

## Viewpoint

# Too soon to give up on English 346K

It's easy to sympathize with the folks in the Department of English. They're obligated to teach courses that every student must take, plus maintain courses for their own majors and graduate students. There's not enough money to hire the tenured and tenure-track professors needed to teach all those students, so the department is forced to rely upon large numbers of low-paid temporary faculty just to fulfill its obligation to the rest of the University.

Problems so severe sometimes call for drastic measures. But the temporary elimination of the English 346K requirement will cause more problems for the University than it will solve for the Department of English. Teaching students in all disciplines to write in English is a noble goal that shouldn't be abandoned now.

The University Council's original decision to cancel English 307 and 308, the second-semester freshman composition courses, and create the junior-level English 346K prompted quite a furor. Some faculty members argued that the earlier college students develop writing skills, the better. Supporters of E 346K, however, maintained that writing skills can be kept sharp only through continual practice. By moving the second required writing course to the junior year, the department also hoped to reduce its teaching load as the number of students trooping through the Department of English dropped because of attrition.

William Sutherland, chairman of the Department of English, has argued that one of the main purposes of E 346K — allowing students to write in their own disciplines — has been undermined because students have taken sections of the course that fit their schedules rather than their disciplines. But punishing all students for the laziness of a few is not the answer; saying that the composition requirement

hasn't met all of its goals is a poor argument for abandoning the requirement entirely.

Of course, unless the department's internal problems are solved, the question of how writing is best taught may become moot. For years, the department has been underfunded and understaffed, relying on a large number of temporary English lecturers to teach the bulk of lower-division requirements and now E 346K. Because the lecturers constitute half the department, many tenured and tenure-track faculty fear that lecturers might have too much influence over departmental policy.

Tenured faculty also have expressed fears that lecturers who have served full-time for several years might sue the University to receive tenure, which ordinarily is granted or denied after six years of full-time teaching service. Lecturers are not eligible for the job security and pay raises that come when faculty receive tenure.

The bitter debate has fractured the department, making it understandably wary of hiring approximately 17 additional full-time lecturers to teach the 68 new sections of E 346K that many predict will be needed next fall. Is it mere coincidence that temporarily abolishing E 346K also would eliminate the department's greatest morale problem and a perceived threat to the tenure system?

E 346K is not a perfect course; as with any new course, it certainly should be re-evaluated after its first year. The charges of grade inflation and problems with registration for the course are legitimate concerns that should be covered in the course's assessment.

But it is premature to eliminate E 346K as a requirement during the second semester it has been offered. "Postponing" the requirement until fall 1986, at the earliest, still will mean

that many students will graduate from the University with no composition training beyond a freshman course — if that.

