

Lecturers: Fish or Foul?

By Robert Twombly

According to the University of Texas Equal Employment Opportunity Office, the rank of Lecturer has become at U.T. Austin the major point-of-entry into the profession of college teaching. More hiring (and for obvious reasons far more "firing") takes place at that level than at any other level of the teaching hierarchy. Because Lecturers are hired for a maximum period of one year (and often at the last moment, during registration week), and because the need for their services fluctuates slightly from one registration period to another, it is impossible to say at any point how many Lecturers the University "has," in the sense of a permanent available work force for the coming semester. It is assumed that there are enough un- or underemployed Ph.D.s in the larger community to answer the last-minute summons to the classroom. In Fall 1983 the University employed 262 Lecturers. (We will not be considering "Senior Lecturers," a different animal altogether.) In Fall 1982 the figure was 266; in Fall 1981 it was 211, and in Fall 1980 it was 104.

The actual size of the Lecturer rank is partly disguised by the fact that most Lecturers do not show up in the University budget for faculty salaries. Instead, they are hired on an "emergency" basis each Fall, commonly with money that had been previously budgeted for unfilled tenure-track lines. (The budget profile of a department, and its actual profile, may bear only a rough resemblance.) For instance, budgeted faculty salaries for 1983-84 show 48.8 "Full-Time-Equivalent" Lecturers, or a modest 2.4% of the total

F.T.E. classroom faculty. *Actually* the University employed, as shown above, 262 Lecturers in Fall 1983 (198.508 F.T.E.) and they constituted 12% of the total faculty. A further discrepancy appears when one looks at salaries: While the *budgeted* average salary for the 48.8 F.T.E. Lecturers in 1983 was \$22,901, the *actual* average F.T.E. salary for the 262 Lecturers was \$21,401. (As explained below, this average is itself misleading; the median salary is a great deal lower.) Both patterns have repeated themselves each year since 1981, when the *actual* percentage of faculty in the rank of Lecturer jumped from 4% to 10%. The budget shows more tenure-track lines than are recruited for; it shows up only a fraction of the Lecturers; and it indicates salaries in this category higher than those actually paid.

The history of our Lecturers begins earlier than it would seem to. The more-than-doubling in the rank from 1980 to 1981 is deceptive. There was indeed a sizeable net increase in the hiring of new faculty into the rank of Lecturer. But added to this real net increase was an apparent increase due to the fact that large numbers of teaching faculty who had previously held the rank of Instructor (a probationary, tenure-accruing rank according to the Handbook of Operating Procedures then in force) in 1981 lost their title of Instructor and became Lecturers instead (a *non*-probationary, *non*-tenure-accruing rank). For instance in the English Department in Fall 1980 there were 44 Instructors and one Lecturer. A year later there was a single Instructor and 66 Lecturers. It was difficult at the time to know

(continued on p. 3)

Lecturers (continued from p. 1)

whether this change in status was a good thing or a bad thing for the individual Instructor-Lecturer. It seemed to mean that those who were building up full-time teaching service toward a mandatory up-or-out tenure decision, and who in anticipation of a negative decision were faced with cutting back to part-time teaching, could *apparently* avoid the up-or-out crisis and carry on at full-time. (Subsequent departmental anxiety over anticipated violation of A.A.U.P. rules brought about attempts to renege on this, and in 1984 Lecturers again faced the prospect of having to go on part-time in order to teach at all.)

The history of the rapid increase in the Lecturer rank actually begins in greater obscurity, though. During 1975-77 Professor James Sledd's research had focused attention on the fact that large numbers of basic English classes were being taught by graduate students who were not experienced and whose primary interest lay in their studies, not their teaching. Professor Sledd argued that it was the professoriate's responsibility to teach required courses. This argument did not in fact prevail. But a reorganization did take place in staffing Freshman English. Henceforth in general only those with Ph.D.s would teach. However, instead of staffing the classrooms with tenure-track faculty (it was perhaps too late to recruit enough for Fall 1977), and instead of causing the confusion that would have resulted from leaving as many as 40 sections unstaffed, the English Department hired ten new staff into the ranks of Instructor and Assistant Professor, but with the tacit understanding that they would be different from traditional tenure-track Instructors and Assistant Professors: They would not be expected to show evidence of active research, and would teach a heavier-than-ordinary load, four courses one semester and three the next. The salary for Instructors was \$11,000. Those who had been Assistant Professors elsewhere were hired as "Assistant Professors" here, but with the mental reservation that they would no longer be tenure-track and should not expect the customary promotion-review. The numbers swelled through 1978-79, and 1979-80. The teaching load was increased to four and four

(and the salary raised to \$14,000). But by 1979-80 several of these apparently non-tenure-track Instructors had come up against the Regent's Rule that required an up-or-out decision after two years. The only recourse seemed to be to put them on part-time service, and it was in this context that the decision to shift them into the rank of Lecturer seemed, from up close, like a solution. (As mere items in the budget, Instructors and Lecturers have looked very much alike, both ranks showing starting salaries pretty consistently \$2,000 below the Assistant Professor starting salary. High work-load, low salary and short contract are the earmarks of both Instructors and Lecturers.) In fact a sizeable corps of temporary faculty had been created and were working under a new and still obscure set of rules, for lower wages, and their very existence was camouflaged by the fact that they had not yet been given a description or a category. They were Lecturers before they were Lecturers, and when they finally became what they were, it all seemed natural and inevitable.

