



## Part student, part professor

# The Graduate

Like many institutions, the University is relying

**S**IX YEARS AGO 17 percent of OU's undergraduate courses were being taught by graduate assistants. Today the figure stands at 30 percent and within the next decade it could climb to 70 percent.

The increasing use of graduate assistants, who teach while studying toward MAs and PhDs, is not a situation unique to the University of Oklahoma. Universities throughout the country are becoming more and more dependent upon the graduate assistant to supply instruction for fundamental courses. The reason stems from economic necessity. There simply are not enough available senior faculty members to handle introductory courses. Thus, the graduate assistant is placed in the anomalous position of being both student and professor. He is more than student but less than professor. While he is aware that his existence is explained in terms of economic feasibility, he is also aware that he must perform the same functions as the *bona fide* faculty member—in addition to maintaining his own studies.

When the term "graduate assistant" crops up, it is many times in unpleasant connotations, especially in the case of parents who feel that their son or daughter should not have to suffer the indignity of obtaining instruction from another student. Some students voice disapproval, particularly if they sense an ultra-authoritative demeanor on the part of their student-professor.

The alternative, if graduate assistants were not used, would be very large classes with little chance for individual instruction. Dr. Richard V. Andree, chairman of the department of mathematics and astronomy, which uses the largest number of assistants in the University (about 80 each semester), accentuates the need for small mathematics classes. "We feel that the number of students in our undergraduate classes must be kept low. Students

*Jon Cole, math: "I don't feel it's my duty to inspire my students. If they don't want to learn, they don't have to. And I certainly don't consider myself a nursemaid."*

# Teaching Assistants

By JUDI FREYER

Increasingly on Graduate Assistants for instruction in a number of undergraduate courses

*Photographed by Larry McDade*

require individual attention, and without the graduate assistant this would not be possible. We also use graduate assistants in our mathematical laboratories and help sessions.

"We are proud of the teaching records of our graduate assistants in mathematics," says Dr. Andree. "The entire math department shares the responsibility of guiding and training this select crew." Commenting on the selectivity of assistants he says, "We turn away about 60 applicants for each one we accept. The majority of those we do accept are actually professors—the better professors—at other universities who are at OU to work on their PhDs. While graduate assistants do teach undergraduate courses at the freshman level, we also have senior PhD professors teaching at every level, and this includes the beginning

math courses. We make it a firm rule not to permit a graduate assistant to teach a course until he is thoroughly familiar with that course and with the next four years of courses above the one he is teaching."

Referring to the large demand for mathematicians he says, "We have at least 50 openings for each of our MS and PhD graduates, and the more outstanding graduates can choose from several hundred openings in industry, government or teaching positions. One of Dr. Ewings' 1966 PhDs has accepted a position as a research professor of mathematics at Brown University.

"The graduate assistant," Dr. Andree continues, "even if he does not pursue teaching, gains a great deal from the experience of trying to explain basic ideas. He begins to

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*Susan Griffith, zoology: "The students are here to acquire knowledge about zoology. It's my duty to help them as much as possible. I'm not trying to impress them with any superior knowledge or to dazzle them with spectacular oratory."*





*Barbara Grundy, English: "Through teaching, I have gained new insight into subject matter. At first I was a bit apprehensive because some students have misguided ideas about graduate assistants. After a week, though, I felt at home."*

perceive connections between elementary and advanced work. His problem in teaching a beginning class is not explaining too little, but too much."

Graduate assistants are presently handling about 95

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## Elconin: We regard graduate assistants as colleagues, not as underlings

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percent of the two freshman English courses, English 21 and 22. First semester there were 109 sections of English 21 and second semester there are almost that many sections of English 22. The honor sections are taught by senior faculty members.

Dr. Victor A. Elconin, chairman of the English department, visualizes the graduate assistants as the life-line of the graduate program. "We do not regard them as underlings but as colleagues," he emphasizes. "They are a vital part of our department." Dr. Elconin points out that the English department uses about 60 assistants each semester. "We screen very carefully about 120 applications from all over the United States after sending announcements to other schools. I believe we are more selective than many larger universities, because they need so many. We have turned down many who obtained appointments at these institutions."