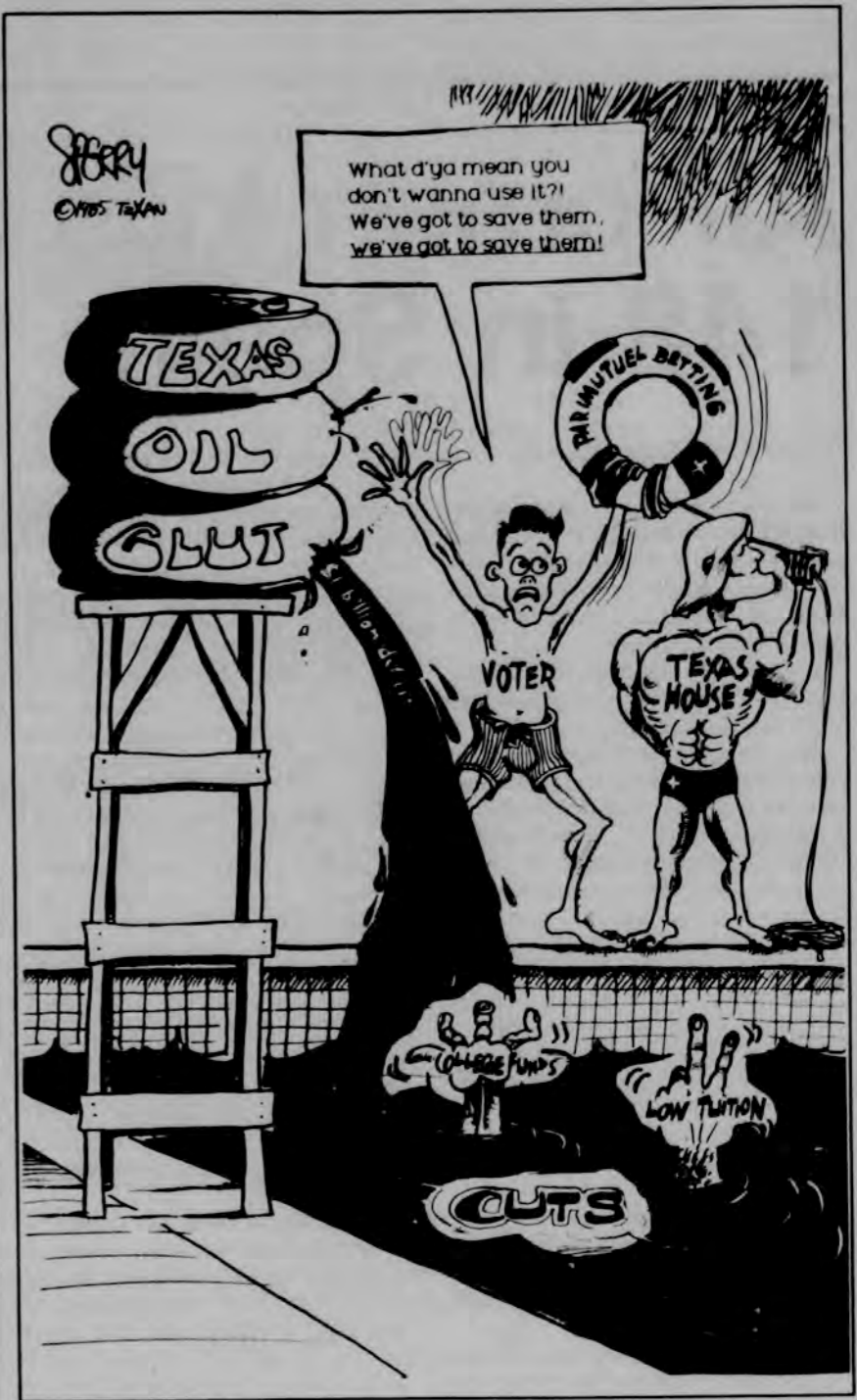
Perhaps this is an early warning of the effects the predicted budget cuts will have on the University. Legislators should wake up and realize that, as UT President Peter Flawn has said, it will be impossible to cut the University's budget without making cuts in important academic programs.

And reducing the quality of education at the University will only undermine the state's commitment to education, scarring the reputation Texas gained through the public school reforms passed during last summer's special legislative session. Already, as UT System Chancellor Hans Mark has told lawmakers, potential faculty recruits are hesitating to come to the University because of the threatened budget cuts. The state's here today, gone tomorrow commitment to excellence in higher education has a very good chance of stopping progress at the University dead in its tracks.

In the end, however, blaming all of the department's problems on the state revenue shortfall won't solve anything. There are other possible solutions, such as phasing in the E 346K requirement more gradually, helping other colleges develop suitable writing course substitutes rather than merely telling them to do so, and forcing some of the tenured literature scholars to teach composition courses more often.

While eliminating E 346K may solve some problems for the University, the students who need the course will be cheated out of a quality education. This is no time for the University — or the state — to give up on students.

—David Woodruff



# Course suspension weakens troubled writing program

The writing program at this university is being systematically dismantled at almost every level. The administration, acting on a request from William Sutherland, chairperson of the Department of English, has suspended the composition requirement of English 346K, "Writing in Different Disciplines," for one to three years (the wording is ambiguous).

But this action is only part of the story. The writing program legislated by the General Faculty three years ago is either nonexistent or in a very weak condition at three other levels in the sequence. This column is an attempt to update the entire University community on this issue, beginning with the course which was suspended last week.

**E 346K — the junior-level course.** The course is the third in a sequence of five writing courses. It is now offered in three versions: writing in the sciences and technologies, writing for social and behavioral sciences and writing in the arts and humanities. A business version was approved by the Department of English last year.

Although 75 percent of the voting members of the department voted for this course, there is a serious effort on the part of a small but influential group to do away with the es-

## James Kinneavy Guest Column

essential nature of the course and either get rid of the course entirely or substitute for it a course in writing about literature.

Sutherland and the three major administrators of the course all favor doing away with any emphasis on technical writing in the science and technology sections, despite the fact that the section was described as a course in technical writing with a humanistic component when it was presented to the University Council.

The effect of the approval of Sutherland's recommendation by the central administration is that 40 percent of the UT undergraduates will not take a single course in the Department of English devoted to composition as its major focus in their entire college career. The other 60 percent will have one such course, E 306, and it may be in jeopardy (see below).

