

Lecturers feel jobs are too dependent on student evaluations

Editor's Note: This is the first of a three-part series examining controversies surrounding UT English lecturers' positions. Today's article addresses the use of student evaluations as the primary criterion in the rehiring of lecturers.

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A shrinking job market glutted by teachers wielding doctorates has been a problem at the University, as well as at other national universities, since the mid-1970s. At the University, however, the problem has taken a twist: while the number of available tenure-track faculty positions has diminished, student enrollment has increased, necessitating the creation of temporary faculty positions that some people feel are unfairly handled.

When University enrollment increased by 3.4 percent in 1978, Department of English administrators met the demand for teachers to conduct about 20 additional sections of required fresh-

english lecturers

man and sophomore English courses by using more temporary appointees.

At first these positions were filled by graduate students, called teaching assistants and assistant instructors, because the University could not afford to create more permanent faculty positions.

The Department of English soon realized, however, "It was immoral to produce all those Ph.D.s and not have jobs for them ... and we couldn't afford to hire enough tenure-track people ... people we would have to turn away after six years," said Joseph Kruppa, associate professor of English and associate chairman of the Department of English.

The UT System Board of Regents in-

stituted the title of English "lecturer" in 1980. English lecturers do not accrue tenure, but instead are hired on a year-to-year basis.

Fall semester student evaluations of lecturers are the "major, verging on the sole, criterion for rehiring," Kruppa said.

"We will take into account peer evaluations under special circumstances," he added.

The Executive Committee of the Department of English reviews and ranks numerically the student evaluations. Lecturers with better rankings are given priority in rehiring, but only the committee knows the order of the rankings.

Rod Davis, a lecturer in English, said the use of student evaluations as the main criterion in rehiring "intimidates you as a teacher. In a class of 25 to 40 students, it doesn't take but two or three people who have it in for you to knock you down in your evaluation ... the teacher ends up a slave to the stu-

dents. It's hard to enforce discipline."

Some critics of the use of student evaluations also question the objectiveness of freshmen who may have little experience in evaluating a university teacher's performance. One's job security is often decided by a "popularity contest" judged by "a bunch of 18-year-olds," lecturers contacted agreed.

"Since this isn't exactly a student-controlled university anyway, I don't understand the emphasis on student evaluations," Davis said.

Suspicious also arise as to "ways teachers can manipulate them (evaluations)," Kruppa said.

"There are teachers who take students out for beer on the day of evaluations or do other favors solely to get evaluations pumped up," Davis said.

"I'm in favor of setting a standard of assumed competency. And unless someone really screws up, presume he's doing an acceptable job," he said.

Other criteria that have been suggested by lecturers but rejected by the

department for consideration in rehiring include reports by tenured faculty monitoring classes, before and after testing of students, and research and published work by lecturers.

Of the last alternative, Clifford Endres, a lecturer in English, said: "It is flatly wrong not to incorporate one's scholarly activities into the basis of reappointment because supposedly research feeds into the teaching. They mutually enhance one another."

"What they're saying implicitly is research (by the lecturers) doesn't count for anything," he added.

One compensation of not obligating lecturers to perform research is that they have one less pressure to distract them from their teaching, said Joseph Moldenhauer, professor of English and associate chairman of the Department of English.

Tuesday: Why some lecturers are not hired until a few days before the semester begins.