

Forum

GTF course helps remove barriers

By Kenneth D. Ramsing

Graduate Teaching Fellows (GTFs) serve the University in several important capacities. Whereas they teach or conduct research to fulfill their GTF contracts, they are also obligat-

ed to make satisfactory progress in their degree programs. They must balance their time and commitment between their responsibilities as student and scholar, and those as teacher and mentor.

Commentary

International GTFs bring the added dimension of cultural di-

and holding office hours.) The TSE rates speakers based on their oral responses recorded onto a cassette. GTFs scoring below a threshold score are required to enroll in oral skills and GTF training courses at the American English Institute.

We must recognize that language is not the only potential barrier to communication; cultural variables may also contribute to misunderstanding. For example, an international GTF may have a completely different view of the instructor's role, therefore acting contrary to student expectations. On the other hand, many international GTFs come from a rel-

stood in the classroom. We must remember, however, that communication entails dialogue. It is important that we not inhibit communication because of preconceived notions. I encourage students to keep an open mind and to attempt to resolve difficulties by seeking help from their GTFs and from the administrative support units which exist to help resolve these problems.

I strongly believe that the testing and training required of international GTFs has been a positive step.

The Graduate School is committed to working with departments and students to assist GTFs, international or otherwise. I encourage both students and GTFs to inform me of their concerns so that we may work together to improve problem situations as they arise.

Kenneth D. Ramsing is acting dean of the Graduate School.

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versity and an array of skills and expertise. Students, faculty and the community can benefit from their presence. The international community also benefits because the exchange of people and ideas is crucial if we are to achieve peaceful co-existence on this planet.

For undergraduates to benefit from interactions with international GTF instructors, however, GTFs must be able to communicate verbally in English. For this reason, the University instituted a policy in Fall 1987 which requires that all new international GTFs in teaching related positions take the Test of Spoken English (TSE). ("Teaching related" duties include lecturing, leading a discussion or lab section, grading,

actively formal educational background and may be confused or offended by their students' words and actions. Norms about the amount of work required and grading standards vary markedly from one country to another. These are the types of issues addressed in the American English Institute's GTF training course required of some GTFs. This course focuses on communicative competence in the classroom, discussion of cultural differences between university classrooms in the home country and the United States, as well as the differences in educational values and student expectations.

The University has a duty to ensure that GTFs can be under-

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