

THE EVALUATION OF TEACHING AND THE STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY*

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THE university generally professes to have two main functions: teaching, that is, the imparting of knowledge, skills, and critical tools; and research, ordinarily defined in some variation of the cliché "advancing the frontiers of knowledge." At certain points in the career of every faculty member, it becomes necessary to assess that person's performance and make decisions on his or her future. We all know how one goes about evaluating a faculty member's research when it comes time for promotion or a merit increase, and I need not talk about this aspect. Usually, however, and increasingly, evidence must also be submitted to deans and review committees on the person's teaching effectiveness. This need seems basically to have developed in the past ten to fifteen years, since students came to be more assertive of their right to receive competent instruction. It used to be assumed, more or less, that an effective researcher is also an effective teacher, and scholarship was the chief evidence adduced to demonstrate a person's worthiness of a faculty position. This is in fact still the assumption when we seek to appoint those who are recognized as "stars" in their disciplines—Nobel Prize winners, for example.

In a system such as the University of California's, where assistant professors and associate professors must be considered for increases every two years and full professors every three years, the only way to get a raise comparable to the rise in the cost of living is to receive a merit increase in the base scale (this requirement will become even more rigid in the post-Proposition 13 climate). As a result, pressure has grown for evidence of the quality of teaching in every course offered, and each time it is offered. There are signs that even the students, who were such avid course evaluators in the beginning, are bored with the process and feel put upon when asked to express their opinions.

We tend to assume, as a point of ideology, that the purpose of this evaluation is both to pass judgment on the teacher's effort *and* to provide an incentive and an input for improving it in the future. But whereas our judgment of a faculty member's scholarly efforts can, at least for purposes of argument and review, be based on objectified grounds, judgment of the teaching effort remains elusively subjective. The masses of material compiled on each faculty member do not always speak for themselves. In fact, we have tended in practice to abandon the evaluation of teaching to the immediate consumers of the product, the students, while remaining reluctant to intrude our own supposedly expert opinions in the matter. Since the evaluation of teaching became a hot issue during the 1960s, it has remained more a student than a faculty

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province, and changes in course offerings, instructional materials, and approaches to teaching have probably most often come as a reaction to student pressures. Yet the perceived quality of the instruction offered remains a prime cause of student dissatisfaction.

In the fall of 1977, the president of the University of California appointed a system-wide task force to investigate the evaluation of teaching within the university. The task force received a threefold charge:

1. To review the existing literature and experience on evaluation of university teaching in order to distill the current state of the art.
2. To extract from that effort those elements which are appropriate and applicable to teaching in the University of California.
3. To recommend means of implementing reliable, flexible and effective teaching evaluation methods for two purposes; viz., to assist faculty to improve their teaching, and to assist departments, deans, and Senate committees to assess and weigh teaching in personnel actions.

The task force consists of faculty representatives from each of the nine UC campuses, two student representatives, and one representative from the office of the assistant academic vice-president for planning and program review. It began meeting more or less monthly in December 1977 and is slated to report at the end of the 1978-79 academic year. In our deliberations so far we have marveled at the divine wisdom with which the task force was put together: it contains two faculty members whose specialty is teaching evaluation and consultation (and one of the student members also falls into this category); two administrators (an academic vice-chancellor and an assistant academic vice-chancellor) who can provide us, at least selectively and for their own campuses, with archival materials and with insight into confidential aspects that might otherwise remain hidden from our view; a chair who is a dean of instructional development; a representative from the vice-president's office to keep an eye on us,

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help to make arrangements, and take charge of the money; and a handful of more or less normal faculty members. For myself, at least, the whole experience is enormously enlightening, not necessarily, or only, with regard to the evaluation of teaching within the university.

The first two points of the charge (review of the existing literature and extraction from that literature of those elements applicable to UC) have so far been relatively simple to deal with: we have turned the sifting of the literature over to the specialists on the task force, who have presented us with a distillate from what they claim are many thousands of articles and books on the subject. Most of the literature (at least the studies we have been asked to peruse) is written by specialists such as educational psychologists in a jargon that passes all understanding and in a style that would not pass bonehead English. In fact, we have concluded that there is not much in the literature that is of more than commonsensical usefulness to the task at hand. There is no theory capable of enunciation and application across the board in a system as extensive as the University of California's.

