

Spring 1990 Adds and Drops Extra

Polemistic

A journal must have polemic, if it is to struggle. —Karl Marx

UT and the Money Question: Why We Can't Get Classes

by Tom Philpott
and Scott Henson

"Must one smash their ears before they learn to listen with their eyes?"

—Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

The UT administration's chief excuse for not providing enough teachers to teach classes is lack of funds. Upon examination, however, this claim withers. From its founding in 1883, it took the University 96 years, until 1979, for the UT-Austin budget to grow to \$149 million. Within the next ten years, the budget more than doubled, to \$328 million. Adjusted for inflation, this amounts to at least a 63 percent increase. In the meantime, numbers of undergraduates increased by about 10 percent, and numbers of faculty grew by 7 percent. Where has all the money gone?

The Political Economy of UT's Understaffing Crisis

In short, both the University and the UT System have funneled money, capital and resources that should have gone to pay for classes into promoting local industry instead. The first stage of the policy began in the early '80s, as Texas policymakers began to fear the oil bonanza couldn't last forever. Diversification of the economy — mostly in the form of high-tech industry — slowly became a priority among the state's lawmakers and opinion leaders, picking up speed when oil prices crashed.

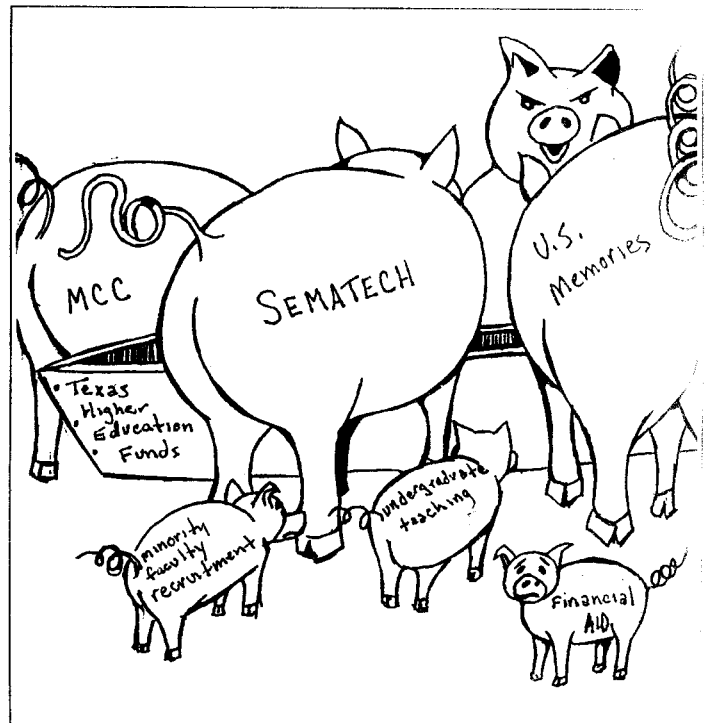
Basing their plans on the Dukakis model, formerly known as the "Massachusetts Miracle," they decided to use the state's universities to mold and boost the economy, much like Michael Dukakis farmed out MIT to multinational corporations and the defense department.

The first phase of this plan was to bring the Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corporation (MCC) to Austin. A consortium of major defense contractors, MCC develops software and studies artificial intelligence. George Kozmetsky, the former business school dean who's credited with luring MCC to Austin, described the consortium's goal as to create "a new paradigm" for Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative.

To lure the consortium, the UT-System purchased \$14 million worth of land and buildings, which it rents to MCC for \$2 per year—\$1 for the land, \$1 for the building. MCC also houses some \$20 million in UT-owned capital. In addition, the University had to agree to beef up its computer science and electrical engineering departments to bring MCC to Austin. In return, MCC would provide employment for a handful of graduate students and high-tech research grants for a few professors. Of the \$34 million UT spent, undergraduates received none of the quid pro quo.

