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While an English Department committee worked last summer on its charge to reconstitute the syllabus for English 306 around issues of "difference," a few members of the faculty reacted with shrill cries of protest. Philosophy professor Dan Bonevac openly red-baited the class's advocates, declaring the course "Marxism 306" on a local TV show. Government professor Jay Budziszewski called the course "indoctrination in bigotry," and accused it of "serving the ends of hatred."

The class had been approved by the Lower Division English Policy Committee as well as by Liberal Arts Dean Standish Meacham, and was scheduled to begin in the fall. But then, under apparent pressure from President Bill Cunningham and Provost Gerhard Fonken, Dean Meacham postponed the new curriculum for a year, leaving the course without a syllabus four weeks before it was to begin.

Since then, questions have arisen concerning Cunningham's involvement in delaying the course — questions that call into doubt the administration's respect for departmental autonomy and the extent to which it allows alumni donors to influence policy. What isn't in doubt, however, is the rank and file support the course has gained among English Department faculty. At a Sept. 14 meeting, the faculty voted 46-11 to support the committee's effort to redesign the course.

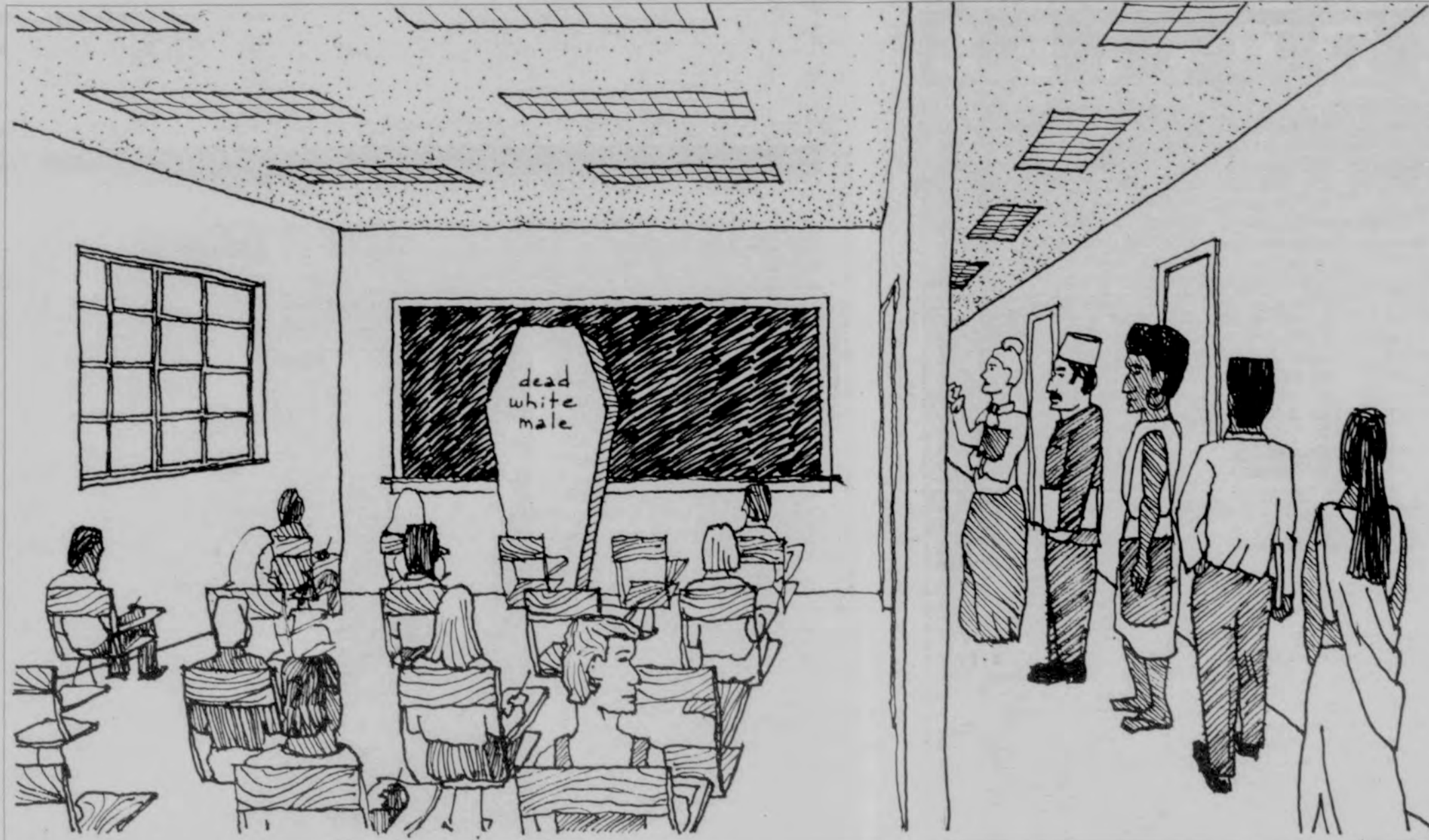
What heresies had the English Department concocted to impose upon the youthful minds of incoming freshmen? Under the new syllabus, the course would consist of readings from Federal and Supreme Court decisions concerning various civil rights cases, notably *Sweatt vs. Painter*, which resulted in the admission of UT's first African-American student.