In attempting to develop such a broad theory, the first problem, of course, would be to define "teaching" and apply the definition equitably to situations ranging from physical sciences to fine arts, from humanistic disciplines and language instruction to social sciences, and to professional subject matters such as law and medicine. Then would come the problem of measuring teaching quality. But how? By how much students learn (when often they are not even in command of high school English and mathematics when they enter the university)? By how much they enjoy their courses (perhaps a criterion more relevant to extension courses and certain types of community college offerings)? By how much they can memorize, by how much they like their teachers and can relate to them, by how well prepared they are at the end of their studies to venture out into the world? The only sensible rule is to remain flexible.

While we are still confident that any new and striking developments in the theory of teaching evaluation will be brought to our attention by the specialists on the task force, we have embarked on a venture in deciphering the rewards structure of the university and in ascertaining present perceptions and practices with respect to the role of teaching and the evaluation of teaching within the university. At our first meetings we spent most of our time deliberating on a series of instruments and modes of inquiry to be used in the effort and in trying them out on smaller samples. In the fall of 1978, we began to interview chancellors, academic vice-chancellors, and members of the academic personnel committees on the several campuses. We are also questioning chairs of departments about practices within their departments and we

may attempt to survey general faculty and student attitudes as well. It seems clear already that the task force will not be able to recommend one particular mode of teaching evaluation. It should, however, be able to make recommendations for presenting the fullest possible account of teaching effort in personnel-action cases and for improving teaching effectiveness through consultation services and teaching resources centers.

It is already apparent that the predominant method of evaluating teaching is to rely on student opinions. This is in line with what I have already said about the evaluation of teaching as a student issue. Most campuses have student evaluation books, student-run evaluation centers, and the like. Almost invariably the student evaluation instruments make a claim to have formed *the* authoritative judgment on the courses evaluated; only rarely are their findings submitted to faculty, deans, and committees. The methodology, reliability, and coverage of such undertakings often leave much to be desired. Perhaps the most questionable aspect of campus-wide evaluation procedures is the straitjacket of standard forms: each department, program, and teacher is judged by the same criteria, the same set of numbers that can be run through computers, and the same expectations about what constitutes effective teaching. Another questionable aspect is that many courses fall between the cracks and escape evaluation, sometimes because a teacher fears a negative report and refuses permission to conduct the survey, sometimes because the student evaluators themselves have no interest in covering all the courses on a campus. The evaluations are usually conducted by undergraduates, since this group tends to be more cohesive and to have a more identifiable community of interest than the graduate students, whose concerns and courses are generally excluded from the evaluation process. Most of the time only courses taught by full-time faculty members, not those taught by teaching assistants, seem to be subjected to evaluation, although it would seem logical that *if* there is going to be a student-run evaluation enterprise, which is often supported financially in one way or other by the university itself, then *all* courses, or at least all departments, should be evaluated.

The abiding faculty distrust of student-run evaluations is based on a range of fears and bad experiences, which include not only unfavorable individual reports but also failures in the system due to unreliability in publishing results and inadequacy of coverage. For these reasons there are faculty efforts to circumvent student-run evaluation and to substitute for it either departmental evaluation forms or even forms designed by individual teachers. Most faculty members, of course, have no skill in devising survey instruments or, if they do, manipulate these forms to generate as positive a response as possible. Self-interest, not always

enlightened, plays an important role on all sides—on the part of the students, of the departments, and of individual faculty members.

We all know, as chairs of departments, that student evaluations, whatever their source, should be read carefully and sometimes skeptically. At higher levels of review, by contrast, the tendency seems to be to concentrate on the numerical ratings, if available, and to disregard much of the rest. The first and most important evaluation of teaching thus must of necessity come at the departmental level. Student evaluations are not capable of rendering a comprehensive appraisal of a teacher's effectiveness, and students when pressed will tend to admit this. It is important to look beyond the narrow limits of performance in the classroom, if we are interested in knowing what is going on at the university. Some faculty members with no interest in scholarship and little capacity for it turn all their energies, in preparing for promotion time, to manufacturing images of themselves as dedicated teachers with dedicated student followings, just as others will throw themselves into committees and other administrative tasks as a substitute for more substantial achievement in scholarship or teaching, or both.

