

Academic disaster lurks in TA measure

By JAMES L. KINNEAVY

The bill dealing with the use of teaching assistants in universities has passed out of the House Higher Education Committee and will soon be considered by the entire House. After listening to testimony on the bill, after talking to several legislators and after discussing it with many colleagues, I am firmly convinced that no serious impact study has yet been made of the bill. Indeed, most of the testimony about the bill seems to have been on the problems which motivated the bill, rather than on the projected solution. The solution, in fact, is possibly worse than the problem.

Two aspects of the bill in particular make it unmanageable and impractical, even harmful. The first has to do with the failure to provide a grace period for the universities to prepare intelligently for alternate systems of instruction. If the bill passes this summer, UT Austin, for example, may have less than a month to realize radical changes in instructional techniques affecting, for example, in the Department of English alone, 10,000 students.

Secondly, Sec. 1 (d) will have far-reaching and damaging effects. It states that "The governing board of a public institution of higher education may not employ teaching assistants to teach a greater number of student contact hours at any level than the number equal to 25 per cent of the student contact hours taught by fulltime ranked faculty members at the same level." The effects of these two facets of the bill particularly concern me.

TO ESTIMATE the practical effect of the bill, in its present form, I have contacted chairpersons or persons directly involved with five undergraduate programs and with five graduate programs at The University and asked them to predict the results of the bill on these 10 programs. The overwhelming verdict of these persons is that the implementation of this bill in their departments would result in a complete disaster.

I shall try to explain the reasons for this judgment as briefly as I can.

The five undergraduate programs which I examined were: accounting, English, mathematics, Spanish and government. The graduate departments which I examined were: German, Spanish, linguistics, accounting and educational psychology. Occasionally I shall refer to other programs.

I CHOSE TO EXAMINE the impact of these two aspects of the bill on departments since the university department was the most accessible unit of investigation. One member of the administration told me that a total assessment of the percentage of contact hours taught by TAs in the University was not immediately possible. Another member of the administration told me that even if one department or college might not be affected, it would not be in the spirit of the bill to allow one college, for example, to absorb all of the allowed TAs. I assume, therefore, that the effects of the bill will be departmental.

In the department of accounting, TAs teach all but two of about 35 sections a semester in the basic accounting course. If only four or five TAs are allowed at this level, some 9 to 12 new teachers would have to be hired to handle the remainder of the sections. Dr. Kermit Larsen says that the department just couldn't find this number of accounting teachers between now and next September. He sees no realistic way to adjust to the con-

ditions required by the bill in the time given. The undergraduate accounting program, he says, would be thrown into chaos by the bill.

IN ENGLISH, TAs teach approximately 270 of the 325 sections of the freshman composition and sophomore literature courses. If TAs were allowed to handle only one-fourth of these sections, some 75 to 80 fulltime faculty would have to be hired this summer to manage the classes, if the present class sizes are retained.

Since such a procedure is manifestly ridiculous, the English department is presently examining two other alternatives. One is to collapse the present small classes of

guest viewpoint

25 students each into monster classes of 300 to 400 taught by regular faculty and to hire "graders" instead of TAs. This alternative is supported by some members of the central administration. The second alternative is to forget direct instruction in writing compositions and instead reduce the writing experience to a laboratory series of grammar modules (the bill allows the use of TAs in labs). It is a sad but ironic fact that the first victim of Mr. Sledd's legislative efforts may be the composition program for which he has worked so hard.

BOTH ALTERNATIVES would be tragic for the students. In both cases they would lose the necessary contact with a teacher who carefully grades the themes and meets the student in individual conferences. At a time in which hundreds of other institutions in the country are strengthening their writing programs, it is simply unbelievable that the universities in Texas should be forced to destroy theirs. Both of these suggestions are evasions of the responsibility to teach students how to write.

I do not have to go into the details of the three remaining departments, mathematics, government and Spanish. All three of these lower division programs would become confused shambles. To retain present class and group discussion sizes, mathematics would have to hire 15-20 fulltime faculty; government would have to hire 38; and Spanish would have to hire 33. In mathematics, as in English, some are now advocating much larger class sizes. In each case the student suffers.