The UT-System, egged on by the state's politicians, continued its liberal spending for "economic development" throughout the decade. The austerity measures UT implemented in the mid-80s—cuts in library hours, a ninefold tuition increase and a faculty hiring freeze—didn't extend to the University's corporate beneficiaries. In the summer of 1984, only months after the imposition of austerity, the UT Board of Regents approved \$16 million in matching funds to endow 32 chairs at \$1 million apiece. Some of these chairs were reserved to do research for MCC, and hiring for these chairs continued throughout the "hiring freeze."

Later that year, the regents spent another \$20 million for a new Cray supercomputer. Jess Hay, then-chair of the regents, linked that purchase directly to the endowed chairs, declaring it "an essential next step if we are going to maximize the use of the 32 endowed



chairs."

Also that fall, UT-System Chancellor Hans Mark proposed funding for 5 new high-tech research institutes, three of which were eventually built. When asked about these expenditures in the face of austerity, Mark announced that only budgets of units in the UT System with "clear applications of creating new jobs" would be increased. Required lower-division classes, the reader will imagine, possess little job-creating potential.

More recently, in 1988 the UT-System agreed to dole out \$12.3 million for land and buildings to lure the Sematech consortium, a collaborative effort among defense contractors and the defense department. State and local taxpayers laid out another \$56 million to draw Sematech to Austin.

Although other cities competed heavily for the consortium, as Hans Mark put it, UT "put green money on the table ... Other places also said they'd go to their legislatures. But we said, 'When you get to town, you'll have a bank account you can draw on.'" The following fall, in 1989, 1000 students were turned away from E316k during adds and drops, with UT President Cunningham claiming UT's "lack of funds" as the reason.

All of these high-tech research expenditures were gambles—the university and the state had hoped that, in the long term, they would boost the economy. The economy, however, didn't cooperate. MCC, for instance, placed its hopes on a boom in SDI funds, which never occurred. In fact, in the post-Cold War era, banking on SDI monies appears increasingly hopeless.

Sematech, too, has provided fewer benefits than its champions had predicted. Now it appears that the defense department, which provides \$100 million annually to Sematech's budget, may pull out of the consortium. That would leave Austin, which has had difficulty prying taxes out of Sematech, with little to show for its multi-million dollar investment.

In fact, hinging Austin's economic future on high-tech manufacturing appears to have been a fundamentally flawed decision, both in terms of economic development and the damage done to Austin's quality of life. The *Austin-American Statesman* worriedly reports that the chip equipment business will decline by 13 percent in 1990. And former MCC chief, Bobby Inman, just took Tracor—the only home-grown Fortune 500 company in Austin's high-tech industry—into bankruptcy. Meanwhile, the Sematech facilities pumped "hundreds of gallons" of chlorofluorocarbons into the air last year, according to *Mother Jones* magazine. And the Austin plant of California's Advanced Micro Devices was named one of the 500 worst polluters in the country by the National Wildlife Federation.

So, UT's subsidies to corporate research have yielded little benefit to the state's economy, or to the Austin community. But what were the opportunity costs of such extravagant expenditures?

Following the Money

Ultimately, undergraduate education was the main victim of the state's ill-fated industrial policy. To use the University as a mechanism to promote the high-tech industry, UT had to shift its resources to buying both intellectual and physical capital for these firms, and away from educating students.

In the MCC deal, as noted above, the University promised to pour more resources into the computer science and electrical engineering budgets. And as we can see from Table 1, UT kept its promise. While liberal arts departments struggled under growing budget constraints, computer science and electrical engineering budgets far outstripped increases in numbers of students taught.

Since 1980 in computer science, the per-student resident instruction budget increased by 216 percent after inflation. Meanwhile, the number of students taught in that department rose by only 2.4 per-

Table 1
Where the cash goes, and where it doesn't
(over the period including 1980-1989)

Department	Percent increase, resident instruction budget per FTE student	Percent increase, # of FTE students
French/Italian	-48%	71.0%
Government	-3	15.5
Philosophy	-20	41.4
Spanish/Portuguese	-57	67.6
Computer Science	216	2.4
Electrical Engineering	80	26.5
Mechanical Engineering	75	14.9

Source: Derived from the UT Office of Institutional Studies' *Statistical Handbook 1989-1990*. Adjusted for inflation based on price index figures from the *World Almanac*. Budget figures are rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.

cent. In electrical engineering, too, per-student budget figures outstripped increases in numbers of students taught by a 3-1 margin. Spanish and Portuguese, on the other hand, displayed exactly the opposite trend over the same period. While the number of students taking these courses increased by 67.6 percent, the per-student resident instruction budget declined by 57 percent after inflation. The French and Italian department suffered a similarly harsh budget crunch.