Nor is there any other course devoted primarily to writing in the Department of English which the student can take. All of the other composition courses available to the ordinary student up until last year have been done away with, includ-

ing Technical Writing (E 317); Expository Writing (E 310); Rhetoric, Logic and Composition (E 308); and Literature and Composition (E 307).

Let us now look at the other levels of the legislated sequence for the writing courses.

**E 106 and 206 — the remedial course.** This is a course intended for students who enter the University with an SAT-Verbal score in the lowest quartile on the national score; at the time of the legislation, about 10 percent of our entering students were in this category, although the percentage is probably slightly lower now because of the new entrance requirements. This course has not yet been offered by the Department of English, although it was approved three years ago.

**E 306 — the freshman course.** This course is currently taken by just over 60 percent of the entering freshmen. It is largely taught by graduate students and full- or part-time lecturers. The course is devoted entirely to developing the student's writing skills in mechanics, organization, definition, classification, logical reasoning, persuasion, etc.

A small segment of entering freshmen take E 303 instead of E 306. E 303 is a course which covers

eight to 10 major literary or philosophical texts and requires themes based on these readings. Sutherland was one of the organizers of E 303 and has made no secret of his aversion for E 306. It is not at all unlikely that, under his chairmanship, the literary course will replace the composition course.

This, of course, would leave the students in the University with no course devoted primarily to composition in the entire sequence.

**E 316K — the sophomore course.** This course is an introduction to either American, British or World Literature through the reading of major classics. At the time the legislation was adopted, the Department of English agreed that this course would incorporate a substantial writing component. At the present time the course is not listed as a course meeting the substantial writing component requirements. The large classes do not permit the teachers to carry out this task, since they are not provided with the teaching assistants to help with the grading.

The effect of neglecting writing in this course is to eliminate one of the five legislated writing courses.

**Courses with a substantial writing component.** The legislation of the Vick committee required that

all undergraduates take, in addition to the three English courses described above, two more courses with a substantial writing component — one during the senior year.

The list of courses approved for this requirement can be seen in the Spring Course Schedule. It is an impressive list. Each of the colleges is offering some courses. And, undoubtedly, a good number of teachers are succeeding in these courses, under difficult odds.

This is not a pretty picture. With the exception of E 306, the writing program is in trouble at each level. The remedial course has not been offered; the sophomore course is not a writing course; the junior course is suspended; and the courses with substantial writing components are not receiving the support that was promised. In the case of the two central English courses, the issue is the same: composition is neglected in favor of literature. The same thing may happen in the case of the freshman course, E 306.

Some of the problems are logistical and financial. But the logistical and financial problems, particularly in the Department of English, have been aggravated by obstacles placed in the development of the program by administrators who do not believe in it. This is especially true of E

346K. Yet many of us who teach the course are eminently happy with it and, more important, so are the students.

The alleged objections to the course actually mask some of the real objections to it. The suspension of the course really achieves the following objectives:

- It gets rid of the lecturers and the "lecturer problem" immediately;
- It takes away from some English teachers what they view as the distasteful job of working in business and technical writing;
- It bolsters enrollment in the literature courses;
- It severely de-emphasizes composition in the Department of English.

All of these objectives are heartily embraced by a small clique in the department.

But E 346K is not the only problem in the writing program. The General Faculty legislated an entire sequence which has been held up as a model for other institutions. Unless something is done, it is going to die from neglect.

Kinneavy is a Jane and Roland Blumberg Centennial Professor of English.

## Letters

### Remember students

I would like to respond to the controversy over English 346K. I have attended several universities, including UCLA, and of all the English courses I have ever taken, E 346K is the most worthwhile. Throughout my career as a student, I had dreaded writing papers because I had never been given comprehensive instruction or feedback on my work.

Good writing is a skill that is necessary in every field of endeavor. Education is about learning to think and express oneself, not learning only a narrow vocation.

Chairman Sutherland and Dr. Kruppa should consider whose interests interests the Department of English should serve: the students, or their own.

Jay M. Grotzky  
Communication

### Writing essential skill

Once upon a time, we (society) felt it was important to write well. We understood the importance of writing coherently so we could communicate our thoughts and emotions "clearly" to others. Proper sentence structure, logical paragraph order, etc. leading to well-thought-out and flowing essays were our prime goal.