While conceding their importance to the English department and the University as a whole, Dr. Elconin does not underrate the benefits received by the assistant from his teaching experience. "By the time he receives a MA or PhD, he is an experienced teacher, and this helps him greatly when seeking a job. Early each year we place every student who wants a job. Our PhDs are going to some of the finest universities in the country."

A frequently expressed criticism of the use of the graduate assistant is that he is placed in the classroom with little, if any, formal instruction in teaching. While it is true that many do not receive an abundance of formal training, most departments attempt to aid the assistant as much as possible. Dr. J. L. Kendall, associate professor of English, directs a program for new English assistants. Each fall he conducts a series of six weekly meetings in which special problems usually encountered by the new instructor are discussed. Time is devoted to acquainting him with methods of theme criticism and evaluation. Later in the semester three sessions are held by designated staff members to acquaint the new teacher with proven methods of teaching the short story, poetry, and drama.

Joyce Shana'a, instructor in mathematics, recognized the need for an orientation program in the mathematics-astronomy department and was instrumental in its inception. She explains, "The remedial high school algebra courses are often taught by new graduate assistants. These people are starting their first graduate courses as well as facing their first teaching experience. Their problems are often compounded by ignorance of teaching techniques, by communication difficulties, by necessary social adjustments, and by fear."

Each math course with several sections has a coordinator who possesses the teaching maturity to act as supervisor, reference resource, and counselor.

Among his duties are holding weekly meetings with his group, in which topics of discussion include the objectives

*Robert Shriner, economics: "In the AGA our concern is in the quality of education at OU. We see a direct relationship between it and the quality of graduate assistants."*

of the course, the emphases desired by the department, tests, etc. Mrs. Shana'a points out that many problems solve themselves by presentation in free discussion. "All instructors," she says, "help design mid-term and final examinations which are given simultaneously to all sections. These are graded on an equivalent scale, and thus provide a useful guideline to the beginning instructor in evaluating his classes' achievements and his own grading practices. From the coordination sessions emerged the idea of exchange classroom visits among the assistants. The constructive criticisms resulting from these visits are received seriously and acted upon swiftly."

Preceding the fall semester of 1964, new math assistants were asked to attend a four-day seminar during registration week, where they were introduced to the school and community, were aided in selection of suitable course schedules, and were acquainted with the department's requirements of them as students and instructors. "Active participation in the orientation program far exceeded expectations," says Mrs. Shana'a, "and we have now set aside five full days during each fall enrollment for this purpose. During this time the graduate assistant also prepares and presents a lesson from the book from which he will be teaching, and his fellow assistants discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each lesson presented."

During the second semester the assistants meet monthly with their course coordinator and the department chairman. Here they have the opportunity for a free exchange of ideas and a discussion of common problems.

*Persona grata* to the graduate assistant is Dr. John Wood, associate professor of political science. Dr. Wood is faculty sponsor for the Association of Graduate Assistants (AGA), an organization formed at the beginning of the 1965 fall semester and composed of over 100 members. He says, "My own observation has been that we have unusually competent assistants. However, I am afraid that we are going to lose some of them without a stipend more competitive with other schools." Dr. Carl Riggs, dean of the Graduate College, reveals that not only is OU's stipend not competitive with other schools in the Big Eight and in the nation, but it is not competitive with the federal programs available to students on this campus. "This is not a fault of the administration," he emphasizes. "The money simply isn't available."

While the AGA has not achieved its immediate objectives—an increase in stipends, waiving of out-of-state tuition and enrollment fees, staff parking privileges—it has drawn attention to the dilemma of the graduate assistant. Unfortunately, its request for increased stipends came in the middle of the academic year and in the second year of the legislative biennium, which means that the University will have the same amount of appropriated funds for next year that it had this year.

Robert D. Shriner, graduate assistant in economics and president of the AGA, says, "To our knowledge the AGA is the first and only organization of this type. We are interested in the quality of education at OU and see a direct relationship between the quality of graduate assistants and

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the quality of education. If we don't have assistants with the right type of credentials, then we are going to have a less than adequate relationship. We believe that you attract good graduate assistants by offering a stipend competitive with other universities and reinforcing the graduate student program, since the quality of graduate courses will reflect on the graduate assistants."

Shriner, a native of Hobart who is working toward his master's degree, believes there is a close rapport between graduate assistants and students. "This relationship can be very close if the student utilizes it. I spend more time in counseling sessions than grading, class preparation, or any other phase of being a graduate assistant. In the average week, this amounts to ten or twelve hours."