The implications are clear. The University requires that a great majority of students take several language classes, yet slashes budgets in those departments. Engineering and computer science disciplines serve drastically fewer students, and the University floods them with money.

This phenomenon becomes even clearer when we compare college budgets with their student populations. Using numbers from the UT Office of Institutional Studies' *Statistical Handbook*, *Polemicist* computes that between 1980 and 1989 the number of liberal arts majors increased by more than 66 percent, while the liberal arts budget increased only 29.3 percent after inflation. Over the same period, the budget for the College of Engineering increased 94.1 percent after inflation, while the number of engineering majors actually dropped by 16.1 percent.

Similarly, the ratios of full-time equivalent students to full-time equivalent faculty betray the same trend. The

Statistical Note

The "FTE student" number measures total students taught by department. It's derived by dividing undergraduate semester hours by 15, masters hours by 12, and doctoral hours by 9.

other areas. Graduate students teach about 25 percent of all undergraduate liberal arts classes, compared to 5 percent in the engineering school. Further, tenured faculty teach less than 40 percent of all liberal arts classes, as compared to nearly 60 percent in the engineering college. In the business school—long notorious for bolstering its MBA program at the expense of its undergraduates—about 28 percent of undergraduate classes are taught by graduate students, and only 30 percent are taught by tenured faculty.

As we can see from Table 2, this reflects a recent trend in UT's hiring practices. Perhaps to minimize the cost of teaching non-engineering students, UT began hiring fewer tenure-track faculty in favor of cheaper labor in the form of graduate students. This has several meaningful implications. First, while grad students are certainly qualified to teach some classes, clearly the quality of undergraduate instruction goes down when fewer classes are taught by real professors. Also, the shift to grad-student teachers means that the people who teach undergraduates—and who therefore are the logical advocates for undergraduate programs—are excluded from the departmental decision-making process, since such power is

University calls this number the student-faculty ratio—a patently absurd claim, since the number in no way reflects class size. But it does provide a useful tool for comparison. Between 1980 and 1989, this ratio grew in the liberal arts college from 25.76-1 to 28.28-1. During the same period, the ratio in engineering declined from 19.33-1 to 15.61-1.

It should be noted that the liberal arts college is the largest on campus, with more than twice as many undergraduates as the engineering college. The shift in resources to the engineering school defies any rational cost-benefit analysis based on students' needs. It can only be explained by examining the external constituencies—like MCC and Sematech—that the University serves.

This same trend can be detected in

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reserved for faculty.

The University's pay-raise outlays over the last ten years also show a bias toward departments with high-tech applications, particularly, and not surprisingly, computer sciences and electrical engineering. As outlined in Table 3, teachers in language departments received tiny pay increases; pay increases for liberal arts and pure science professors averaged around 30 percent; and electrical engineering and computer sciences professors received average pay boosts approaching 70 percent.

This dramatizes yet again the University's tendency to pour money into the departments it promised to bolster in the MCC deal, and leave departments that more directly serve undergraduates scrambling for the table scraps.

Cunningham's Response: Attack Undergraduates

This striking shift in funds has resulted in the understaffing crisis, which strands students in long lines, waiting for the chance to beg their way into huge sections of required classes. Along with *The Daily Texan*, President Cunningham, with typical slyness, has framed the problem in terms of "overenrollment." With this sleight of syntax, Cunningham removes responsibility for the crisis from the policymakers whose ideas caused it and instead blames its chief victims: undergraduate students.

