

## THE DECOMPOSITION OF ENGLISH

Since the decision to suspend E 346K was a suspension of an action of the University Council and General Faculty, I believe that this body should be given an insight into the circumstances which provoked the action of the central administration. I am certain that you may already have read too much about it in The Daily Texan, but unfortunately the Texan has been the only medium of communication for members of the English department to reach anyone, including the central administration.

I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REACT TO THREE OF THE THE POSITIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN PUBLICLY TAKEN ON THE WRITING PROGRAM BY MEMBERS OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT. I do not believe that the charges which I advanced in my guest viewpoint in The Daily Texan on February 20 have yet been answered: the writing program at this university is being systematically dismantled at almost every level and an attempt to replace composition courses by literature courses is underway.

Some objections have been raised against the course, Writing in Different Disciplines, and I think that the Faculty Senate should have a chance to evaluate their validity. Three main arguments have been raised: (1) the English faculty does not have the specialists to teach a course which teaches students to write in their own disciplines; (2) the department cannot hire enough people to teach the course; (3) the course is difficult to administer because students cannot get into the desired sections.

THE FIRST OBJECTION was the burden of the guest viewpoint of Mr. Rebhorn and was signed by 13 members of the department. As he said, "THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT SIMPLY DOES NOT HAVE PERSONNEL QUALIFIED TO TEACH WRITING COURSES IN ALL THE DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES STUDIED HERE AT THIS UNIVERSITY, AND IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT IT COULD EVER ASSEMBLE SUCH A STAFF." These speculations seem plausible enough. But they are precisely that: speculation. And they are contradicted by the stark historical fact that MEMBERS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS here and at hundreds of other universities in the land HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS OF TECHNICAL WRITING FOR THE PAST FIFTY YEARS--without being specialists in any of the sciences or engineering. They are able to do this for two very simple reasons: first, there are many principles and strategies common to most writing of this type which an informed English teacher can pass on to the students; second, the students in this type of technical writing class (common throughout the entire country) must write to the general reader, since the English teacher will read the paper. Most technical writing texts recommend this audience training as very useful to the beginning technical writer. Finally, such a course becomes discipline-specific because each student applies the general strategies to the concerns of his or her particular discipline.

These are not speculations. They are facts which can be

checked here and anywhere else in the country. It is clear that the signers of the Reborn document have had little or nothing to do with the technical writers of our own department. The course can be taught by members of the English department--if they want to or are allowed to. Some influential members of the department just don't want to teach technical or business writing.

A RELATED OBJECTION HAS TO DO WITH THE LARGE NUMBER OF TEACHERS THAT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO STAFF THE COURSE. THIS IS A REAL problem and has been a problem at this institution for the past thirty years. Ever since the 1950's, the vast majority of the courses in composition in the English department have been taught by graduate students or people not on a tenure track. In this respect we are not unlike many other large state institutions. Since there are not now enough English graduate students to teach the large numbers of students involved (4000 at the freshman level and about that at the junior level if some intelligent system of exemptions is worked out), and since the English regular faculty itself cannot do the teaching, some type of adjunct faculty has to be hired to do the job. Therefore this year we have hired 53 lecturers to teach these courses. And, unless a careful exemptions system is inaugurated, that number will expand when E 346K is made mandatory. Mr. Sutherland estimates that 60 more than the current 90 sections will be needed. That is, about 15 more lecturers will be needed (each lecturer teaches 4 sections a semester).

Adding 15 more lecturers to those present this would bring the number of lecturers up to 68, almost exactly what it was in the fall of 1983--when lecturers were needed to teach the courses which E 346K replaced (E 307,308,310, and 317). IN OTHER WORDS, IT IS NOT THE NATURE OF E 346K THAT REQUIRES THE LECTURERS, IT IS THE NECESSITY OF STAFFING A SECOND COMPOSITION COURSE FOR THIS UNIVERSITY POPULATION.

The solution of the members of the department who signed Mr. Reborn's letter is to pass off the teaching of writing in other disciplines to the other departments of the university and to get rid of the lecturers who are currently needed to teach the composition courses in the university. This would make the support courses for composition take the place of the main event. And, as I pointed out in my guest viewpoint in the Texan, these courses are not being given the support they need to succeed. MY SOLUTION IS TO RETAIN THE LECTURERS NEEDED TO STAFF THE COURSE AND SLOWLY TURN THEM INTO REGULAR FACULTY MEMBERS.

THE THIRD OBJECTION to Writing in Different Disciplines is actually a corollary to the two preceding issues. Given a strong ideological bias against the course on the part of some very influential members of the department and given the fact that these same members would like to get rid of those who have to teach the course, it is not at all surprising that the course has not received the administrative support that the course demands. AS A

RESULT THE COURSE IS SAID TO BE BESET WITH LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS. MOST OF THESE PROBLEMS, I WILL ATTEMPT TO SHOW, HAVE BEEN BROUGHT ON BY THE ADMINISTRATORS OF THE COURSE. The biggest issue concerns the neglect of 27% of the undergraduate majors of the university, the students in the College of Business. At first the department did not even approve the business variant. Even after it did approve it, no sections were established to test the variant affecting the largest single segment of the population. Two members of the Executive Committee argue that business is not even a discipline. Not only was no provision at all made for the business students, a very inadequate provision was made for other segments of the university population. The Colleges of Engineering accounts for about 15% of the students [I am using figures I gathered in 1980 at the time of the original legislation], Natural Sciences also about 15%, Nursing 2%, Pharmacy 2%, Architecture 1%, and Education 6%. These total up to 41% of the students, most of whom would opt for a section in writing in sciences and technology. This spring the sciences and technology offerings added up to 19% of the sections--a deficiency of 22% from the 41% needed. If this deficiency is added to the 27% deficiency of the business students, a total of 49% of the undergraduate population had no courses to accomodate them. There was, therefore, a neglect of all of the business students and about half of the science students. By contrast the sections in arts and humanities accounted for 39% of the offerings--to accomodate 21% of the population. With such administration disproportionalities, it is not surprising that the students could not find the desired sections. THIS PROBLEM WAS CREATED BY THE ADMINISTRATORS OF THE COURSE.

The administration of the course has been a farce for the past three years. It has been placed in the hands of people who do not believe in the course, there has been no single administrator given time and place to administer the course despite the fact that around six to seven thousand students could be affected, no serious attempt to establish exemptions was made until a short time ago, the administrators discouraged contacting the target departments (the various science, social science, humanities, and business departments), and especially the administrators actively discouraged the use of any technical writing in any of the sections of the course. Yet that is what about 67% of the undergraduate colleges want. The administrators have tried to turn the course into a course in discourse analysis, a sub-species of literary criticism.

THE ADMINISTRATION HAD FOUR YEARS TO GET READY FOR THIS COURSE. THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT IS NOT READY BECAUSE THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT DOES NOT WANT TO BE READY--NOW OR EVER.

And, as I pointed out in my guest viewpoint for The Daily Texan, the junior level course is only one of the levels of composition being dismantled. The remedial course has never been offered; the sophomore course is not a writing course, though it was supposed to be; the junior level course is suspended and

some influential members of the department would like to get rid of it; and finally, the substantial writing courses are not being given the support they need to succeed.

Two brutal questions have to be answered. First, does the university really not have enough money to finance basic literacy? Second, if the department which has been the traditional agent for literacy no longer cares to carry out this responsibility, should not the charge be given to another department which will take it seriously?

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