Using majority opinions, dissenting opinions, and arguments from both plaintiffs and defendants, the course would require students to form opinions and support their arguments with evidence, using the legal texts to back up their claims. But Alan Gribben, professor of English and the course's loudest critic, calls that "thought control."

The prevailing myth, popularized by Gribben's and others' declarations that the course was rushed through "hastily," assumes that the course was designed in response to demonstrations last spring led by the Black Student Alliance calling for the creation of a more diverse curriculum. Actually, the planning for the revised E306 began last fall.

In May, after the committee had approved the class texts, course director Linda Brodkey created an ad hoc committee composed of four professors and eight graduate students (grad students teach E306) to write the syllabus. By mid-June, according to Brodkey, it became clear that the text chosen to supplement the readings from the lawsuits, Paula Rothenberg's *Racism and Sexism*, was unsuitable for the format of the new E306. Already under pressure from right-wing attacks in the media, Brodkey and English Department Chairman Joe Kruppa dropped the textbook. Dean Meacham provided Brodkey and a graduate student funds to expand a supplementary packet in lieu of the book.

On July 9, about three weeks after the book was dropped, the two committee



Fonken

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Kurt Heinzelman, professor of English

members who didn't support the change. John Ruskiewicz and James Duban, sent Brodkey a letter saying "all members of the LDEPC should be kept current about materials being considered for this expanded packet." They concluded by stating, "We hope you'll keep us informed." The following day Brodkey responded with a short memo thanking them for their concern and telling them that "I plan to keep the members of the Lower Division English Policy Committee informed."

Ruskiewicz and Duban claim that their letter was a specific request for information on the expanded packet. Brodkey, who hadn't yet finished compiling the packet, didn't take it as a specific request. She says the information was available if they had bothered to call or come to her office and look at it.

Without contacting Brodkey beforehand or making any further attempts to review the expanded packet, Duban and Ruskiewicz resigned from the committee the next day. Duban charged Brodkey with "secrecy." Despite the ambiguity of his and Ruskiewicz's letter, Duban told *The Texan*, "I resigned because after seeking specific information from the chair of that committee about the packet ... I did not receive a satisfactory response."

Duban's charge of secrecy fueled the already growing right-wing attack on the course, which held that Brodkey's alleged obfuscations betrayed an overt political agenda. Ruskiewicz himself added to this hysteria in a July 24 *Texan* guest column in which he declared that "the E306 curriculum changes were compromised by their ideological freight and by a rush to do what seemed politically correct on this campus at the moment." Ruskiewicz failed to show how the opinions of federal judges and lawyers would constitute any "ideological freight" that would conflict with mainstream sensibilities.

While Ruskiewicz and Duban did raise some pedagogical concerns, their allies in the battle focused solely on politics. Ruskiewicz acknowledges that the "core" of the opposition to the course came from the Texas Association of Scholars, a local chapter funded by a national right-wing faculty group, the National Association of Scholars. The NAS receives much of its funding from the right-wing John M. Olin and Sarah Scaife foundations, which subsidize

New Right groups including the Heritage Foundation, Freedom House, the Committee on the Present Danger and Accuracy in Media.