In an over-long and fluff-filled three-part apology in *The Daily Texan* last fall, Cunningham laid out this rationale and hinted darkly at its implications. He ar-

Table 2
Distribution of New Hires Among Faculty Ranks

	Tenure Track		Non-Tenure Track	
1979-80	192	(77.7%)	55	(22.3%)
1980-81	201	(79.8%)	51	(20.2%)
1981-82	148	(61.9%)	91	(38.1%)
1982-83	85	(49.4%)	87	(50.6%)
1983-84	69	(40.5%)	100	(59.5%)
1984-85	100	(32.8%)	205	(67.2%)
1985-86	112	(33.1%)	226	(68.9%)
1986-87	113	(41.5%)	159	(58.5%)
1987-88	118	(32.0%)	251	(68.0%)
1988-89	138	(38.9%)	217	(61.1%)

Note: Tenure Track professors include Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors and Instructors.
Source: Appendix 7 to the ad hoc Committee to the President on Undergraduate Education (Dolouisio Cmte.)

gued that part of the reason UT doesn't sufficiently fund undergraduate programs was the funding mechanism the Legislature imposes on the University. The state provides funds based on the number of undergraduate, masters and doctoral students, with UT receiving more money for graduate students than for undergrads.

Cunningham claims that these limitations keeps UT from hiring more professors to teach undergrads, since the mechanism supposedly earmarks a large chunk of the budget exclusively for graduate education. And since we can't hire more teachers for undergrads, or so the rationalization goes, there's no choice but to slash undergraduate enrollment.

First, that conclusion is based on a false assumption — UT doesn't have to spend its state money in the proportions the Legislature doles it out. According to a law passed in 1985, "Each governing board [for UT, the Board of Regents] participating in the distribution of funds as described in this section may expend such funds without limitation, and as such governing board may decide in its sole discretion for any and all purposes described in Article VII, Section 17, of the Constitution of Texas." This means that the regents can spend money from the legislature on anything covered in the University's charter, unfettered by the funding mechanism that Dr. Cunningham

chooses to hide behind. Understaffing isn't a structural flaw, it's the result of conscious decisions by the people who run UT.

Second, Cunningham himself has pointed to another obvious flaw in his own rationale. In a report to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board last July, he declared that "reducing enrollment is tantamount to reducing appropriations," because "support from the Legislature for higher education in Texas is determined by formulas that are based on student enrollment." So, if funding is the problem, then Cunningham should be happy the present enrollment figures — they maintain UT's budget.

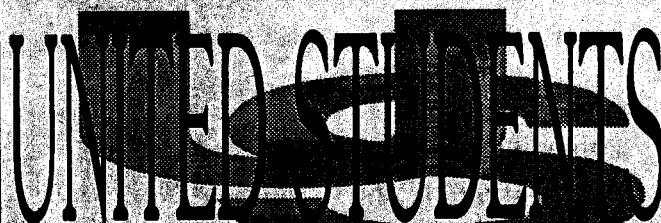
In fact, it's been well established that even large cuts in enrollment wouldn't solve UT's understaffing woes. According to the August 3, 1989 recommendations from the president's ad hoc Committee on Undergraduate Admission and Enrollment Policies, also known as the Dolouisio Committee, "most of the [understaffing] problems remain even if enrollment drops to 46,000." And in the above-cited report to the Coordinating Board, Cunningham himself notes that "with some exceptions—UT Austin has the laboratories, classrooms, and other facilities to handle 50,000 students."

But in the same report, Cunningham released two potential 5-year plans for UT-Austin enrollment — one that would allow overall enrollment to increase, and one that would maintain it at around 50,000. (Overall enrollment includes graduate students, undergrads, and law students.) Since that time, Cunningham

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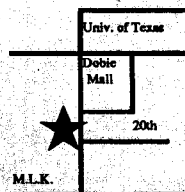


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has announced that UT will try to maintain overall enrollment at its present level.

A look at the plan to maintain overall enrollment at 50,000 reveals that Cunningham indeed plans to cut the total number of undergraduates and replace them with—surprise—graduate students. The proposal would cut undergraduate enrollment from 38,100 students to 37,400 over the next five years, and boost the number of grad students from 10,500 to 11,400. These enrollment projections were explicitly stated in a detailed chart. If the University had chosen the alternative plan—allowing enrollment to grow slightly—then undergraduate enrollment would stagnate while the number of graduate students would increase by 1,700.