There are a variety of other available sources of input on teaching in its broadest sense, the sense in which it should really matter to us. It is a sign of our laziness and inertia that we have allowed the students to dominate the issue and co-opt us, so that we have turned over our responsibility to them and to the numbers and comments in their evaluations of individual courses. The most effective method of ensuring that we ourselves know what goes on in the classroom would be a system of peer teaching review. From direct experience and class visits we do know, as a rule, what our youngest colleagues are capable of doing, though once a teacher has the Ph.D. in hand, the classroom tends to become an inviolate sanctuary, not to be invaded by other members of the faculty except by invitation. Team teaching experiences also lead to solid impressions of a colleague's capabilities, as do presentations at departmental colloquia and public lectures. Faculty should concern themselves as well with evaluating their colleagues' course syllabi and teaching materials, instructional innovations, and contributions to the ongoing process of advising and counseling both undergraduate and graduate students. All these things are relevant to a departmental evaluation of a person's teaching, just as relevant as what students may say in their course evaluations. In addition, it would be desirable to have student opinions, especially the opinions of departmental majors, over a longer period of time. If students wish to be allowed to evaluate their teachers, then they should also be willing to sit down and write a letter or at least a paragraph about a person who has taught them not just for one quarter or semester but in a series of

courses over two or more years. It would also be helpful to have retrospective evaluations by students who have been away from the university for several years and have had the opportunity to realize the effect a teacher has had on them. Finally, since I am sketching alternatives to the exclusive reliance on student end-of-course evaluations, there is also a place for teacher self-evaluation of a course, including an honest appraisal of its shortcomings and an opportunity to reply to student criticisms.

Surveys at the University of California, Irvine

Having spoken already at such length "in general," I would now like to share with you the results of three surveys of opinion and perception at UCI within the recent past. One document, *The Academic Inventory: Undergraduate Student Perceptions of the Educational Environment at the University of California, Irvine*, by Martha A. O'Mara, was sponsored by the Associated Students. The two other surveys I undertook myself in conjunction with the work of the university task force. My first survey, a questionnaire directed at chairs of departments and deans of the schools at UCI, was designed to probe the perceptions and attitudes of faculty members in positions of administrative responsibility. To ensure a maximum response, the questionnaire was distributed through the Academic Senate Office with a cover letter from the executive vice-chancellor. There were a total of 27 replies, or a response rate of about 80%. It was possible to fill out the questionnaire anonymously, although I urged respondents to identify themselves and most did. Many respondents answered a number of the questions at length.

My second survey was a questionnaire administered at the end of the winter quarter in first- and second-year German courses and at the end of the spring quarter in first- and second-year Spanish courses, as well as in one of the introductory Spanish courses for majors.¹ A total of 332 students replied, more than 150% of the sample of the *Academic Inventory*, which analyzed 216 student responses; because my questionnaire was administered to students in humanities courses, the distribution of respondents from the various campus units is somewhat different from the survey population of the *Academic Inventory*. My questionnaire was administered to a more or less captive population: to the German students at their final exams and to the Spanish students in classes during the last week of instruction.

The results of the three surveys, taken together, are not entirely flattering. Each survey suffers because there is no external comparison or control group. My own two questionnaires were frankly trials by a neophyte in asking such questions, and if they were to be repeated or extended, it would be necessary to revise some of the

questions and rethink others. I do have reason to believe, however, that the situation described in the surveys is not peculiar to UCI. My questionnaire for chairs was repeated in a similar format by my task force colleague from UCLA, with similar results, and my student survey does contain, as it turns out, a built-in comparison group: namely, those students who had attended other postsecondary institutions before enrolling at Irvine. Until further testing at other institutions proves otherwise, I would take my findings as more or less representative of at least large public institutions.

