

Fuszkievicz

MEMORANDUM

To: Freshman English Policy Committee

From: Susan Jarratt

Date: April 25, 1984

There will be a meeting of the FEPC on Friday, April 27, 1984 at 2 p.m. in Parlin 214. The agenda will be as follows:

- I. Selection of Assistant Director
- II. Report on current status of E106/206
- III. Proposal for Computers for the Writing Lab
- IV. Distribution of revised grading standards
- V. Variant text and course requests

April 21, 1984

TO: Freshman English Policy Committee
FROM: Thomas C. Heber, AI
SUBJECT: Proposal for Variant of E308

I am interested in teaching a variant of E308 which would focus on rhetoric and logic in politics. Since I have not had the opportunity to examine the E308 syllabus, I am not sure just how "variant" this course would be, but I would like the committee's reaction to my ideas for it before the Spring semester ends. Here is the course desc.:

The course will begin with an examination of logic in argumentation, our discussion being based on Ray Kytte's Clear Thinking for Composition and Aristotle's Rhetoric (esp. his discussion of the enthymems). We will emphasize Kytte's techniques for finding "implied assertions" (hidden premises and hidden implications) in arguments and the cultural conditioning which often allows these assertions to go unexamined. Of course, we will be careful to counterbalance the negative aspect of the course--taking apart arguments in order to expose weaknesses--by examining the positive aspects of political argumentation (that "rhetoric" in the unpejorative sense is needed in order to resolve issues with which we are confronted, and that not all implied assertions are "bad," just as not all cultural conditioning is bad). Our main goal will be to become better able to analyze arguments so that we can better evaluate them.

In the second part of the course we will focus on language in argumentation, taking Orwell's "Politics and the English Language" as our starting point. We will discuss a number of exercises and documents illustrating the points Orwell makes in his essay (I can supply the committee with a folder containing these exercises and an outline of a unit I have previously taught based on the essay). We will analyze and evaluate various political documents (speeches, newspaper and magazine articles, letters to the editor) with special attention to generalizations, abstractions, and figurative language (as well as other aspects of "gobbledygook" (and "ungobbledygook")). I hope to keep the course flexible enough so that we can examine current examples of political rhetoric as they arise--while we still have a clear sense of what Bitzer calls the "rhetorical situation."

We will view a videotape of a major political debate--perhaps the 1984 League of Women Voters debate between (among?) the candidates for president--and analyze it. (I have already done this twice with the 1980 Reagan-Carter debate.) The course will culminate in an analysis and evaluation of a political debate (spoken or written), to be undertaken by each student as a final paper.

*If the committee does find this course feasible, I would like to know when would be the earliest semester during which it could be taught.

TEXTS

Kyle, Clear Thinking for Composition

Orwell, 1984

Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"

Trimble, Writing with Style

EXEMPLARY TEXTS

The Book of Matthew

Jefferson et al, The Declaration of Independence

Kennedy, Inaugural Address

King, "I Have a Dream"

Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address"

Nixon, Resignation Speech

others

ASSIGNMENTS

specific number of papers.

Journal

exercises

short papers arguing for a position on a political issue

short papers analyzing and evaluating the argumentation of others

final paper

FRESHMEN ENGLISH POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes

April 20, 1984

Attending: Ruszkiewicz, LeClercq, Myers, Simon, Westbrook,
Daniell, Jarratt, Trachsel

Absent: McMurrey, Underwood, Jolliffe

- I. Minutes of the last meeting were approved.
- II. Selection of Assistant Director: Ruszkiewicz, Myers, and Jarratt will conduct interviews with Mara Holt and Clare Colquitt next week; the committee will make a final decision at next Friday's meeting.
- III. Adoption of readers: We decided to vote on each reader currently under adoption or up for consideration.

Though Daniell pointed out that the writers of the essays in the Bedford student collection are largely non-traditional and the quality of writing is considerably higher than what we generally get from typical UT freshmen, we still voted to adopt the text.

The committee generally liked Donald Hall's collection of contemporary essays better than Goshgarian's, but we didn't think either was different or distinctive enough to replace the Little, Brown collection currently under adoption.

After re-fighting the battle about whether anyone could teach a rhetoric/composition course using a reader including traditional literary/philosophical pieces, we readopted the Conscious Reader.

We decided to keep the Bedford Reader because its modal organization fits the syllabus and many people use it.

We initially decided to keep Jacobus' World of Ideas on as a special request item, but later voted to do away with the special status, allowing instructors who wish to use Jacobus or any other unadopted text to do so through the variant text request procedure. Because of our late decision, we will announce a two-week extension on variant text requests for fall with our announcement of textbook adoptions. Instructors requesting variant texts will be asked to submit a statement

describing the way they intend to use a text in accord with the syllabus. Adoptions and also-rans are available for examination in the Freshman Office.

IV. McMurrey distributed a proposal requesting computers for the writing lab. We will decide whether or not to support his request at the next meeting.

V. In response to questions about the decision not to implement E106/206, Ruskiewicz said that he had reported to the committee the information as given to him by the English Department chair.

The committee charged the director to meet with the chairman to determine the current status of the course.