So what has happened? Well, somewhere down the line, somebody made a gross error in deciding that writing skills were no longer important on the college level. This happened at the University two years ago when E 308 was tossed out the window, and just recently as E 346K was similarly chunked. The University is now

left with a scant six hours of basic English requirements, of which one course (E 306) can be placed out. This means that many students will be able to graduate from the University with only three hours of English to back them up in a world that revolves on millions of reports, essays and documents.

Whether the problem with the lack of required writing courses stems from an ugly political quarrel, lack of staff and money, or the false illusion that students receive sufficient training in high school, it needs to be quickly resolved before thousands of UT graduates are turned loose to the "outside" world without even the most basic writing skills as the knowledge to write a resume.

Andrea Watson  
Marketing, Pre-Law

### Keep junior course

I am concerned, as many are, about the possible discontinuation of English 346K. I took that class last semester as a new requirement and feel that it was one of the most beneficial courses I have had at the University. In English literature courses, you write an essay or what you read and are never really taught how to improve your writing. However, in 346K, writing is actually improved. Also, the assignments seemed more relevant since they concerned evaluations and reports that truly enlightened to the importance of good writing skills in many of today's professions. Please keep English 346K.

Debbie Romano  
Communications

# English lecturers deserve better treatment

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time or three-fourth-time this semester because there are not enough classes available to be taught.

In addition, encouragement, support and recognition should be given to these teachers rather than the constant denigration offered by those professors who received their tenure during an earlier, less academically demanding era.

Now to my third word — ignored. Actually I am being kind. A more accurate choice would be thwarted or subverted. Here is what is really happening, folks. A small group of literati, hell-bent on maintaining control of the Department of English at any cost, have undermined every attempt by conscientious tenured and non-tenured faculty alike to implement the mandate of the Vick Committee, the entire University community, and, we might also add (President Flawn take note), the Centennial Commission and its commitment to excellence in undergraduate education.

Having failed in previous attempts, they are now saying, simply, "Let's give up." Even before we have finished the first full year of teaching E 346K to the students entering under the 1983 catalog. Even though professors and students report glowing success with the course in all its variants. I know this to be true because I have taught all the variants and am currently teaching four sections of the course to enthusiastic students.

The claim that students can take other writing component courses is, at best, a weak response that passes

the academic-composition buck to those in other departments less qualified to or interested in teaching writing. A professor of history told me recently that he does not evaluate the assigned "papers" for grammar or English proficiency. In fact, he further allowed that he doesn't count the papers very much; and, his students, knowing his policy, usually treat the assignments with careless abandon.

There is little doubt that the primary aim underlying the decision to axe E 346K is twofold: first, to dismiss a large group of faculty, the lecturers, who, because of their willingness to teach despite adverse circumstances, pose some vague sort of threat to the overpaid, underworked senior faculty; second, to "discipline" a rapidly growing composition-rhetoric program that, because of its popularity and effectiveness, again poses a threat, possibly real this time, to the unpopular established literature domination of the department.

Another important fiscal point must not be overlooked, President Flawn. A potential economic catastrophe will occur if E 346K is dropped immediately and the lecturers fired as a group. The students who would have been taking E 346K next year will be forced to take other upper-division courses to satisfy various requirements. Most E 346K classes, taught by lecturers, cost the University approximately \$2,200 per course. Most upper-division courses, taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty, cost \$3,000-\$4,000 or more. If 7,500 students are involved, as administrators claim, then the new proposal will cost be-

tween \$500,000 and \$900,000, depending on the distribution of the students at that level.

Our primary responsibility must be to the students. Therefore every student, faculty member, and administrator must know what is happening. The primary result, if not also the intention, of the dropping of E 346K is the gutting of the undergraduate writing program for all students and the penalizing of those faculty who have served long and well as teachers of undergraduate composition classes. James Kinneavy, who has brought national prestige and scholarship to the rhetoric program and is considered by many the father of the E 346K idea, is heartsick at the efforts of his colleagues to thwart his work. He asks: how can they do this to us? I have an answer. They can only if we allow them to do it. We are still a democratic institution in a democratic nation that pays at least lip service to democratic ideals. We, the people of Texas, are the ultimate governing body of this or any other public institution.

My plea is addressed to all levels of the University community: help us to achieve the success E 346K can bring to the entire undergraduate program and thus to the University as a whole. Then all can share the sweet fruits of a ripe academic harvest of young minds, challenged by excellent undergraduate and graduate programs, proficient in both written and oral expression, truly prepared for the world today and tomorrow.

Skaggs is a lecturer in the Department of English.