

As the English Department enters its annual spring frenzy of futility, position papers must be multiplied if tradition is to be preserved. Wherefore,

The Department's treatment of part-timers--TAs, AIs, lecturers--has been a disgrace for years. The AIs and lecturers teach most sections of the required courses, especially the required courses in composition; and the Department and the University at large have customarily insisted that those courses cannot be abolished or transferred to another jurisdiction and that the part-timers teach them satisfactorily. The administration, however, has never supported the required courses adequately or rewarded their satisfactory teaching; the Department has never united to resist the administration's injustice; and neither Department nor administration has been willing to rationalize their actual behavior and junk the whole sleazy operation. The result has been a running sore, which we claw at from time to time but never heal.

The present concern is the lecturers. If they are fit to do the important duties which the Department assigns them (and the Department cannot consistently deny that they are), then they are fit to be treated as full participants in an important undertaking--and rewarded accordingly.

Yet the Executive Committee has every reason to be surprised that people who strongly supported the establishment of the new English requirements should now oppose the butchery of the lecturers, which follows as a logical consequence from the principles underlying those same new requirements. Of course the false claim was repeatedly made, last year, that the wishes of faculty and students provided a "mandate" for the new requirements; but when it was proposed to provide what faculty and students had actually voted for, the Department's representatives attacked the proposals, Deans Vick and Jeffrey said openly that polls of faculty and students were irrelevant, and with all six student members of the University Council voting against the new requirements, the administration's party forced their confirmation.

That past cannot simply be swept under a thick rug of benign sentiment. Remember: the Vick Committee said that E.306 shouldn't be necessary; Galinsky as chairman of the Faculty Senate interpreted the Vick Committee's judgment as meaning that E.306 is a "remedial" course; and President Flawn has dictated that "remedial" courses shall not be given at UT. In the same spirit, E.106 and 206 have been scrapped because the University claims not to have the resources for elementary teaching though it can provide millions and millions for MCC and for star scientists (who publicly rejoice that they don't have to teach much); the bureaucracy itself acknowledges that there are serious problems with E.346K; faculty in other departments have fled in droves from the promised courses with "substantial writing components"; where such courses have in fact materialized, calls are already being made for English TAs to read the papers; etc. ad nauseam. If faculty and administration refuse to support the courses in writing, why should they support the lecturers whose presence the courses necessitate? The butchery of the lecturers was predictable--and predicted.

To make a big fuss over tenure is also diversionary. Tenure is perfectly safe--for research-oriented scholars whose research doesn't threaten the Big Rich; and in the future only such scholars will be given tenure. Only yesterday one of the New Stars was bragging that they come here to escape teaching, and the Statesman's reporter observed that such people get just about anything they want for their research. The fact that lecturers and assistant professors in English get crucified doesn't indicate that tenure is endangered. What's endangered is the purpose for which the University was founded--namely, to help to educate the people so that the people can govern themselves in freedom.

For the real subject of our debate is the aims of education. The administration long ago made its decision. It doesn't give a damn for the education of a free people. Instead, it wants to build "a graduate research institution of international reputation," a technological and research institution essentially for the service of the Big Rich; and the establishment of the new English requirements was one more step toward the full implementation of that decision. There is no room at UT, as UT is presently governed, for a large, experienced, secure staff devoted primarily to the teaching of the basic courses in the arts of literacy. Research is the watchword--research in the teaching of composition, yes; but the actual teaching of composition, no. Unless the English Department runs a revolving door for its lecturers and reserves part-time teaching as much as it can for the support of graduate students, then the Department will become known as that worst of all departments, a service department. Service (except service to the Big Rich) is to be abjured. The fashionable ideal is rather a self-serving department, with faculties scrambling for goodies as the brains of the interlocking bureaucracies of government, business, the military, and high tech.

So this spring's debate can easily be just one more push for one more special interest, with various seniors maneuvering to win recognition as Generous Patron. If the push is to amount to anything, it must instead be a push for the cultivation of literacy among all undergraduates--that literacy which the Department and administration have never yet supported. If a fight worth making is to be made, it must be made on that line; and it must be made in the full expectation that it will be hard, dangerous to some careers, and probably unsuccessful in the short run. What's happening at UT is happening everywhere, as part of a nation-wide campaign to Reaganize education at home while terrorizing Latin America. Dean King was speaking for the dominant reactionaries when he said that neither this nor any other big state university will ever give an English department all the tenured or tenurable staff it needs. In the immortal words of Scheick, "Composition stinks."

In the circumstances, only a fool would expect anything better than the annual futile frenzy. Going along to get along is the name of the game. Yet the Department could do something memorable if it wanted to.

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