

Minutes, Freshman English Policy Committee

December 4, 1978

Parlin 8C

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

Agenda:

Approval of minutes

Gross request

Report from Grading Criteria Subcommittee

306 Syllabus

1. The minutes of November 20 were approved as written. (The meeting scheduled for November 27 had been cancelled.)

2. Mr. Creel began discussion of Mary Jean Gross's request to carry some of her current 306 tutorial students into a 307 tutorial next semester. He said the request contained several items he'd like to talk to Ms. Gross about, for instance the small number of papers she'd assign, and he asked if other committee members had foreseen any problems. Dr. Witte mentioned two: since the request had come so late, its approval would probably create numerous logistical problems and might also establish an unwelcome precedent. Ms. Byars said that other instructors had gained approval for similar requests, but Dr. Witte replied that those had fit into the existing framework.

Dr. Newcomb asked whether the proposed section was intended to be an experiment, and Mr. Cameron replied that it arose as a part of the evaluation project. Dr. Newcomb then pointed out that a section of self- and instructor-selected students would prove nothing. If the request were granted, he said, our approval letter should indicate that this section would not advance the evaluation project. He went on to take exception to some assumptions in the request memo, saying that complete student freedom may actually be coercive and that one semester of college does not cause students to mature. When first-semester students fail, he added, their failure probably indicates that they need another course. Dr. Newcomb concluded his remarks by saying that he'd like to see students have a range of options in our program, including the one that Ms. Gross had proposed.

Dr. Kinneavy then provided a brief history. Ms. Gross has one and a half years experience teaching a 307 tutorial class similar to Dr. Bump's, though his requires fewer papers but mandatory rewrites. This semester she has been teaching a 306 tutorial. Dr. Kinneavy also noted that the first paragraph of Ms. Gross's memo is misleading: as a matter of fact, 306 has been taught tutorially for more than a year, and as a matter of experimental integrity, Ms. Gross should not evaluate the project in advance.

Next, Dr. Witte observed that the memo doesn't specify how many

of her students Ms. Gross has invited to continue next semester, and he expressed concern for those who don't want to go. Mr. Cameron said that she's asking all her students and plans to post a general announcement in the lab for students in other courses if we approve her request. Dr. Newcomb remarked that such a strategy would result in still more self-selection, but Mr. Cameron ventured that Ms. Gross is actually more interested in teaching a tutorial section than in experimenting.

Dr. Kinneavy then shifted attention back to the logistical problems involved. Since requests of this sort are normally made a year in advance, we'd be setting a precedent, one that would require us to depend on word of mouth during registration to keep the many workers informed of the section's status. He proposed asking Ms. Gross to request her section for next fall. Mr. Cameron said that we might limit registration problems by giving the section a newly created number during the drop/add period and enrolling students only then, and Ms. Byars added that we could handle the logistics if we wanted to.

At this point Mr. Creel offered a summary of the committee's objections to the request:

- it would cause administrative difficulties and set an unusual and perhaps dangerous precedent;
- as a formal experiment, it would be flawed by having self-selected participants and no control group;
- it misses the deadline for variant-course proposals.

To these Mr. Hart added that inviting students to take another course with an instructor puts them in a difficult situation until they have received their final grades.

Dr. Kinneavy then asked how many of Ms. Gross's students are interested in taking the proposed course. Mr. Cameron answered that all she had polled were interested, and explained that she had been polling them randomly, simply as they came in for conferences. Several more questions followed, and it was determined that the proposed course would constitute a new variant course, a version of 307 regular.

With this fact established, Dr. Trimble objected that the Gross variant might be too diluted. He wondered why it would require fewer papers, how many fewer there would be, why it would not require rewrites, and how long the weekly meetings would last. He speculated, moreover, that since the students would have absolute freedom to choose theme topics, they might be ill prepared for later courses with assigned topics. Finally, he pointed out a contradiction in the memo request: in paragraph 2 Ms. Gross says that she would not recommend tutorials for entering freshmen, but in paragraph 3 she

says that more than half her students are responding admirably.

More questions were then asked about the contents of the proposed course. Dr. Kinneavy inquired whether Ms. Gross is planning to use English 3200 tests, and Mr. Cameron answered that she is not. Ms. Byars asked how many papers Ms. Gross usually assigns, and Mr. Cameron indicated that there are usually four, with rewrite privileges on all. Dr. Trimble wondered whether short paragraphs might count as papers, and Mr. Cameron replied that there usually twelve paragraphs which count only as paragraphs. Then in a general response to the committee's concern about seemingly light work loads in tutorials, Dr. Witte pointed out that individual conferences consume much time.

Dr. Witte went on to say that he would vote for the request if Ms. Gross would agree to label the course tutorial, to draw no experimental conclusions from it, and to admit students who had not taken her 306 tutorial. This last point prompted Ms. Byars to observe that as other courses closed during registration, some students who did not want this one would sign up for it anyway.

Now, in light of the objections raised to it, Mr. Creel moved to deny the Gross request. Dr. Trimble, though, said that we should defer a vote until all our questions could be answered, and his remark was restated as a motion to substitute for Mr. Creel's. Mr. Cameron agreed to seek answers from Ms. Gross provided that if we were to find them satisfactory, we would promise to manage the administrative difficulties involved. These problems were then reviewed and were summarized by Dr. Witte as being too burdensome for Sheila and Etta; and the committee agreed that if Ms. Gross could arrange her course for the fall instead of the spring, it could be gotten into the catalogue, thus avoiding the logistical problems. Consequently, Dr. Trimble withdrew his motion, and Dr. Witte moved to deny Ms. Gross her request because of insurmountable logistical problems but to invite her to submit another request after being informed of the committee's questions and objections. This motion passed unanimously.

3. Dr. Trimble reported on the much-revised Grading Criteria Statement after circulating the current draft. He pointed out the following features of this version:

- a title which includes the words expository and suggested,
- phrasing which attempts to eliminate potentially offensive and unintelligible "English-teacher" talk,
- more specifics,
- newly incorporated rhetorical concepts (e.g., audience),
- language to forestall objections of judging freshmen by the same as those for upperclassmen.

He added that he had merely pencilled in revisions because the draft

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will no doubt earn still another typing and because he had wanted to display the present changes graphically.

At Dr. Witte's request this item was tabled to allow more time for study.

4. Dr. Kinneavy reported that a serious impediment to publishing the 306 syllabus had arisen: a talk with his publisher had revealed that we would be able to use the syllabus for only a year at most because of copyright-infringement problems.