

Teaching assistants upheld

By BRENDA BELL

Staff Writer

The president of the University of Texas today defended its teaching assistant program before a legislative subcommittee which heard scathing criticism of it Monday.

Lorene Rogers said teaching assistants (TAs) and instructors — graduate students who help teach undergraduate courses — are doing a necessary job and are often as skilled in the classroom as their professorial counterparts.

She said TAs teach only 20 per cent of the courses offered at UT, fewer than at other competitive institutions. Rogers added that 19 per cent of the faculty is composed of instructors and TAs who have not attained their doctoral degrees, compared to 25 per cent at Texas A&M University

and more than 30 per cent at the universities of Indiana and Minnesota.

Monday, English professor James Sledd, a long-time critic of the TA program, said the use of TAs is "grossly abused" and hurts undergraduate education by enabling regular faculty members to avoid teaching lower division courses.

Sledd cited a "no work" graduate course, English 398T (supervised teaching for graduate students) which enabled TAs to register for nine hours per semester, meeting minimum workload requirements. Sledd said according to the state funding formula, the university received additional money for teaching the course, although in many cases the class never met.

Rogers said 398T was established to give beginning graduate students,

who also were teaching, an opportunity to take only two subject matter courses, and at the same time receive supervision in their teaching duties. "It's working better in some departments than in others," she said.

In her testimony this morning before the House Higher Education Subcommittee for Appropriative Affairs, Rogers also reiterated her support for elimination of faculty teaching workloads, currently imposed by both the legislature and the Board of Regents.

"I do not believe there has been any significant difference in the way we operated since before we had the workload, and I don't think there will be any difference if it's removed," she said.