The questionnaire for chairs and deans was designed to ask what procedures departments follow in evaluating teaching at UCI, whether departments give greater emphasis to teaching or research in their deliberations in personnel cases, what departments do when a faculty member's teaching is found wanting, and whether there is any uniform perception of official campus policy with regard to evaluation and emphasis on teaching. The responses to a first series of questions directed at teaching evaluation procedures and trends at UCI can be summarized fairly briefly:

1. To a question asking respondents whether they perceived any trend in the relative emphasis on teaching versus research over the last five years, 14 saw no trend or change, 7 saw teaching as having become more important, 3 saw research as having become more important. The result is a standoff, and basically very little seems to have changed.

2. Although replies indicated that the prevalent method of evaluating teaching is reliance on student course evaluations, no respondent had anything positive to say about the student-run evaluation book, and most departments made use of their own forms or of forms devised by individual faculty members for their own courses.

3. To a question asking what is done to improve inadequate teaching, four respondents referred to discussions with colleagues whose teaching had been found weak. No respondent indicated use of any extradepartmental resources in this regard.

4. To a question asking how the teaching load was shared in departments, 19 respondents stated that all members of their department taught at all curricular levels—lower-division, upper-division, and graduate. The reply from one department was something of an anomaly, stating that assistant and associate professors taught most of the graduate courses.

A second series of questions sought to find out how official university policies were perceived and applied within the departments. Replies to a question about the chairs' official understanding of the relative significance of teaching, research, and service as the evaluative components of recommendations showed that the university's policy is interpreted as ambiguous. Twelve responses suggest that the official policy is to stress

research more than teaching in personnel actions. Ten responses indicate that research and teaching have equal weight. To a question about how the department goes about weighing teaching, research, and service in discussing pending personnel actions, the largest number of respondents say that research is discussed first and most extensively. To a question about how much stress seems to be laid on teaching at various levels, from department to dean to committee to vice-chancellor and chancellor, the general impression is that teaching weighs less the higher one goes in the chain, although there is an intimation that perhaps the chancellor himself cares more than most people realize. My conclusion from this series of questions is that much could be done at the highest levels of administration to clarify policy and practice, at least to change the policy from "ambiguous," as it is now interpreted at departmental levels, to "flexible."

A third series of questions sought to determine whether in fact there *was* weak teaching and what was done about it in departmental personnel actions. To a question asking whether there had been weak teaching in the department in the last few years, there were 11 positive and 8 negative replies. Presumably, however, the weak teachers were detected early and either were dismissed at the end of their initial appointment or were quickly turned into good teachers, for only two respondents indicated that a faculty member had been given a negative mid-career appraisal because of weak teaching. Or perhaps different standards were applied during mid-career appraisal in the fourth year. To a question asking whether a faculty member who was strong in research and weak in teaching had been denied either tenure or promotion to full professor, there were only 3 affirmative replies and 17 negative ones. To the corollary question whether a faculty member who was weak in research but a strong teacher had been given either tenure or promotion to full professor, there were only 2 affirmative replies and 17 negative ones. It is thus clearly permissible to give tenure, to promote to full professor, and to advance full professors to the highest steps in the system on the primary basis of strong research, but not on the primary basis of a strong teaching record. For better or worse, and despite an official campus policy that seems either ambiguous on this point or concerned equally with research and teaching (depending on how one reads the guidelines), the campus *perceives itself* as predominantly research-oriented, and the more productive scholars and researchers reap the most rewards.

This situation is diametrically opposed to the undergraduate perception of the university's reason for being. To quote from the *Academic Inventory*, "When the undergraduates sampled were asked what weight a faculty member's teaching quality should be given relative to research, in the promotion and tenure process, half felt that teaching quality should be given

more weight than research" and "46% felt that teaching should be given equal weight with research." In reply to the set of questions asking respondents what they had found to be the primary role faculty performed on campus and what they thought the faculty's role should be, 87% replied that the faculty's role should be primarily to teach. In the schools of engineering and fine arts, fully 100% of the students thought that the primary role of faculty should be teaching. In the humanities, 82.6% found the faculty's prime role to be teaching and 95.6% said it should be teaching. There was no appreciation whatsoever of a faculty role either as administrator or counselor, and only 4.4% in the humanities thought that the primary role should be research (*Academic Inventory*, p. 10).

