

Minutes, Freshman English Policy Committee

January 24, 1979

Parlin 214

Members present: Kinneavy, Trimble, Ruszkiewicz, Witte, Cameron,
Creel, Byars, Hart

Agenda:

Approval of minutes
Burns request
Kinneavy-Witte-Cameron project
Grading Criteria statement
Women's tennis versus FEPC

1. The minutes of December 11 were corrected and approved.
2. Mr. Hart described a request from Hugh Burns to substitute sections of 308 for 306 in his dissertation experiment: could he not make the substitution, Mr. Burns's findings would not generalize because 70% of the students in 306 this semester are provisionals. Ms. Byars asked why we do not isolate provisionals in sections of their own, and Mr. Creel supplied two reasons--such an arrangement would violate the legal prohibition of remedial sections and would run counter to the provisional program's requirement that its students attempt to succeed in the regular university environment. Dr. Kinneavy added a historical note: although the program was instituted to increase minority enrollment, it is now used chiefly by wealthy white students.

Dr. Witte asked whether Mr. Burns's change of plans would cause problems for 308 instructors, and Dr. Kinneavy said that it would not. Dr. Witte also wondered why Mr. Burns had chosen 308 rather than 307, and Dr. Kinneavy replied that Mr. Burns had wanted to avoid literature sections. One more question remained: Ms. Byars asked whether these would be 308 regular or 308PC sections, and Dr. Kinneavy answered that they would be regular ones. Discussion ended, and the committee unanimously approved Mr. Burns's request.

3. Dr. Witte reported that data from the Kinneavy-Witte-Cameron experiment is being prepared for analysis in cooperation with a group from Measurement and Evaluation, people whom he praised as being knowledgeable and capable. The analysis will not be complete until summer's end, after which much of the actual report writing will still remain for the fall. Presently, the researchers are interviewing teachers to get impressions of the instructional methods they used in their sections, a task that will take up the next two weeks. In addition, Dr. Witte said, Paula Marks and Merry Eginoire are now interviewing D-level students and examining pre-essays of drop-outs to see if these essays contain any distinguishing features. Dr. Kinneavy noted that approximately one hundred students failed to

complete the experiment for various reasons.

Mr. Cameron mentioned that a corner of the lab has now been sectioned off to be used by people working on the project. His remark prompted Dr. Kinneavy to say that Dr. Wittig has suggested replacing her at the associate professor level in the freshman writing program. The EC will approve the replacement, Dr. Kinneavy added, and he asked the committee to reflect on possible appointments.

4. Dr. Kinneavy called for a report on the Grading Criteria statement, and Dr. Witte asked Dr. Trimble to oblige. Dr. Trimble said that there was little to report: being merely a consultant on the project, he could not perform his duties before receiving a new draft from Dr. Witte. Dr. Witte in turn explained that he had not hurried to produce a draft because Dr. Kinneavy had advised him that the matter was not a pressing one.

At this point a feeling of responsibility crept over Mr. Hart, who promptly confessed that he had caused a misunderstanding by notifying both professors one day the previous week when all copies of the old statement had seemed to have disappeared from the Freshman English Office. Later that day the copies had been located just as Dr. Witte had walked up to, and Dr. Kinneavy had walked out of, Parlin 16. Mr. Hart had hurried into the hall from Parlin 14, announcing the discovery, whereupon Dr. Kinneavy had observed to Dr. Witte that there was no rush to write a new statement. Unfortunately, Mr. Hart had not talked to Dr. Trimble until several days after this meeting in the hall, by which time the momentary grading criteria crisis had receded in his memory.

Undisturbed by this unusual report, the committee acted with its customary wisdom. It determined that the copies of the old statement would last through the summer and that, indeed, Drs. Witte and Trimble need not hurry to compose a new one.

5. Next, Dr. Kinneavy began a long discussion of relations between the athletic program and the freshman English program. A student on the women's tennis team, Ms. Ruman, had come to his office with a spring tournament schedule which she figured would require her to miss thirteen of her thirty English classes. She and her instructor had agreed that her studies would suffer, but the academic advisor for women athletes, Sheila Rice, had told her that she must follow the schedule and that anyhow only ten classes would be involved. Dr. Kinneavy had advised the student to drop but she had not wanted to do so.

He had solved this particular problem by switching Mr. Ruman into Mary Jean Gross's tutorial section, Dr. Kinneavy said; but, he added, policy issues remain. We have had trouble with the men's athletic program, he continued, ever since Darrell Royal turned the program's academic advising duties over to Joe Evans, an ambiguous, vague, and sometimes blatantly deceitful man. Now, it seems, Dr. Rice is imitating Mr. Evans.

Dr. Witte suggested that we remind the athletic department that this is an institution of higher learning and that students should attend classes--unless UT has a policy like Oklahoma State's that approves absences for university-sanctioned events. Dr. Kinneavy said that such a policy, which would interfere with academic freedom, does not exist at UT.

