problem. The problem is caused by the decline in the number of graduate students available for teaching (mainly) composition classes. When we had 175 TA's, there was no need for what we now call lecturers. Now that we have only 100 AI's, we need additional faculty to teach these courses and have hired lecturers for this purpose. Thus a new and large class has been created on the university campus, a class which has been called unprofessional by some members of the tenured faculty. And, because this "unprofessional" class seems to give an unfavorable aura to the department, the move has been made to get rid of it. This seems to be the motivation of the policies recommended by the EC.

The reasons why the members of this class are unprofessional are only vaguely suggested. Some tenured faculty say that lecturers are unprofessional because they teach composition--not literature; and the professional in this department teaches literature, these few allege. Others hint that the lecturers are not as good teachers as the tenure-accruing and tenured faculty; I personally have not seen figures on this. I do know that we are more aware of the teaching abilities of the lecturers than we are of those of the regular faculty because the former must be evaluated every semester. And, of course, it is easier to be a good teacher when one teaches only two or three courses instead of four. Finally, there are those who point to the fact that the lecturers do not publish. Undoubtedly, some do not; with a four-course load, it is surprising that any of them publish. Nevertheless, if professionalism is defined by publications, many of our tenured faculty must be viewed as unprofessional as the lecturers.

So much for past and present. Let us take a brief look at the future and what issues are at stake in the proposals under consideration.

A. FREE SPEECH.

Tenure exists in order to ensure freedom of speech to a college faculty. So, when one decides that, for the future, more than half of the faculty of this department will routinely be

denied access to tenure, one is deciding that this segment of the department will also be denied freedom of speech. In a meeting with some of the lecturers yesterday, this was made very clear to me. Some of them are afraid to say or even to vote their opinions for fear of recrimination. The present situation exemplifies the very issue at stake. Yet it is difficult to maintain, with any seriousness, that the elite literati have a right to freedom of speech, but that migrant peasants have no such right.

B. QUALITY OF EDUCATION FOR THE STUDENTS IN COMPOSITION CLASSES.

The student tends to be the forgotten item in many of the discussions to date. Yet the student can benefit from the present developments. For the first time in many years, possibly thirty, there is the chance for a permanent and trained composition faculty--a faculty which would make a "profession" out of teaching writing. This is the one good by-product of the current situation. If we can find a way to retain the best teachers of composition in some permanent way, we can build up as professional a corps of teachers of composition as we presently have for literature.

Yet the EC proposal specifically prevents this by forcing all future lecturers out of the department as soon as they have learned to be good teachers. This assures a transient population for the teachers of composition. It means that the students in the composition classes will continually be taught by perpetual beginners. Yet the composition classes are almost half of our regular course offerings.

Why not try to make this department first class both in literature and in composition? We have a chance to do both. The EC proposal condemns half of the offerings of the department to perpetual mediocrity.

C. THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF COMPOSITION AND LITERATURE IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT.

The preceding issue leads naturally to the next issue. The determination that the teachers of the composition classes are transient migrants is a determination about the importance of teaching writing in our society. The demeaning of rhetoric in favor of literature is a twentieth century phenomenon in the history of the liberal arts tradition. I have attempted to sketch the history of this tendency in several recent articles and speeches. I can only say that a healthy liberal arts tradition has to maintain a balance among the three kinds of thinking represented by logic, rhetoric, and poetic. If the largest English department in the country systematically adheres to this denigration of rhetoric, the future of the liberal arts will continue to be threatened, as it is today. On the other

hand, we can be a model to the rest of the country by a wholesome integration of literature and rhetoric into a strong program, unifying the university both dialectally and conceptually.

D. THE FUTURE OF TENURE.

Possibly the most serious immediate danger which the EC proposal presents is the danger to tenure. If the English department goes on record as saying (1) that more than half of the members of its department have no need of tenure, and (2) that the teaching of composition does not merit tenure, this is a clear signal to the legislature that the notion of tenure needs to be looked at. We all know what has happened to tenure at UT Permian Basin and at the UT Systems Cancer Center (our own regents abolished tenure and the legislature did not object). We know that tenure is being questioned all around the country. If the largest English department in the country can dispense with tenure for more than half of its members, tenure after all must not be such a necessary commodity, it could be argued.

This is the fourth issue at stake here today. Do we want to be responsible for the demise of tenure in this state?

RECOMMENDATION. Of the EC recommendations, the first having to do with the definition of the lecturer is simply a clarification of the policy which all departments follow with regard to the hiring of lecturers. The last establishes a healthy priority for hiring lecturers. Both of these should be adopted.

The middle policy, attempting to put a time limitation on the service of lecturers, is the one which denies free speech to more than half of the teaching faculty of the department, which assures that half of the offerings of the department will never be first class because they will always be taught by rank beginners, which denigrates two of the three branches of the liberal arts tradition, and which endangers the future of tenure for all faculty in the state. I urge you to reject it.

By rejecting this policy and following the first and third policies, the department can work toward a way in which the teachers of the composition courses of the department can eventually be as professional as the teachers of literature. This may entail successive hirings of new assistant professors to replace temporary appointments and will undoubtedly take time. And if some of the current lecturers can meet these hiring standards, all the better. In the meantime, I hope that the Senate will favor free speech, quality instruction, an integrated liberal arts program, and a respect for tenure over a restricted freedom of speech, an assured mediocrity for half of our offerings, a fragmented and unbalanced liberal arts program, and the most serious threat to tenure which this state has yet seen.

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