This indicates that, just as the administration should make clear to the faculty its expectations with regard to the respective roles of teaching and research, whatever these may be, so the faculty has the immense job of educating undergraduates about the role of the university in society and the importance of research, if it wishes to maintain its conception of itself as having as much obligation to push at the frontiers of knowledge as to engage in teaching. Otherwise the students will perceive every hour spent in research as an hour stolen from them, from their instruction, and from their concerns.

These findings are borne out by my own survey of undergraduate attitudes. Originally I set out to ask questions about what students were thinking when they evaluated a course, but the questionnaire evolved instead into an attempt to measure the climate of student-faculty contact and understanding. The conclusions to be drawn from my questionnaire are rather depressing in several respects.

The Spanish and German samples differ somewhat in composition: Spanish draws about 45% of its enrollment from majors in humanities departments, whereas German 1 has only 25% humanities majors (German 2 approaches 45%). Both Spanish 1 and Spanish 2 enroll a significantly higher proportion of students who attended other postsecondary institutions before studying at UCI, and Spanish 2 has twice as many freshmen enrolled (49%) as does German 2 (24%). Despite these differences, it seems acceptable for my purposes to lump the Spanish 1, Spanish 2, and German 1 samples together because they show the same tendencies in their replies to the survey questions. I shall save the German 2 sample for later discussion, along with a 15-student sample from a third-year Spanish course. The significant number of minority students (mostly Chicanos) in the Spanish samples in contrast to the German samples might have made some difference in the final evaluation of the survey results, but the questionnaire did not provide for identifying minority students.

The Spanish 1, Spanish 2, and German 1 samples

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together contain 271 students. While most find more emphasis on teaching at UCI than at their previous institution (142, or 52%—with another 65, or 24%, stating that the emphasis is about the same), they do not see this as creating a generally more favorable atmosphere. Forty-four percent perceive UCI teachers as less concerned about their students, 46% consider faculty-student contact less satisfactory at UCI than at their previous institution, 50% regard UCI teachers as less accessible. Fifty-five percent have the impression that UCI teachers are sometimes more interested in research than in teaching. There is admittedly some ambiguity in the phrasing of the questions. The students were asked to compare UCI with their last institution, which for 66% of the respondents was high school. The term "teacher" used in this series of questions is also ambiguous. I chose the term in order not to prejudice the questions about professors as opposed to teaching assistants on the second page of the questionnaire, so that in the context of the questions about quality of contact, teacher concern, and so forth, the term "teacher" could mean either full-time faculty member or teaching assistant. What does show up quite clearly is that students find the atmosphere at UCI less caring, on the whole, than at their previous institutions. There seems to be a strong positive correlation, however, between relative satisfaction at UCI (that is, a perception of the quality of contact, concern, and so on, as better or about the same) and previous attendance at another postsecondary institution, and this finding leads me to believe that UCI does not seem decidedly inferior in atmosphere to other postsecondary institutions but only to the students' high schools.

I included the questions about how much students think teachers work as something of a curiosity. As I was drafting the questionnaire, the first results of a UC work-load survey, conducted by a private research institute in Berkeley, became available, showing that faculty members claimed to work, on average, about 65 hours a week and to devote about 30 of these to instruction-related activity. I myself was among the random sample of UC faculty asked to keep a work diary for two days and transmit the results. Over two weekdays I logged a total of about 20 hours that could honestly be considered job-related, so that for a week (including weekends) I do not consider 65 hours an exaggerated figure. Professors have a bad public image, however, and the work-load survey is probably not going to persuade many people, either students, or legislators, that we are doing enough work. Of the 271 respondents, 35% thought that professors worked 30 hours a week (and a couple even thought "30 hours or less"), while another 26% answered 40 hours. Since a fairly large percentage of respondents did not venture an opinion on this question, this total of 61% is even worse than it appears. There is a fairly strong positive correlation between the answer 30 hours or 40 hours on

the work-time question and a yes response to the question whether it is right for professors to do research as well as teach (a total of 69%). This may indicate that students think professors work 30 or 40 hours at instructional activities and then do research on their own time, but the question clearly asked them to include in their estimate of total hours worked the time spent on research and on committee meetings and the like. Almost 14% stated flatly that it wasn't right for teachers to do research, while another 27% answered that they "can't tell," and some of those who stated that it was all right to do research added a qualifier such as "but not if it detracts from teaching."