VI. Adjournment.

Submitted by Susan Jarratt

Guidelines for Grading Freshman Writing

Revised - Spring 1984

These guidelines take as a starting point the definitions of 5 grades given in the General Information Bulletin (1983-84, p. 79): A=excellent, B=above average, C=average, D=pass, F=failure.

"Average" is assumed to be average work for a freshman at UT.

The attached grading criteria are further based on the idea that the total effect of a piece of writing results from the successful or unsuccessful combination of certain features. Each of the five grade categories describes a hypothetical paper with a certain combination of features. Though few real papers will fit any of the descriptions exactly, any paper receiving a particular grade will have several of the features listed for that grade.

The order in which the qualities appear in all the categories suggests their relative importance: i.e., the highest priority is whether or not the paper fulfilled the assignment, especially in terms of achieving a purpose, using a mode of development, and creating a sense of audience. Another area of major importance is content: the quality, quantity, and interrelationship of the ideas in the paper. In order of decreasing importance, other criteria are organization (including use of introduction, conclusion, and transitions), language use (at the sentence and word level), and mechanics (spelling, grammar, punctuation, and proofreading). In some cases, particularly strong or weak performance in one area can

counter-balance performance in other areas. For example, a well-organized, smoothly written and mechanically perfect paper may not receive a high grade if the writer missed the point of the assignment or had nothing interesting to say. On the other hand, a paper with a strong sense of purpose and interesting content may be graded down for excessive mechanical errors. In addition, an instructor may weigh one of the categories more heavily if she/he has been focusing on it in class or in comments on the writing of a particular student. But students should be aware that there is an unavoidable element of subjectivity in the very human activity of judging writing, and the ultimate interpretation of the guidelines rests with the instructor. The criteria are offered as one means to help the student come to a better understanding, through the course of the semester, of what constitutes good writing.

The description of the C paper represents an exit-level standard. A student should be able to write a paper of "C" quality in order to pass the course, though an instructor may assign a final grade of D to represent a student's overall performance in the course.

GRADING CRITERIA

A C paper does a competent job of fulfilling the assignment. It adequately communicates a sense of purpose (uses an identifiable mode) and shows some awareness of an audience. The content, while perhaps not striking, has some news value. The paper has a recognizable thesis, supported by sufficient detail, and is organized

clearly enough that the reader can follow the argument. The paper includes an introduction, a conclusion, and transitions, though they may be less than effective. Sentences are clear and logical for the most part. Diction is understandable and includes few clichés, repetitions, and redundancies. Though the paper may contain mechanical errors, there are not enough to seriously distract the reader.

A B paper deals effectively with the assignment, communicating a clear sense of purpose and audience (use of mode). It offers interesting content unified around a clear thesis and supported by substantial, logically ordered detail. The paper draws the reader in from the beginning, includes transitions which lead the reader from point to point, and offers a thematically related conclusion at the end. Sentences are not only logical, but are sometimes varied in structure through effective use of coordination, subordination, and parallelism. Word choices are fresh and precise. The paper has few mechanical problems.

An A paper does an exceptionally good job of fulfilling the assignment, showing a strong sense of purpose (and use of mode) and creating the sense of a community of readership with its audience. The content has striking news value, entertaining or informing the reader through an ingenious or imaginative approach to the subject. The central idea is risky, but nonetheless abundantly supported with well-ordered detail. The structural elements from title to conclusion

all work together to create a smooth, unified whole. Artfully varied sentences result from the writer's command of structures. Word choice is not only precise but distinctive and sometimes clever, demonstrating an awareness of the figurative power of language. Mechanical errors are minimal.

A D paper is unsuccessful in one or more important ways. The writer may have been off center in her/his approach to the assignment. The paper lacks a clear sense of purpose (or use of mode); the writer may seem uncertain of the audience. Though the paper has a discernible subject, the ideas are too commonplace or general to have much news value and may not be centered on a thesis. If a thesis is present, it may not be convincingly or thoroughly supported. Ideas may not be organized in a perceivable pattern; attempts at transitions may be awkward or non-existent. The introduction and conclusion may be empty placeholders. Sentences may contain mixed structures (i.e., may not scan), or they may all be structured on a repetitive pattern. The paper may contain one or more fragments, run-ons, or comma splices per page of text. Diction is often imprecise, confusing, or clichéd. The paper may contain a distracting number of mechanical errors.

An F paper fails to fulfill the assignment. The writer may have misconstrued the purpose (mode) and writes without a sense of audience or with a mistaken notion of who her/his audience is. The paper offers only a superficial treatment of the subject, with a weak or

unsupportable central idea and little or no logical development. Order may be confusing, and the writer may have shown no sense of a reader's expectations concerning the opening and closing of discourse. The writer may lack a sense of "sentence," generating two or more fragments, run-ons, or comma splices per page of text. Correct sentences may be elementary in structure. Word choice may not represent a college-level vocabulary or may show a misunderstanding of word meanings. Mechanical errors are copious. An "F" paper falls below the acceptable level of college writing because of its lack of understanding of the subject, or the writer's inability to communicate his knowledge, or both.