The Nation and *The New York Times* reported that at its first national conference in 1988, an NAS crowd of 300 cheered when Alan Kors, a professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, advised his colleagues to "use ridicule" to combat African-American, gay and feminist activists. When a UT faculty member contacted the NAS for information, a representative bragged to him that recently "our Texas chapter helped to defeat, er, postpone an English course" at the University of Texas.

The TAS collected 56 faculty signatures — only seven from the English Department — on a "Statement of Academic Concern" attacking the revised course. The statement continued the ongoing smear campaign against E306. It falsely declared that the title of the course would change from "Rhetoric and Composition" to "Difference — Racism and Sexism." It went on to perpetuate the misrepresentations of the class as indoctrination, claiming the course would only teach a "single hegemonic view."

The statement was published as an advertisement in *The Daily Texan*. The Texas Association of Scholars collected funds for the ad and cut the check, yet its name appeared nowhere on the ad.

When contacted later, the majority of the faculty we talked to who signed the ad weren't associated with TAS, and non-members weren't told that TAS had coordinated the effort. Clarke Burnham of the Psychology Department, for example, is not a TAS member, was not aware of TAS's involvement and had never even heard of the national organization. Karl Galinsky, former chair of the Classics Department, is actually a member of the National Association of Scholars — but wasn't aware even of

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Anne Blakeney, member of the Liberal Arts Foundation Council



Meacham

the existence of TAS, much less that it had sponsored the ad.

Galinsky is emblematic of most of the signees. Alan Gribben isn't.

In an article in the fall 1989 edition of the NAS journal *Academic Questions* called "English Departments: Salvaging What Remains," Gribben lays out a 10-point strategy for "salvaging the remnants of the discipline of English."

Gribben writes that "the American public is overwhelmingly on our side in this struggle." But since "neo-Marxists" control the university, it's necessary for "pluralist" academics like himself to take the "struggle" outside the academy to the public. When that happens, he writes, "we can expect a gasp of indignation." He declares that professors "who would oppose the takeover of our discipline" must "Organize or Retire."

It was in this spirit that Gribben took the battle for E306 to the state media and directly to UT alumni. He published diatribes against the class in the statewide press. Anne Blakeney, a member of the Liberal Arts Foundation Council — an alumni group, most of whom donate at least \$1,000 per year to the Liberal Arts college — read a Gribben polemic in *The Dallas Morning News* and wrote him requesting more information. His response, obtained from Dean Meacham's office through the Texas Open Records Act, reveals an agenda that the TAS forgot to mention in its "Statement of Academic Concern."



Cunningham

UT faculty speculate that alumni pressure caused President Cunningham and Provost Fonken to undermine the course. New evidence suggests that Cunningham decided to cancel the class sometime before July 11 — almost two weeks before either Brodkey or Kruppa had heard of the postponement of the course.

English Department should be placed in receivership indefinitely ... and then be governed by a new English Chairman appointed directly by Gerhard Fonken, Executive Vice President and Provost;" 2) "During this period of receivership the department's faculty should be divided into a Department of Critical Theory and Cultural Studies and a Department of English Literature and Language;" and 3) "barring the accomplishment of these steps, the two university-wide required English courses (E306 and E316K) should be abolished, thus ending the necessity of hiring additional English professors at the rate they have been recruited for the past decade from the most radicalized (but prestigious) graduate programs across the nation."

Gribben then hints that even these rather drastic measures won't remedy the situation unless Dean Meacham, a supporter of cultural inclusiveness in the classroom, is removed. "Most vital of all," he declares, "will be a comprehending College of Liberal Arts Dean with nerve and a determination to oversee the recruiting policies and decisions of the English Department, which has lost all sense of tradition, direction, civility, and academic freedom in the classroom."