The questions about professors and teaching assistants are for me most revealing of the problematic situation of a university such as UCI. I myself am totally convinced by the argument put forth by my friend and former colleague Jeffrey Sammons, in the *Unterrichts-praxis* in 1974, that teaching assistants are in reality exploited scab labor, making it extremely difficult for Ph.D.'s to find jobs. Teaching assistants, having themselves only recently been graduated from college, are for the most part unqualified as teachers and have to learn something about teaching while on the job, at the same time as they are expected to carry a full academic course load. When I expressed this point of view during the past year in my reply to a questionnaire by the UCI Committee on Educational Policy, it seems to have caused something of an uproar. No one had ever thought of the utilization of teaching assistants quite in that light before, and the ensuing discussion led at least to a recommendation to try to seek some financial support for first-year graduate students or to offer them extra compensation for the trials and tribulations of learning to teach. I do not expect much to come of that. Legislatures and university administrations have been so sold on the idea of staffing a large number of introductory-level courses with cheap teaching assistant labor that it will take a miracle to effect much change. In the meantime the situation with regard to teaching assistants at UCI (and I suspect not only here) is deplorable.

Of the survey sample, fully 75% of the respondents replied that they were taught either 25% or 50% by teaching assistants, almost 20% were taught 75% by teaching assistants, and a few said 100%. Even juniors and seniors are still being taught by teaching assistants in a significant percentage of their classes. The results are inevitable. Teaching assistants identify with their students; the undergraduates identify with the teaching assistants. To the question whether the teaching assistant or the professor is the more concerned teacher, the overwhelming response was the teaching assistant. The response to the question about quality of contact with teaching assistant as opposed to professor is even more overwhelming (79% for the teaching assistants). The areas of the campus in which

some students prefer the professors happen to be predominantly areas where the teaching assistants are perceived as especially ill-prepared for their teaching duties, so there is no comfort to be found there.

The *Academic Inventory*, from which I quoted earlier, does document or mention some dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching assistants at UCI. That feeling, however, is *not* the main thrust of the answers to the questions I posed. Some dissatisfaction with teaching assistants shows through at times, but it is primarily the lack of meaningful contact with faculty members that is in evidence. This becomes clear from some of the responses to the questions asking what a teaching assistant is and what the difference is between a teaching assistant and a professor. The responses to the two questions tend to merge, and sometimes they border on the cynical: "A graduate student still naive in believing that teaching is fun. A professor teaches because he has to." "Grad student, leads sections, helps you understand the prof's lectures, does the dirty work." "A knowledgeable person who answers questions and problems caused by the prof. Profs create problems, TA sometimes help answer them." "A teacher in training who is a spin-off of the professor. A TA is usually also a student, often more easy to relate to (unless they let their position go to their heads)." "A graduate student charged to instruct a class the application of lecture material. Professor present the dogma; TA rake through it in hope of giving students clearer understanding of dogma." The illiteracy and clumsy expression of many of the replies are outstanding. Here is one comment from a graduate student in comparative literature: "I been at UCI for 4 years."

Most respondents (56%) answered either that student evaluations of teachers were *not* taken into account by the department or that the impact of evaluations was not known. The questions asking for the most important point in evaluating a teacher and the major reason for evaluating courses and teachers elicited totally safe answers: "How much you learned in the course" and "How well the teacher succeeded in motivating you" were by far the most common responses to the former question; the response "So that the teacher can do better in the course and improve it the next time" was chosen overwhelmingly as the major reason for course evaluations. By a substantial margin students prefer as a format for evaluations a combination of essay and numerical scale (over a simple numerical scale), and two thirds of the students believe that they can evaluate courses "very objectively."

