

Teaching Assistant Program Undergoing Intense Scrutiny

By ANN MCKAY
Texan Staff Writer

The University teaching assistant program is "an area of mutual concern rather than an issue between Dr. James Sledd and the administration," Dr. Stanley Ross, University vice-president and provost, said Thursday.

Sledd, professor of English, has alleged that teaching assistants (TAs) are being exploited by the faculty Sledd has waged a vendetta against the English department for several years and is extending his criticism to the University administration for what appears to be its failure to force departmental action.

There is a difference of opinion on the best way to resolve any problems related to the TA situation, Ross said.

"A GOOD DEAL of effort has been put in to improve the

University's TA program," Dr. Gerhard Fonken, associate provost, said.

For example, several years ago a minimum salary requirement for TAs did not exist. The administration now enforces an equitable pay scale by requiring that a department have enough money to pay a TA the minimum salary before the appointment can be approved.

The administration has been accused of holding back money for TA appointments until the last possible moment, which results in TAs being insufficiently prepared to teach.

Ross and Fonken vehemently denied this. "Each department has in its budget, its TA allocation which is available from the time the budget is finalized. Any additional TA funding that budget may need is dependent upon leaves of

absence or vacated positions. These may not be known until quite late in the year," Ross explained.

Sledd maintains that TAs are overworked, teaching six hours of classes a week while taking the nine hours of graduate studies required by University rules.

HE MAINTAINS that their situation cannot be eased unless the regular faculty assumes some of their load by teaching freshmen courses. The majority of professors are unwilling to make this move, Sledd charges.

Ross and Fonken believe that the issue gets confused at this point. The workload and compensation of the TAs and who is teaching freshmen composition are two separate issues, Ross said.

In regard to TAs being qualified to teach freshmen composition, "experience has shown that willing, eager young people do a better job than unwilling older people," Ross said.

Concerning their workloads, the administration expects TAs to devote 20 hours a week

to teaching duties. Consideration must also be given to the fact that the faculty is supposed to plan classes; TAs are not expected to develop a syllabus, Ross and Fonken said.

SLEDD QUESTIONS this figure as an accurate representation of the actual time TAs devote to their teaching duties, maintaining that the English department makes them work more than 30 hours a week.

Sledd contends that enough manpower exists in the English department to allow regular faculty to teach freshmen courses if the substitution of committee work and other teaching tasks were curbed by the Legislature.

The four-course workload may not be reasonable where graduate instruction is involved, Ross and Fonken said.

Two committees of the Texas House of Representatives are expected to report on the University's teaching assistant system to the next session of the Legislature. The investigation was requested by Sledd.