Gribben's letter also alludes to Blakeney's "offer of assistance in my effort to halt the new E306 course, reform my out-of-control department, and rescue my academic career at UT." And Gribben makes a muted plea for help from other members of the council. He writes: "only members of the Liberal Arts Foundation Council actually understand how the University operates and what it will take to effect any significant improvement in the English Department situation."

Blakeney responded to the plea by writing a letter to the president of the Liberal Arts Advisory Council, Drew Cauthorn, urging him to take seriously Gribben's wild-eyed complaints. The undated letter, obtained from Meacham's files under the Open Records Act, argues that "the state of the English department and the subject of multiculturalism ... must be discussed further and in some way resolved" by the Advisory Foundation at a meeting scheduled for this fall. She goes on to write that "since Standish Meacham is the point man for multiculturalism in the college, we need to be informed of views balancing his in order to see the whole picture." The man to provide that balancing view, she continues, is none other than Alan Gribben — who by that time still hadn't so much as asked to see the readings, much less the syllabus, for the E306 course.

To his credit, Cauthorn replied in a letter to Blakeney, dated July 31, that the foundation had no business intervening in departmental affairs. He asked her to pursue her agenda in an "individual capacity and not as a member of the Foundation," thus squashing Blakeney's and Gribben's hope that this particular group of large donors could as an

institution dictate English Department policy.

While Gribben's maneuvering betrayed his colleagues' professed apolitical objection to revised E306, it did not silence it.

Even after details of Gribben's letter and tactics had been revealed, English professor and director of the English honors program James Duban insisted that the opposition to the course had been pedagogical, not political. And when asked in an interview whether he thought Bonevac ("Marxism 306") or Budziszewski ("serving the ends of hatred") had misrepresented the course's content, he declined to distance himself from either statement.

Duban presented himself in public as an intellectual above the fray, concerned only with the students who should be victimized by discussing issues of difference instead of punctuation and writing mechanics in a composition course. He complained bitterly in a *Texan* column that the revised course would have forsaken the goal of teaching students to write, despite the fact that every graded assignment in the class would still be a writing assignment. He called for the use of a 56-point checklist of what makes good writing, ignoring that in any class students would still have to write about *something*. Duban's actions before and after the postponement, however, reveal a man at least as versed in the methods of hard-ball politics as writing pedagogy.

When faculty supporters of the course drafted a letter to *The Texan* to "deplore the unprofessional manner in which opponents of the new syllabus for E306 misrepresented the substance and aims of the course," Duban threatened at least one member of the English faculty — lecturer Sue Heinzelman — with a libel suit if she signed it. He added that he would sue anyone else who signed the petition as well.

Heinzelman says Duban's actions constitute "sexual harassment." "When a full professor calls up an untenured lecturer who's a woman at 11 o'clock on a Friday night and threatens her with a libel suit, that's sexual harassment," she explained.

Duban's attempt at intimidation failed — Heinzelman, along with 42 others, eventually signed the letter. It appeared in the Aug. 10 *Daily Texan*, although with the word "unprofessional" omitted. Duban has yet to make good on his threats — when he consulted an attorney about suing, he was rightfully told that he had no grounds for legal action. Interestingly, Duban admitted to *Polemicist* that he had threatened Heinzelman, but when a *Texan* reporter questioned him on the subject, Duban, the champion of academic integrity, denied it.

Also in conflict with his disinterested, apolitical public pose, Duban apparently

When the multicultural reform of freshman English was first proposed, the voices condemning the change seemed to belong only to conservative faculty, but new evidence suggests that the decision to scrap the new curriculum came from the very top of the University's hierarchy.

by Scott Henson and Tom Philpott

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offered to travel around the state to present "informed views" on multiculturalism in the English Department in general and the revised E306 in particular. Anne Blakeney, in her letter to Cauthorn, names Duban as one of the professors who, along with Gribben, offered to "travel to different cities to address members of the Council" on the evils of the proposed E306 reforms. Clearly, joining Alan Gribben on a state-wide series of meetings with alumni donors — to enlist their support in thwarting cultural inclusiveness in the curriculum — more than qualifies as a political act.

The source initiating such political reaction is only now coming into — presidential — focus.