Another spokesman for the AGA is one of its hardest-working members, Dale Parent. Dale is a graduate assistant in political science while working toward his MA and is responsible for teaching three discussion sections per week. He spends about 20 to 25 hours each week in class preparation, paperwork, and test-grading. "What is really important about the work is not the time consumed, but whether the work has a meaningful relationship to the assistant's course of study. If the assistant is studying history and teaching freshman history courses, there is a fairly good relationship. On the other hand if he is studying chemistry but sharpens pencils or washes test-tubes for his assistantship, a poor relationship develops.

*"Reddy" Mallareddy, engineering graphics: "I have found the American student more serious than the Indian student. This is probably because he is under more pressure."*



"Considering the problems faced by the administration, the situation at OU is about as good as can be expected. The administration is generally very sympathetic to our problems, but because of lack of funds they can't do much to solve them. Most married assistants report that they cannot, under their present salary, meet their financial obligations and make satisfactory progress toward their degree. Some assistants are even forced to go on welfare. With enrollments in Oklahoma colleges and universities expected to double in the next decade, the problem demands immediate, decisive action. A delay of one or two legislative sessions will seriously cripple higher education in Oklahoma."

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Grateful for the opportunity to teach is graduate assistant Barbara Grundy, who teaches two freshman classes of English. Barbara, who plans to be married this summer after which she will continue work toward her master's degree, says, "Through teaching I have gained new insight into subject matter. I have read outside books and benefited from the opinion of critics. Grading themes has also proved beneficial. I usually read the theme twice—once to get the student's ideas and once for grading purposes."

To the question of "Were you apprehensive at first?" Barbara responds with a frank "Yes" and explains, "The responsibility of having a freshman class of English frightened me. I knew some students had misguided ideas about graduate assistants. After the first week, however, I felt quite at home. My students indicated their willingness to work." Barbara defines "willingness to work" as class participation, improvement on themes, and regularity in attendance. "I grade mostly on improvement," she says.

Harapanahalli "Reddy" Mallareddy, like many of his colleagues, is a lab instructor. The enthusiastic assistant from India, who teaches two sections of engineering graphics, does not lack experience in the teaching field. Before enrolling at OU two years ago, Reddy had taught hydrolics, engineering mechanics, and engineering graphics for five years at the University of Mysore in Bangalore, India. He plans to return to India to teach upon completion of his PhD, hopefully by spring of 1968.

Noting the dissimilitude between students in India and students in America, he says unswervingly, "Americans are more studious. This is probably because they are under more pressure than students in India, who, because they are only quizzed once during the year, are inclined to become a little lazy."

Reddy denotes the difference between a teacher in a laboratory and a teacher in the conventional classroom. "In the lab the teacher is a supervisor; the students are doing most of the work, whereas in the classroom the teacher instructs, and the student can take it or leave it. Because I love to teach, I would like the opportunity to teach outside the lab; however, I have enjoyed and benefited from my lab experience."

Atypical of the OU graduate assistant is Charlotte Hallock, who recently presented her graduate piano recital. A quarter-time assistant, she accompanies for voice and instrumental lessons. "I'm supposed to work 10 hours each week," she explains, "but I usually end up accompanying for recitals, try-outs, luncheons, etc., which means that I devote quite a bit more than 10 hours."

Charlotte emphasizes that she does not regret her non-didactic role. "By accompanying, I have increased my knowledge of the literature of music, I have improved my sight-reading, and I have become familiar with all types of music. Also, each teacher instructs in different ways; therefore, I have been exposed to numerous techniques. Another advantage is that I have met VIPs in the music field that I would not have met otherwise." Charlotte, who is marrying a ministerial student this summer, plans to teach piano. She's got a good start. Besides her school activities, Charlotte has 20 private students and serves as pianist for her church choir.

