

# E398T TA class varies in degree of substance

## Spot checks show strengthening of controversial course this semester

By KEVON ANDERSEN

The University's controversial 398T graduate courses, labeled "phony and immoral" by a state representative last week, appear to have a varying degree of substance this semester.

In a spot check by The Daily Texan, almost every department with a graduate program offered the course, "Supervised Teaching for Graduate Students," this fall. Since teaching assistants' duties differ in various departments, the curriculum for the course also varies. All the departments checked were requiring mandatory attendance at least once per week except in the journalism department.

Several TAs who had taken the class before fall, 1975, said it required no work or attendance. There were no reports that it is a mere sign-up course this semester.

Controversy arose about the course when English Prof. James Sledd testified before a House subcommittee last week. Sledd told legislators that a "soft" course (398T) was created in 1972 to satisfy the Legislature's requirement that TAs take nine hours of graduate courses per semester instead of six.

The move netted the University a large sum of money, because the amount allocated by the Texas College Coordinating Board is based on the number of semester hours per student. The money allocated for a graduate course semester hour is five times that of a freshman course semester hour.

### Dated information

Though Sledd testified that attempts have been made to make the class more meaningful, legislators such as subcommittee chairman John Hoestenbach still think 398T "is a sham."

Several professors teaching 398T this fall, including two in Sledd's own Department of English, disagree with that view of the current course. One English professor said, "Dr. Sledd is working from dated information. What he said was probably true in the past but not now."

English Prof. James

Garrison is using a six-page syllabus for his section of 398T. He requires mandatory attendance, a journal of the TA's teaching experience, and the reading of three books in addition to the texts the TAs use in their own classes.

"There are real inequities within the (TA) system, and I sympathize with Dr. Sledd concerning them, but I don't think attacking an improved 398T program is the solution," Garrison said.

### Metamorphosis

Dr. James Kinneavy, another English 398T instructor, said, "It is now really a course. Now there is a program to strengthen the teaching training of TAs."

The metamorphosis of English 398T into a "real course" occurred last fall, five months after the "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Composition" (called the Trimble Report) was released. The report, which urged beefing up the 398T classes and adding volunteer faculty members to supervise the previously "phony" classes, was almost unanimously accepted by the English faculty.

Other departments within the College of Humanities known to have had "phony" courses in the past have also changed their formats. No longer is class attendance optional. Mandatory class attendance from three to five times per week is standard.

French 398T is an example of the course in the foreign language departments. TAs must attend a demonstration class (five days per week for the first six weeks and three times a week thereafter) in which they learn how to present the language effectively to their beginning students.

The TA's also must attend a group meeting with their instructor once a week to discuss problems encountered in class or with the text. Instructors also visit TAs in the classroom to criticize teaching methods.

### Not 'phony' classes

Dr. Jean-Pierre Cauvin, professor of French who teaches 398T, said that a supervised teaching class is essential for foreign language

TAs since many are from foreign universities and are unsure of themselves because of their trouble with the English language.

Past 398T courses in the foreign language departments have not been "phony" classes, Cauvin said, although attendance has been made mandatory only within the last two years.

In the sciences, 398T is used for supervising the TAs in their lab instruction.

Chemistry 398T is an example of the course in the natural sciences. The labs are staffed by TAs and are overseen by a faculty member.

### Teaching labs

Jim Bogard, a chemistry TA and president of the Graduate Student Council, explained how the course works in his department.

"Most professors pay TAs out of grants. For those TAs who are not yet under the wing of a professor working with a grant (usually new TAs), they are compensated by teaching labs under the guise of 398T," he said.

Computer Science 398T is taught in the seminar fashion. The instructor, Dr. Norman Martin, requires the class to meet one hour per week to discuss work in the labs. Mandatory attendance is a relatively new requirement, however.

The journalism department has the most unstructured 398T course of those departments questioned. The class has been handled informally with no class meetings. Because of a lack of faculty, no attempt to structure the class has been made for the fall. The only present requirement is a single meeting of those registered for the course. Dr. Ernest Sharpe, the course instructor, plans a three-hour meeting once per week next semester.

"The publicity (by Dr. Sledd) has had its effect," Sharpe said.

### Less difficult

Associate Communication Dean Norris Davis said the Journalism 398T course "will definitely be a real class in the spring."

Though all 398T instructors interviewed said their courses

were substantial, most admitted that the course was much less difficult than other graduate courses. Many 398T courses still appear to give credit to TAs merely for consulting a graduate faculty member and carrying out TA duties.

"The 398T course is merely a symptom of the total (TA) problem," said English TA Mike Rush, who testified before the subcommittee last week. "The question is: will our priorities change concerning the quality of teaching and learning at the University?"

When 398T courses became popular in 1972, the nine-hour course-load requirement for graduate students had put

what was considered a heavy burden on TAs who had to teach two separate sections. Moreover, the quality of instruction by unqualified or unsupervised TA in lower-division courses was being questioned.

### Stopgap

Tension developed between the TA's role as student and his role as teacher.

The 398T course became a kind of stopgap to the problems.

With each semester, however the 398T classes are becoming more structured; by next spring, the "soft" course may be gone forever, many administrators indicated.

History 398T Instructor Philip White still believes there are inequities in the requirements and policies of the course.

"There is a stupid rule that says in effect you cannot get credit for one semester of 398T unless you take the class for a full year," he said.

### Scholastic achievement

"Also a University policy encourages that graduate students take the course during their first semesters as a TA. But since very few history TAs teach individual sections, I feel they should take it immediately before they leave the University to teach at other institutions."

White also said the people with high scholastic achieve-

ment are designated TAs and must take 398T even though they have the best shot at being employed by a prestigious research-related institution. The persons with less distinguished records are not appointed TAs and are not required to take 398T.

"Those people need the training and experience for teaching in the smaller universities and junior colleges," he said.

The problems and abuses of 398T are being studied by a variety of panels.

### Graduate Assembly

The Graduate Assembly is scheduled to meet Sept. 29. Dr. Leslie Willson is slated to present a study his panel has

conducted on the 398T situation.

The Union of Graduate Student Workers also will meet on Sept. 29. The union, which now has approximately 200 TA members, has planned to lobby the Legislature and represent the TAs on their working conditions and course requirements at the University.

"I discovered at the Legislature that they (the legislators) are looking at the University as a whipping post. They are being self-righteous with the 398T issue because it is a simple topic. They are avoiding the more complicated issues like the TAs' burden versus the quality of the learning of undergraduate students by TAs," Rush said.



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### Tug power

This tug of war was among the events of the "Olympiad of the South Forty" this week at Washington University at St. Louis. The Rutledge team won this contest but was eliminated later.

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