Notification of their metamorphosis from Instructor (and Assistant Professor) to Lecturer reached the English Department group on April 22, 1981. The group was encouraged to feel that this was an advancement. However, the change in status subsequently came to mean, in the minds of many, a professional and social demotion. In most cases Lecturers are nominally held exempt from the expectation that they do research. (Though in fact any Lecturer knows that his future in the academy depends upon his breaking into the tenure-track ranks through research. Besides, it seems cynical and unrealistic to expect a scholar, however humble, to forego the curiosity that has brought him into the field.) Accordingly, for Lecturers a full-time load is by now usually defined as four courses per semester, often four of the most difficult and time-consuming courses to be found (courses which, compared to graduate courses, require heavier work for only half the credit!). The Lecturer is paid less than the least of his tenure-track counterparts, and for more work.

(continued on p. 4)

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Lecturers (continued from p. 3)

Though top U.T. Austin salaries are impressive for what are known as "Super-Lecturers" (\$44,365 F.T.E. for men, \$39,000 for women) the low is \$14,000 for "full-time." The mean, or average, salary (\$22,286 for men, \$19,870 for women) is skewed upward by the salaries of the few "Supers." The median Lecturer salary (\$19,765 F.T.E. for men, \$18,767 for women) gives a fairer indication of the conditions under which most Lecturers must raise their families. A supplemental salary for summer teaching is in general not available to Lecturers. And though there may not be objective or controlled evidence for it, there is plentiful anecdotal evidence to support a feeling among Lecturers that their very status as Lecturers prejudices departmental recruitment committees against them when it comes time to hire at the tenured or pre-tenured level.

The vast majority of Lecturers at U.T. Austin hold Ph.D.s from North American universities or the equivalent degrees from "foreign institutions." Some have won U.T. teaching excellence awards. Many have good publication records.

Some have been senior ("tenured") faculty at other universities, and have lost that rank through the wholesale closing down of programs. Once they arrive here they are itinerants, the very existence of 3/4 of them unacknowledged in the University budget.

Seen up close, the rank is full of individual victims of misfortune and broken promises. From a greater distance, however, the professional disabilities suffered by Lecturers resemble the professional disabilities suffered by other hard-pressed groups, women for instance. And indeed it is instructive to see how much the categories "women" and "Lecturer" overlap. In some cases it is almost as if the rank of Lecturer had been foreordained as the repository for female Ph.D.s. Women make up the following percentages of four different academic ranks at U.T.: 7%, 18%, 27%, 37%. One need not puzzle long over which is the percentage of female Full Professors, which the percentage of female Associate Professors, or Assistant Professors, or Lecturers. And though one might claim that young women "have not had the time as yet to

become Full Professors," one can hardly make that an excuse for the discrepancy between female Assistant Professors (27%) and female Lecturers (37%), since both are threshold positions. In the English Department, which hires and fires more than four times the number of Lecturers found in any other department, the proportion of female Lecturers last Fall stood at 47%.

Is there any reason beyond considerations of fair play why professors should be concerned about the status of Lecturers? Yes. For one thing they afford an all-too-instructive model of the tractability and the powerlessness of an untenured faculty. As cheap labor they are a walking invitation to think of classroom teaching reductively, in terms merely of the laws of the marketplace: How many students can we instruct for \$30,000? 400 (say)? Or only 150? Because they seem able to take care of the more onerous chores, the Lecturers' existence is a seduction toward an intellectual double-standard, and toward the demeaning of certain kinds of essential teaching.

(continued on p. 5)

Lecturers (continued from p. 4)

Toward the end of his term as U.T. President, Dr. Norman Hackerman delivered a public lecture in which he reflected at length on the function of the University from the point of view of "those with all the money." He said that it had been shown that people with college degrees (regardless of the quality of the degree or of the college!) borrowed more, and bought more goods and services, than those without degrees, and that for this reason alone it was economically important for Texas state institutions to turn out, as one turns out a manufactured "product," as many young men and women as possible with degrees. He compared the University to a factory and he indicated that the analogy was a persuasive one in the minds of financially powerful Texans, who felt that a standardized sequence of courses constituted an efficient "assembly line," and that faculty, as "workers on the line," should be organized by "management" (the administration) with the sole aim of keeping the "line" moving as smoothly as possible.

