

SUBJECT: Limits on employment of teaching assistants

COMMITTEE: Higher Education reported favorably with a complete committee substitute

VOTE: 7 ayes-- Rains, Allred\*, Gaston, Gonzales\*, B. Hall, Hoestenbach,  
Price

0 nays--

2 present, not voting-- Olson, Caraway

2 absent-- B. Clark\*, Thompson\*

WITNESSES: (Note: the following were witnesses for the original bill; there were no witnesses when the substitute was considered.)

For--James Sledd, Department of English, UT Austin, representing self

Against--James L. Wright, Texas Association of College Teachers; Neill Megaw, Texas Conference, American Association of University Professors; James C. Kearney, Union of Graduate Student Workers; Kathryn Lee Grant, Graduate Council, UT Austin; James L. Kinneary, Departments of English and Curriculum, UT Austin, representing self; Brian Rasmussen, UT Students' Association

DIGEST: There are now no legal restriction on the use of teaching assistants (TAs) in state colleges and universities. (TAs are graduate students who teach undergraduate courses.)

This bill puts these limitations on the use of TAs: 1) Teaching assistants cannot teach alone unless they have co-taught with a full faculty member for one semester or have taught their discipline for two long semesters in high school or college; 2) no department can have more TAs than fulltime faculty members; and 3) teaching assistants cannot teach more than 25 per cent of the student contact hours taught by fulltime ranked faculty at the same level.

Teaching assistants who only teach labs that constitute less than half the total contact hours of a course are excluded from the last two restrictions.

The bill also requires colleges and universities to keep records and submit annual reports on faculty and TA assignments to the Coordinating Board.

PRO: This bill will help eliminate abuses of teaching assistants and will improve the quality of undergraduate education.

Too many undergraduates--especially freshmen--find that a college education means taking basic courses in impersonal large classes taught by inexperienced graduate instructors. More than half the basic English and accounting courses at UT, for example, are taught by overworked TAs. This bill will reduce the size of that army of TAs and send some full faculty members back into the trenches, where they belong.

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\*NOTE: Asterisk indicates HSG members.

The bill will also help guarantee that the remaining TAs get some experience before they start teaching. The only preparation now given at UT Austin, for example, is a sham course--398T. It's supposed to help TAs learn to teach. But it really helps them learn how to pass three hours of the nine-hour course load requirement without doing any real work; it teaches them how full professors can pad their teaching record; and it teaches them how the taxpayers get bilked out of their money.

This bill won't cost the state any extra money. The funding formulas for colleges and universities won't be changed. The TAs can be replaced by shifting ranked faculty from graduate and upper-level courses, by increasing the teaching loads of fulltime faculty and by eliminating inefficient small classes, such as graduate classes smaller than five or undergraduate courses smaller than 10.

No TAs will lose their jobs. Normal attrition through resignations and loss of financial aid will take care of the positions eliminated by this bill.

CON: This bill will not end the abuses suffered by TAs and will severely damage graduate education and the quality of basic courses.

The co-teaching or outside experience will not insure that TAs are qualified for the classroom. One semester co-teaching with a bad teacher may be worse than no experience. "Real world" experience or good teaching instruction may be better.

The controversial 398T course is an easy target. There may have been some abuses in the past. But the course is really very good now. TAs are even videotaped while lecturing to help them improve their delivery.

The bill does nothing to prevent TAs from being overworked or underpaid. The remaining TAs can still be required to teach two courses while carrying a full load of nine graduate hours.

The quality of undergraduate instruction will not automatically improve if ranked professors are forced to teach undergraduates. The most renowned Elizabethan scholar may not be the best person to teach basic sentence structure and composition. Many TAs get more favorable teaching evaluations than some professors, and most TAs are competent to teach the basic courses of their discipline.

TAs now provide more instruction per dollar than other teachers. Replacing them will mean unacceptably higher faculty workloads, bigger classes or more money for new teachers. Heavier faculty workloads will hurt, not help, the quality of graduate and undergraduate education. Professors cannot possibly keep up with the research in their fields, meet publishing requirements and still do a good job teaching 9-12 hours at major universities.

Larger classes in basic English or math courses will mean the end of personal, direct instruction available now. More faculty will cost \$2-\$6 million statewide.

The cutback on TAs will force many needy graduate students out of school, leaving advanced education to the wealthy and those few lucky enough to get scholarships. Also, some departments will be hurt worse than others because the attrition rates are different. Some TAs will have to be fired.

The language of the bill is unclear. Does a laboratory discussion leader qualify as a laboratory TA? What about one who grades papers, holds office hours and handles administration? What is co-teaching, exactly? Are TAs to be counted by the head or by fulltime teaching equivalents in administering the bill?

At least 14 departments at UT will be disrupted by this bill. The effects on Texas Tech, Texas A & M, the University of Houston and North Texas State--all of which have even higher percentages of fulltime teaching positions held by TAs--have not been studied.

Finally, the bill contains no implementation date. Routine implementation in September, 1977, will require the expensive reshuffling and reprinting of course schedules and the impossible task of finding qualified faculty on short notice.

COMMENTARY: Rep. Hoestenbach says he will offer a floor amendment to set the implementation date for Sept. 1, 1978.

HB 833 largely incorporates the recommendations of the House Higher Education Committee's interim report.

The UT System administration opposes the bill.

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