I have managed to begin and end my paper, by a sort of legerdemain, on the same subject, the evaluation of teaching, by way of what may seem a digression on the image of the professor and on the TA system as it is practiced in major public universities. Strictly speaking, the university task force on teaching

evaluation is not supposed to be dealing with teaching assistants, who are seen as a separate issue. It seems clear to me, however, that the TA system is an integral part of the problem of the atmosphere and the climate of learning in the university and that it must be dealt with in the context of the whole. The responses of chairs and deans to my questionnaire on the evaluation of teaching in faculty ranks would lead one to believe that there is no great problem in the university. A consideration of the TA system, however, and of the treatment our students receive at the hands of their teachers (teaching assistants and distant professors) shows a substantial degree of unrest that has not percolated up to the top levels. Quite simply, the TA system has alienated us from our students, and we should do something about it.

I have saved my questionnaire responses from Spanish 101 and German 2 until the end. They both suggest that a better atmosphere *can* be restored and that foreign language departments, if they work hard at it, *can* carve out within the mass university an area of humanity characterized by a quality relationship with students and student appreciation of faculty efforts. German 1, Spanish 1, and Spanish 2 are taught at UCI totally by teaching assistants. Despite the questionnaire instructions to respond to the questions in the context, so far as possible, of their *total* experience at UCI, the respondents *were* influenced by the immediate surroundings of the Spanish or German course in which the questionnaire was administered. Spanish 101 is an introductory-level course for Spanish majors, and although the students in my sample were taught by a teaching assistant, the students were taking upper-division Spanish courses under faculty members, at the same time. In the Spanish 101 sample of 15 students, the concern, quality of contact, and accessibility ratings for professors are much improved over the Spanish 1 and Spanish 2 statistics, although teaching assistants are still perceived as being more concerned teachers and affording a more satisfactory level of contact by about the same margin as in the Spanish 1 and Spanish 2 samples.

In German 2, by contrast, most of the sections have been taught, as a matter of policy, by full-time faculty members, and where it was absolutely necessary to use TAs, only the most qualified graduate students were assigned this course. The German 2 responses to the questionnaire do not at all follow the pattern of the German 1 responses: the concern, quality of contact, and accessibility ratings given by the more advanced students show a turnaround from those in the German 1 survey. Fifty-one percent of the German 1 students found less concern at UCI than at their last institution, whereas only 17% of the German 2 students made this claim; 45% of German 1 students found the quality of contact poorer, whereas only 17% of German 2 students

thought this was so; 49% of German 1 students found UCI teachers less accessible, as opposed to only 28% of the German 2 students. Thus far, German 2 and Spanish 101 show a similar pattern, both in contrast to German 1, Spanish 1, and Spanish 2. But whereas Spanish 101 did not improve on the questions relating to concern and quality of contact with teaching assistants and professors respectively, there is a substantial change for German 2. To the question asking which teachers were more concerned only 39% of the German 2 students answered teaching assistants, and in reply to the question about better contact, 46% said teaching assistants and 30% said professors (as opposed to 77% for teaching assistants and 12% for professors in German 1).

The lesson seems to me to be clear, and here I think I am uncovering a dirty little secret: we language and literature teachers can do ourselves a great favor by involving ourselves intensively at the lower-division levels of instruction. In our most rational moments, when we are not thinking of the glories of producing unmarketable Ph.D.'s, we should perhaps hope and pray for the breakdown of the TA system. In all probability, it would be a blessing if our graduate programs were to be pruned back, so that we would be offering graduate training and degrees only to those students who are truly qualified and not continually luring excessive numbers of students into a TA system that is only a thinly disguised economic exploitation. That might of course mean that we would have to put in a few extra contact hours in our language courses, which we should keep open to all comers. We might be the better for it and have more and better students at the advanced undergraduate levels. Also, those who do not have anything truly original to contribute to scholarship might then lack the time and opportunity to perpetrate their products on the profession. We should devote ourselves to getting acquainted with our undergraduate students and trying to learn how to teach them, instead of first allowing them to be malformed by the victims of the TA system. In contrast to the largest departments at the university, we have the relative advantage of small numbers and potential close contact with our students. If we would devote ourselves more to the undergraduates, we might just conceivably—and possibly very quickly—find ourselves a highly respected part of the university with some political clout.

NOTE

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