"I feel I have profited greatly from my teaching ex-

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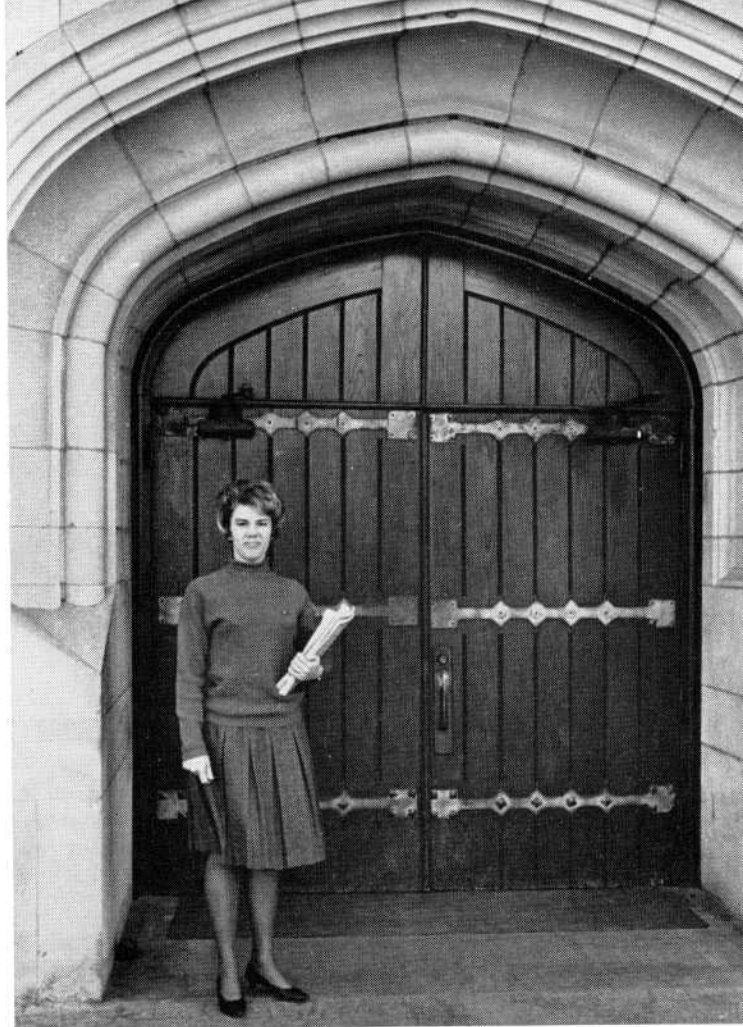
## Because of low pay, the better GA is continually on the lookout

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perience," says Susan Griffith, an experienced assistant in zoology. "I can certainly see the difference in my teaching now from my first semester of teaching. Nevertheless, the administration is getting a bargain. It's not the amount of time we spend that bothers us—it's the trouble we have meeting living expenses."

Reflecting on her teaching obligations, Susan says, "I feel students are here to acquire knowledge about zoology. It is my duty to help them as much as possible. I'm not trying to impress them with any superior knowledge or great oratorical ability. They [the students] have the feeling that though you're on the other side of the fence, you're basically one of them. But I don't feel that any of my students try to take advantage of me because of my student-status."

Susan, a PhD candidate, came to OU from Kansas State because she found the OU faculty "agreeable and able individuals. I haven't been disappointed," she says. "The graduate program in zoology reflects the capability of the



*Charlotte Hallock, music: "I have increased my knowledge of the literature of music and have had an opportunity to be exposed to numerous techniques of instruction."*

faculty." Susan received her BA and MA degrees from Emporia State Teachers College in Emporia, Kan. Future plans call for a June wedding and a teaching career.

One of the 80 assistants in math this semester is Jon Cole, Altus graduate student, who observes, "It is not as difficult to teach elementary math as it is to teach elementary courses in other fields, mainly because of the inherent nature of math—it is more clearly defined. Teaching an elementary math course is to the math teacher what teaching the alphabet is to the English teacher.

"I don't feel it is my duty to inspire my students," he says without equivocation. "If they don't want to learn, they don't have to. I certainly don't consider myself a nursemaid. As I tell my students, it is as easy to record an A as it is an F. I do find that an occasional reference to the draft serves as a spur to my male students. Female students don't seem to need the study incentive."

The math instructor, who quips that the quality of instruction is at least as good as the quality of learning, believes that while being a graduate assistant is time consuming, it doesn't present an insuperable burden. "On a dollars per hour basis, I think the assistant is getting paid very well. I don't have any complaints. It is true, however, that due to the low scale of pay at the University, the better sort of graduate assistant is constantly on the lookout."

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