

Making the teachers teach

By JAMES SLEDD

Back in '71 and '72, when a mandatory teaching-load was first imposed, the faculty and administration at UT Austin thought they were very smart to devise ingenious ways of evading the new requirement. They invented phony courses and defined teaching so generously that a

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professor could hardly go to the bathroom without getting credit for teaching a class. Which may have been appropriate.

But such arrogant indifference to the Legislature's intent was bound to provoke conflict: the academics tried too openly to make monkeys of the legislators. Now the predictable conflict has begun — with faculty and administration hysterically screaming "Foul!"

Less indignation and more thought would maybe do some good. It's silly to argue that UT Austin is a research institution, not an undergraduate college. Among other things, UT is one of the biggest undergraduate colleges in the state. What's needed is a decision. Either the University should stop admitting 5,000 plain, ordinary freshmen every year, and lots of transfers, or it should plan to teach them — and teach them well.

RIGHT NOW UT is so busy being "a graduate research institution of international reputation" that it assigns much — most? — of its undergraduate teaching to an army of underpaid and overworked TAs, who do the work the ranked faculty doesn't want to do and incidentally save the professoriat's advanced classes from collapse. That contradiction ought to be removed. The function of UT Austin in the state's educational system ought to be decided, rationally.

HUSH, CHILD! HAVEN'T YOU HAD ENOUGH?



The academics talk a lot about excellence — which ought to mean good teaching of undergraduates as well as good teaching and research with graduates. But neither faculty, administrators nor regents have the right to make the needed decision. The people's elected representatives must decide, with advice not just from the faculty (which will always push for more money, more privilege) and not just from the regents (who just might want big corporations to get their research done cheap), but from every legitimate interest-group and especially from the citizens who pay the bills. It's typical, but very sad, that the University community should talk itself so quickly into

unyielding opposition to rational discussion and rational decision by men and women elected — not appointed — to make decisions.

One way or another, elected officials must ultimately define the University's job. The academics won't help any by saying that if they can't have their \$6 million the sky will fall. And if that \$6 million cut will destroy education at UT, as Regent Shivers says, then why in the world did the regents ever spend many times that sum on bricks and mortar? Logic like that doesn't say much for our teaching.

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