Asked if he himself approved of the metaphor, President Hackerman replied that that was irrelevant: The metaphor was in fact already in place, as the "reality" we had to live with.

It is bad enough to be told to accept the "reality" of so dangerous a metaphor. It is worse to find oneself collaborating in its application and enforcement. Yet certain departments may have slid uncritically into just this role through the way they have treated Lecturers and, by extension, the students whom those Lecturers teach. By allowing the number of classes taught by our

Lecturers (our line-workers) to swell, we have swelled the ranks (and diminished the professional responsibility and initiative) of the Lecturers. By setting large numbers of Lecturers annually in artificial competition with each other for jobs, and by magnifying the uncertainty of employment for all of them, we have through fear created a highly controllable and exploitable group. We have conditioned everyone involved to think of the unemployed Lecturers as forming what is known as "The Pool," a euphemism that suggests, among other things, that they are in effect day-laborers, that in operation they are standardized and exchangeable, that they can lay down and take up the tools of their craft on short notice, and that the functions they perform are essentially without continuity or moral content.

The motives for doing all this have been artificially sweetened: It is done out of "service" to the University and to the larger community; it is done in response to the "needs" of our students and the "needs" of the Lecturers themselves; it is the "most effective" way of teaching basic skills to large numbers; it would be "inefficient and prohibitively expensive" to hire enough tenured Professors to do the job. Besides, most Lecturers are "grateful" for the opportunity they have.

There is a growing sense of common grievance among U.T. Lecturers, and a growing uneasiness among the non-lecturers. However, the uneasiness among the tenured ranks seems matched by a general disagreement over practical "solutions" to the Lecturer problem:

I. Offer the Lecturers tenure, or a kind of tenure. This, it is said, makes a

mockery of "real" tenure, and of the probationary process by which "real" tenure is attained.

II. Do the reverse: Institute mandatory termination after a set period of service. This has been tried, or almost tried, twice, always with a sense of wasted talent and grotesque injustice. It prompts a further injustice, a fiddle with the rule: continuation of a Lecturer on part-time (i.e. reduced salary!) past the termination date.

III. Turn Lecturers, one by one or all at once, into "Specialists." This may be underway already. "Specialists" and Lecturers tend to merge in budget summaries as it is. However, there is the problem of how the University could so alter the academic duties of Lecturers as to make the title-change anything more than a sleight-of-hand and an obvious evasion.

IV. Carry on as-is, with indefinitely renewable but forever uncertain short-contracts. This very soon violates both the letter and the spirit of A.A.U.P. rules, and opens the way to a limitless "pool" of day-laborer teachers, stripped of curricular and other responsibilities. Both expedience and "equity" will favor the rehiring of terminated Assistant Professors into this pool, which can become a veritable sea of teachers without real professional expectations. There will be diminished incentive to promote any but the rarest candidate to tenure, and there will be irresistible temptations to let the deprofessionalized and disenfranchized group balloon into the major classroom work-force that it has already become in the English Department.

(continued on p. 6)

Lecturers (continued from p. 5)

V. *Reduce Lecturers to 3/4-time employment.* This has happened on a large scale in the English Department. Though it produces a more reasonable course-load, the loss of pay and fringe benefits is for many an insupportable hardship, as 3/4-time Lecturers earn only about 2/3 the salary of Assistant Professor counterparts. Three quarter-time Lecturers also lose the right to vote. The very best thing that can be said of this "solution," from the point of view of A.A.U.P. rules, is that it is a technical dodge.

Other responses to the problem involve doing either something good or something bad for the Lecturers (e.g. raising or lowering their salaries, raising or lowering their fringe benefits, raising or lowering their F.T.E. teaching load). It is remarkable how vehement are the

arguments for doing *bad* things to the Lecturers: Though it is helpful to have large numbers of Lecturers present, it is "not wise" to encourage them to stay very long. Making life increasingly difficult seems a more "natural" way of ensuring rapid turnover than does any arbitrary termination.

The English Department faculty (at least) is hemorrhaging in reverse; we have a kind of edema of temporary teachers and it is not clear that there is anything we can (or even want to) do about it. We have almost twice the students that the tenure-track faculty can (or cares to) teach. So far, it has been unthinkable to refuse to teach them (i.e. to limit the size and number of sections opened at the last minute during registration). The only recourse

is to hire more faculty. Muscling about with the administration to try to fill more of the Assistant Professor lines in the budget does not yet appeal to many. Getting rid of the "donkeys" would mean spreading the "donkey-work" around in what are felt to be distasteful amounts, and increasing the competition to teach the easier and more prestigious courses. So far, as a group the Professors have left themselves in the position of tacitly supporting a Lecturer system that seems to be swelling past control. The fairness of the system has not yet been publicly debated. Neither have the implications of the system as a model for thinking about faculty power, faculty organization, and the vocation of teaching in higher education.