

Rogers defends TA system before hostile subcommittee

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University President Lorene Rogers defended the University's teaching assistant program, including a graduate course which one legislator called "a sham" and "immoral," before a hostile House higher education subcommittee Tuesday.

A University professor Monday told the House subcommittee for appropriate matters that the course, 398T "Supervised Teaching for Graduate Students," was designed to give teaching assistants and professors credit for classes which were never taught.

"I think it (398T) is a sham," Subcommittee Chairman John Hoestenbach told Rogers.

'Don't believe everything

"I don't agree with that at all," she responded. "I'm not going to do away with 398T. I believe strongly in 398T. When it was first set up there were many problems with it, but we have been working to make it an effective course. I can't personally take responsibility for what went on 10 years ago."

Rogers warned Hoestenbach not to believe everything he has heard about the University's teaching assistants and 398T.

"I believe most of it," he said, adding that he is convinced the 398T course was "phony" and "immoral."

Them or us

"I have all kinds of material to refute some of the things that were said (Monday) about the teaching assistant program," Rogers told the legislators. Teaching assistants comprise 19 per cent of the University's faculty, a figure

lower than almost any of the major universities, Rogers said.

Rogers also defended the requirement that TAs must take nine semester hours in addition to their teaching duties. She said it was implemented "to discourage professional teaching assistants." Several TAs have criticized the rule, saying it forces them to choose between teaching undergraduates and their own education.

The 398T courses, which are offered in several departments, were used to circumvent the nine-hour requirement by giving TAs credit for work they would be doing anyway. James Sledd, professor of English, testified Monday.

Rogers for TAs

"It was to give an advantage to the students," Rogers conceded, "but we also had felt for a long while that our TAs needed supervision."

Near the end of her opening remarks, Rogers said she wanted to "put in a good word for teaching assistants."

"A title doesn't make you a good teacher," Rogers said. "One of the poorest teachers I ever had was a full professor and one of the best teachers I ever had was a teaching assistant."

Representative flays faculty

"We are aware that there are problems (with the TA program), and we're doing everything we can to improve it. The situation is much better now than it was three or four years ago."

The legislators were critical of ranked faculty who spend most of their time researching or consulting.

"There seems to be an elitist group that in effect says, 'It's foolish to teach. We would rather spend our time doing

research.' Have you seen this attitude?" Rep. Frank Gaston asked Rogers.

She said that although the University followed a "publish or perish" policy in the 1950s and 1960s, that is no longer the case. "We have national prominence now, and we have gone back in the direction of stressing (classroom) teaching."

However, Rogers defended prominent faculty who engage in research or consulting. "You cannot have a graduate instruction that's effective unless you have research to go along with it," she said. "Without this creation of new knowledge our whole nation, our whole technology, our whole life in effect, would come to a standstill."

Fringe benefits

The way to make the University "as good as the best that there is in this nation," Rogers said, is to improve faculty benefits. "If you talk about trying to build a quality university, you have to start with the faculty," she said.

"We're in competition with the top universities in the nation and we must have the same type of inducements. We must have competitive salaries," Rogers said. The University's biggest drawback in recruiting top faculty is a lack of fringe benefits.

Specifically, Rogers asked for better travel pay, retirement benefits and leaves for faculty. She said the University is the only major state university with a legislatively imposed workload.

"The faculty workload is a detriment to us in faculty recruiting," Rogers said. "It serves as something of an insult to a person who considers himself a professional and works more than 40 hours a week."