Mr. Hart then described a further problem. During drop/add week, Dr. Rice had phoned Sheila Wallace to find freshman English sections for women athletes. After receiving a list of times and instructors for all open sections and an explanation of why her students could not be added to closed sections, Dr. Rice had vowed that she would not think of asking instructors to add athletes to closed sections. The next day, however, David Hansard had come to the FEO with a letter from Dr. Rice indirectly asking him to add a swimmer to his closed section.

Next Mr. Creel related his experience with student athletes. He has taught seven football players, he said, all of whom always came to class regularly and called him "Sir." Three years ago, however, he taught Kevin Curran, a top-seeded tennis player who asked permission to miss some classes. Mr. Creel agreed, and when Mr. Curran was to miss class on days papers were due, he submitted his work early. Although Mr. Curran made a few 0's on in-class work and thus received a C in the course rather than a B, Mr. Creel said that their arrangement had worked satisfactorily. Since an instructor's right to set classroom policy involves academic freedom, he continued, we should let individual instructors resolve absence problems with their student athletes unless we decide to establish a program-wide policy. Our chief concern, he added, should be with athletic department attempts to pack sections of freshman English.

Dr. Kinneavy spoke again now to describe how athletes' absences and athletic department pressure on instructors can merge into a single problem. When Ron Baxter, a basketball player,

missed the last three-fourths of his E306 classes in the fall of 1977, Joe Evans pleaded for an arrangement with Mr. Baxter's TA, who came to Dr. Kinneavy for advice. Dr. Kinneavy recommended giving the student an F, but when the instructor talked to Mr. Evans again, he threatened to interfere at the dean's level. Subsequently, the instructor agreed to let Mr. Baxter complete his work under supervision during the holiday, and Mr. Evans agreed to keep Mr. Baxter in town throughout the break. Mr. Baxter completed his work and received a D in the course, but he took a trip to New York with the basketball team during the holiday.

The following spring Mr. Baxter came to his English class for a few weeks and then again quit attending. His new instructor came to Dr. Kinneavy, who advised dropping the student with an F if he missed any more classes. Meanwhile, Mr. Evans invited Dr. Kinneavy to join the players on the bench during a basketball game, an invitation Dr. Kinneavy declined. Mr. Baxter did no work this semester but passed English again.

At this point Dr. Trimble recalled that Dr. Ayers is a member of the Athletic Council and suggested that we explain our problems to him. Dr. Ruzskiewicz proposed that we also notify AI's and remind them that they have no obligation to grant extensions though they may do so if they like.

Mr. Cameron then related the lab's experience with athletes. Last semester, he said, although forty of them took the lab course, Mr. Evans applied no pressure, perhaps because the lab's flexible arrangement of hours did not make it necessary for him to do so. One student who fell behind in his work but could not drop below twelve hours was advised to stay in the course for an F and did so. Dr. Kinneavy added that the lab had been fortunate that semester: the previous year athletic tutors in the lab had supplied athletes with answers to tests.

Discussion now began to focus solely on solutions. Dr. Trimble asked whether the University Council might help, but Dr. Kinneavy replied that he thought not, at least not as long as the Athletic Council membership includes J. Neils Thompson, who has a history of ignoring UC advice. Dr. Witte suggested that in order to determine the extent of our problem we institute a policy calling for AI's approached by the athletic department to report to the FEO. Ms. Byars supported this suggestion, saying that instructors would probably comply gladly since they dislike pressure. Dr. Witte said further that the athletic department has no business contacting graduate students, who may be more vulnerable to pressure than professors are.

Dr. Ruszkiewicz added that the problem here resembles the one with plagiarism: AI's are uncertain where they stand.

Mr. Creel proposed that we send a memorandum to instructors indicating that we are investigating athletic department pressure on our staff and are asking for their cooperation in building a file. Ms. Byars suggested that we enlarge the investigation to include any outside pressure whatsoever; and Mr. Creel asked whether many instructors would find an attempt to pressure in a letter such as the one from Dr. Rice to Mr. Hansard. Ms. Byars and Dr. Ruszkiewicz both said that with its official letterhead, the Rice letter seemed intimidating. Dr. Trimble, however, pointed out that we were conjecturing about motives and asked whether Dr. Kinneavy had talked to Dr. Rice about the letter. He had not, but several members rushed to say that given a context of athletic department subterfuge and harassment, Dr. Rice's motives were discernible.

Mr. Creel restated his proposal as a motion, and the committee busied itself with the precise wording. Mr. Hart, though, suggested that the committee was phrasing the resulting memo rather than the motion itself and asked that the discussion end. The committee agreed, Dr. Witte seconded the Creel motion, and it carried unanimously.