University faculty speculate that alumni pressure inspired by such outbursts caused President Cunningham and Provost Fonken to undermine the course. New evidence suggests that Cunningham decided to cancel the class sometime before July 11 — almost two weeks before either Brodkey or Kruppa had heard of the postponement of the course. In a handwritten letter to Cunningham received in his office on July 9 and acquired under the Open Records Act, a Dallas woman named Banett Valenta pleaded with



Duban

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Cunningham to stop the implementation of E306.

At the bottom of the letter, presumably in Cunningham's handwriting, the following was scrawled: "Send her a thank you note. Tell her that the English Department has decided [illegible] rethink their decision and that the course will not be modified this fall." A brief letter to Valenta dated July 11, signed by Cunningham, states: "After careful consideration, the Department has decided that the course will not be modified this fall."

The earliest Cunningham could have written that statement was July 10. According to Cunningham's appointment calendar, obtained through the Open Records Act, from July 3 until 2 p.m. on July 10, Cunningham was on vacation in Beaver Creek, Colo., in a cabin owned by Freeport McMoran, a company for which Cunningham serves as a member of the board of directors.

Kruppa, in a Sept. 1 phone interview, expressed surprise that the department he runs had canceled the course modifications by July 11. He himself left for vacation on July 10. In fact, the department itself didn't make the decision to postpone the class — Kruppa was informed that the course might be canceled on July 20, at a meeting with Fonken and Meacham.

Dean Meacham, who took the public heat for the cancellation of the course — but not until July 23 — would only say in a Sept. 3 interview that he was "very surprised" to hear of Cunningham's assertions in the Valenta letter, and that he knew of no decision by the English department to cancel the course at that early date.

The timing of Cunningham's decision to cancel the course remains unclear, but the chronology of the official decision went like this: With Kruppa still on vacation on July 18, *The Texan* published

the Statement of Academic Concern. On July 19 Cunningham faxed a short letter — obtained under the Open Records Act — accompanied only by a copy of the Statement of Concern to Board of Regents chair Louis Beecherl. The letter, signed "Bill," said Cunningham would call Beecherl after the latter man had had a chance to "review" the document.

The next day, July 20, Provost Fonken met with Kruppa and Meacham to discuss "problems" with the course. Kruppa says Cunningham met with the two that Saturday, July 21, and made official the cancellation of the new syllabus. Brodkey was told on Sunday, the day before the public was told July 23.

In a Sept. 1 phone conversation, the authors confronted President Cunningham with the startling Valenta correspondence. Cunningham refused to confirm or deny that he had made the decision to cancel the course before July 11. He also refused to meet with the authors to review the documents. When we explained that we were working on a deadline and needed a confirmation, he told us curtly to "Just run it."

In public appearances since, Cunningham has called his response to Valenta a "mistake," claiming that he meant to say that the textbook *Racism and Sexism* had been canceled, not the course itself. Dean Meacham, for one, accepts Cunningham's excuse, although many faculty members think the president is lying. His excuse is problematic, however, because neither Valenta's letter nor Cunningham's response ever mentioned the book.

Cunningham refuses to divulge the content of his and Fonken's meetings with Meacham and Kruppa, as well as his discussion of the course with Beecherl. Cunningham declared those discussions "privileged" at a University Council meeting on Sept. 18. He insists that Meacham made the decision to cancel the course without input from the administration.

But as Kurt Heinzelman, professor of English, noted, "Before the weekend, Meacham and Kruppa were ready to start the course, and after the meetings with Fonken and Cunningham, Meacham reversed his position." Heinzelman went on to say that "it is inconceivable that Meacham arrived at this decision to suspend E306 — which completely reverses his previous position — without considerable encouragement from Fonken and Cunningham."

Perhaps "coercion" would be a more appropriate word than "encouragement," but Heinzelman's point is well taken. From all appearances the UT administration took an active role in crushing the course. In doing so, it caved in to the tactics of a right-wing pressure group at the expense of departmental autonomy and academic freedom, not to mention all the students who would have taken the course. ■

The preceding is an updated version of Henson's and Philpott's continuing chronicle of the E306 milieu. Henson and Philpott featured an earlier version of this story in the September issue of Polemicist, which they edit.