

Memo to all the TA's

From: A.G.S.E.

Re: "half-time Instructors"

As many of you have heard, this semester the Department began hiring people as "half-time Instructors" to fill its staffing needs. This means that people are being hired (from a "Resource Pool") to teach four courses per year--half-time, as TA's and AI's do, but that they are being paid \$6000 for this teaching load, over 50% more than the average TA salary for the same work. Moreover, some of these people have no Ph.D. and are not presently enrolled as graduate students in English--in other words, their qualifications are officially no better than ours. (Apparently, some of them ran out of TA teaching-time and dropped out of the program, some are faculty wives, etc.)

Needless to say, this is dismaying to us, as a matter of equity and morale among the TA's, since the situation encourages the unfortunate inference that to receive more pay, we should drop out of the program. Therefore, two weeks ago, A.G.S.E. sent up a formal inquiry to the Departmental administration to ask what was what; the response from Mr. Walter was as follows:

- 1) TA salaries are set by the university administration, not by the department, and there is no way for the department to either raise TA salaries or give them additional classes for more pay;
- 2) Anyone who applies for a TA-shin but who has no prior teaching experience must now be an Apprentice (and not teach) first;
- 3) The E.C. approved the formation of the "Resource Pool."
- 4) The pay is \$3000 per two-course semester because that is one-half of one line salary, set by the university. There is no way to break a line except in half, we were told: TA salaries are all lumped together as one other line in the budget;
- 5) Only a few people were so hired, so the matter is minor.

In short, there is nothing to be done, it seems. Since there seems to be a legitimate need for such half-time Instructors, and since the salary also appears to be inalterable, A.G.S.E. decided to respond to this situation by

- 1) informing all the TA's (herewith); and
- 2) sending a letter to the E.C. asking that a formal set of guidelines for hiring such people be established, including chiefly a required doctorate;

If you have any response or questions, you might drop a note to Maureen Walker, President of A.G.S.E., or to Mr. Walter.



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To: Professor Rebhorn  
Chairman, T.A.C.  
From: Richard Hart  
Date: February 7, 1978

My thanks to you and the T.A.C. for formalizing the probation procedure and, especially, for inviting T.A.'s to respond. I have two requests.

First, can you be more specific about what kind of evaluation will "show a real deficiency" and, thus, warrant probation? As you suggest, evaluations aren't easy to interpret, but when the time actually comes for you to place someone on probation, you will almost certainly have to establish some principles for interpreting them. Doing so now would not only go far toward advancing the reassuring tone of the current draft of your document, but would also help insure that policy remains consistent as committee membership changes in the future. Moreover, a clearer picture of just what a deficient evaluation looks like might encourage those T.A.'s who want to act against grade inflation. (Most of us realize that the scratch-my-back principle governs course evaluations: good grades and good evaluations go together.)

I realize that you can't foresee all circumstances and that even if you could, it might be unwise to commit yourselves in advance to a specific course of action. Perhaps, though, you could establish some relatively non-binding guidelines for evaluating evaluations, to insure that matters of policy won't become sheerly matters of opinion. Can you at least let us know how you weight items on the evaluation form? (Are we permitted, for example, to be relatively unresponsive to students' needs so long as we come to class prepared, and so on?) And what about the form as a whole? Mightn't it be useful to compare the evaluations with a set of student themes just in case someone manages to teach well but still make his students angry?

My second request is that you not discuss a T.A.'s performance with his class--except perhaps after the final exam. You intend this device to help a poor T.A. improve his teaching, but although I can see how a class interview might produce some helpful advice,

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I can think of no better way to destroy a person's teaching effectiveness than to enter his classroom and say, in effect, "Look, this guy's last batch of students thought he was a horrible teacher, and we'd like you to help him improve by telling us, now that he's out of the room, precisely how he is bad." Regardless of how much finesse you were to employ and regardless of how much you were able to prevail on the students' benevolence, they would quickly discern the negative judgments involved and would thenceforth see what you'd implicitly led them to expect--that their T.A. does a poor job. This procedure will defeat itself. Please imagine how dreadful it would be to struggle right up until class time every day to create a good performance and then walk in to face an audience who's been told that you can't teach. Teaching's hard enough when you have to begin each semester by saying to your students, "Welcome to English 306"!

Thanks for your time.