Clearly the crux of UT's enrollment policy is finding a way to maintain its flow of cheap researchers (read: grad students). Undergraduates, especially non-engineering ones, just get in the way.

This plan also exposes another of Cunningham's lies. At an open forum with students last fall, one of the authors asked Cunningham if he would pledge not to "manage" the understaffing crisis by cutting undergraduate enrollment. He agreed, in contradiction to stated policy.

But perhaps the most egregious aspect of Cunningham's plan to slash enrollment is his method: He wants to radically reduce the number of "provisional students" who successfully educate themselves at the University. The provisional-student program operates under the assumption that people's high-school performance and standardized-test scores shouldn't rigidly determine their future lives. It lets students who don't meet the

University's admission standards—but who still meet other, less stringent standards—enroll in summer or spring semesters. Meeting a certain grade-point-average requirement, these students then gain regular status the next semester.

In his report to the Coordinating Board, Cunningham celebrated the Board of Regents' decision to boost the provisional GPA requirement beyond any reasonable point—from 1.5 to 2.25, effective summer '89. This means that even provisional students who pass all their classes don't necessarily earn the right to continue as students. These students are held to a higher standard, even, than students with relatively high high-school GPAs.

More offensive still is the nasty letter Cunningham sent last summer to potential provisional students. He bragged to the Coordinating Board that "2,800 [high-school seniors] falling in the provisional category received letters informing them that students with similar high school backgrounds have historically experienced difficulty at the University. These students were strongly encouraged to attend other institutions."

This policy may be usefully compared to graduate students attempts last spring to mail letters to prospective UT grad students, informing them about the University's abominable health-care policies. The administration strongly opposed such an action, even though the students' letter wasn't nearly as blunt or direct as the one Cunningham sent out in the summer.

But when average students seem to threaten the University's role as manager of the state's economy and benefactor of multinational corporations, Cunningham

Table 3 Pay hikes: worthy and unworthy faculty

Department	Percentage increase, faculty salaries, 1980-89
Anthropology	4.1
English	28.6
French/Italian	13.0
Spanish/Portuguese	0.08
Philosophy	22.9
Mathematics	37.6
Computer Sciences	67.9
Electrical Engineering	69.2
Mechanical Engineering	47.9

Source: Derived from the UT Office of Institutional Studies' *Statistical Handbook, 1989-90*. The numbers are based on salaries that don't include endowments, and are adjusted for inflation based on the *World Almanac's* price index.

simply tells average students go somewhere else—even when he knows that repelling them won't remedy the University's understaffing dilemma.

It's ironic, then, that in the same report to the Coordinating Board, Cunningham can roll out what he calls Texas' "populist tradition," and even "applaud" it. This former marketing professor is a walking, talking betrayal of every populist Texas idea imaginable.

Polemicist's Response: Fight Back

Our student leadership has reacted with characteristic docility in the face of this onslaught. Since leaders won't lead students, it's time for students to lead the leaders. Cunningham sends letters to

students he doesn't want, so we should send letters to students he *does* want: Namely, National Merit Scholars. UT's number of NMS students is Cunningham's last vestige of credibility. He even announced it at last fall's UT-OU game. (You'll notice he didn't announce the student-faculty ratio.) The time has come to attack that number. The NMS mailing list is readily available. After all, every college in the country uses it. The simplest way to affect UT's priorities is to threaten to mail copies of the "Grade the University" results, or even this column, to every NMS student in the country, if UT doesn't immediately hire, say, 200 more professors. It's time for students to rise up, and show Cunningham what "Texas Populism" really means.

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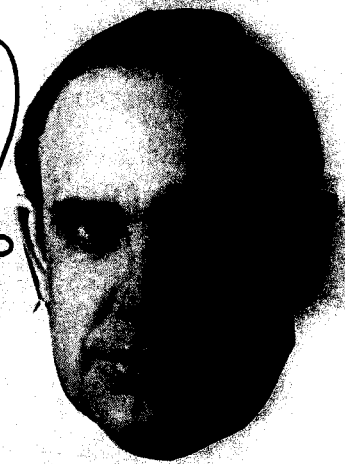
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