There are other departments whose undergraduate programs would also be severely impaired should the bill go into effect: history, educational psychology, curriculum and instruction, all of the modern foreign

languages, etc. Some types of departments would not be affected. Generally the engineering and physical science departments would not be damaged, as far as my contacts can judge. Unfortunately, a full impact statement has not been made by anyone.

SOME OF THE BEST of our graduate programs would be effectively dismantled if House Bill 833 takes effect next September. Dr. Leslie Willson, chairman of the German department and Dr. Rodolfo Cardona, Spanish chairman, both acknowledge that the bill would practically demolish their respective graduate departments by depriving the program of its essential ingredients — graduate students.

The teaching assistantship is the typical method whereby a graduate student in these areas finances his education. It might be pointed out that German and Spanish are two of the best graduate departments in the country; they were rated third and fifth in the country in the most recent Cartter survey.

THE GRADUATE PROGRAM in linguistics, rated the second best in the country, would be forced to send most of its graduates into a fiercely competitive market without the benefit of teaching experience, since most of them teach presently either in English or in lower division linguistics courses.

The Department of Accounting would lose approximately 80 per cent of its graduate students; as a result, approximately 80 per cent of the offerings would have to be abandoned and only a skeleton graduate program could be retained. Such a program could not at all be competitive with any serious

graduate program in the country.

Two other graduate programs which would be similarly butchered would be those in educational psychology and curriculum and instruction. These make up the backbone of the College of Education, which just six weeks ago was rated the ninth best in the country among public institutions.

CURIOSLY ENOUGH, the Hoestenbach bill is listed as one with no major financial corollaries. Yet if the cost of replacing the TAs in the five undergraduate programs which I have listed above (accounting, English, mathematics, government and Spanish) is added up, the figure reaches something well in excess of \$3,334,000, given beginning faculty salaries and the necessary backing funds. This is just the figure for five of the larger departments.

The alternative to paying this kind of money is to throw the students into huge and impersonal classes in some areas in which no one has successfully managed to use large sections. This is particularly true in English and the foreign languages.

It is no accident that frequently the two smallest classes of a freshman entering the University are his English and his math class. This bill will almost undoubtedly get rid of these and completely mechanize the freshman experience. Despite its good intentions, House Bill 833 is ill-conceived, has not been seriously examined as to its effects and would make a laughing stock of the University of Texas across the entire country. Unfortunately, we are getting only too used to such cruel jokes.

James L. Kinneavy is a professor of English and curriculum and instruction.



THE DAILY TEXAN

Student Newspaper at The University of Texas at Austin
PERMANENT STAFF

- Editor Mary Walsh
- Managing Editor Michael Cardenaz
- Assistant to the Editor Chris Hearne
- Assistant Managing Editors Bill Cockerill, Danny Cunningham
- News Editor Kim McCormick
- Associate News Editor Marcie Gugenheim
- Entertainment Editor Colin Hunter
- Associate Entertainment Editor Eric Harrison
- Entertainment Reporter Brad Stribling
- Features Editor Bobby Cheek
- Sports Editor Jerry Briggs
- Photo Editor Mike Smith
- General Reporters Dana Ehrlich, Gary Fendler, Christy Hoppe, Dan Malone, Rosanne Mogavero, Michelle O'Leary, Sonia Perez, Karen Tumulty

ISSUE STAFF

- Issue Editor Ken Ortolon
- News Assistants Susan Rogers, Leslie Thordarson, Kevin Fleming, Jim Duff, Vicki Lovejoy, Dee Steer
- Editorial Assistants Clyde Hoover, Monty Jones
- Assistant Sports Editor Laura Tuma
- Sports Assistant Jim Lefko
- Make-up Editor Glenn Redus
- Wire Editor Steve McAdoo
- Copy Editors Deborah K. Mann, JoAnn Brown, Kevon Andersen, Mary McMullen, Debi Moen, Sue Berkel, Ginger Bergin, Marilane Nather, Kay Moseley,
- Artists Joe Vissers, Kurt Siegfried, Michael Gable
- Photographers David Breslauer, Carlos Osorio

Opinions expressed in The Daily Texan are those of the editor or the writer of the article and are not necessarily those of the University administration or the Board of Regents. For advertising and subscription information, see Page 2.



20% OFF ALL PRINTS
3 DAY SALE

Today, Thursday and Friday, the Unicorn is having a 20% off sale on all posters except original art and framed pictures. Come by and nab a bargain.