

Rationale For E 306 Exam Summer Session, 1985

□ New policy requires an essay exam.

Designed to reinforce aim of course: invent, draft, revise, edit.

Students need more than 75 minutes to write and revise an essay.

Portions of the final examine may be concerned with review of material, but E 306 is not a course in mechanics. Multiple-choice exams would be inappropriate.

You may, of course, base the exam on course readings, issues of writing, rhetoric, etc. You devise the exam. Appropriate to expect students to do readings in preparation for the essay: give them an "area" or a range of topics"--but not specific enough to make it possible for them to write an exam prior to class. Seems appropriate to allow them to bring a dictionary, maybe even a handbook (depending on the exam).

□ New Policy entails a review of exams

You will turn in the examinations with your grade sheets. We will review the writing and return papers to you promptly. Several reasons for this review.

We want you to think about standards for E 306 all term as you grade your students papers. To an extent, this is a grade inflation measure. Our review of papers will be cursory: approximately six ^{hundred} papers at the end of the term. We can't look at all. We will look at sections where the grades seem seriously out of line: all A's.

We want to get a clearer idea of the kind of writing students are doing in the summer courses and how that writing compares with what students do in the regular term.

We wanted an alternative to panel grading which would shift some of the burden for grading responsibility off of your shoulders during the difficult summer term. Greatest # of grading pressures, complaints in summer. You may want to let your students know that they must perform up to program standards. But don't over-emphasize final. Should not be an inordinate part of student's grade.

□ Dealing With Provisional Students

First day handouts describe the Provisional Program and the provisional students. While on the average these students will perform less well than students in the regular term, you shouldn't make any assumptions about individual students. Some have relatively high ECT tests scores.

Your primary job is to teach them how to write at a college level: the aims, purposes, audiences, forms, and strategies they will need in their courses here. You need to engage them in serious issues and challenge them to respond to what they read and write in a serious way.

Students with serious problems should be referred immediately to the writing lab or Learning Skills Center. The course should not become a course in mechanics. Significant writing--what we demand of students in E 306--is a good deal more than correct writing. It entails understanding rhetorical situations, assessing and adapting to the circumstances that evoke composing. It involves learning how to explore ideas and develop them, to test those ideas in writing, to rethink and revise, and write again until an essay becomes a significant effort for both the writer and the reader.

Assume that your freshman have the same problems (aside from the mechanical ones) faced by more mature writers: (Example of the X. J. Kennedy manuscript: prominent literary scholar producing a flawless manuscript that had not focused on aim, audience, or appropriate style--advice to him resembled advice we give to freshmen, or any writers.)

Treat your students as apprentice writers--whether they want to think of themselves as writers or not. No matter what their field or area is, they will have to write. But professional concerns are not the issue here. Writing is the visible part of thinking. They cannot choose not to write and still be a functioning part of our world. You are not functioning as an admissions committee deciding who goes on to a career at UT and who doesn't. You are a skilled teacher of writing

offering your students the opportunity for the kind of creative involvement with writing that will enable them to learn and develop -- *if they choose to.*

Quoting Knoblauch and Brannon: "The teacher's role in a classroom informed by modern rhetoric . . . is vastly different from the traditional role. The teacher is an authority only in the sense of being a more fully matured writer and reader, not in the sense of being able to articulate more principles . . . Indeed, the teacher's greater experience is supposed to have demonstrated the fact that rules and formulas, ultimately, are distracting, debilitating, and false. The teacher is a guide, a coach, a stimulator, a listener, an informed responder, who knows too much about the potential diversity in compositional choices, too much about the complexities of writing and the talent of writers, to assume a more ambitious--and less informed--role of Arbiter or Judge. The teacher does not supply the ingredients for improved performance; cannot provide failsafe, all-purpose guidelines for good writing; cannot anticipate with absolute assurance what a writer "ought" to say or where or how it should be said; and ultimately cannot predict or regulate the growth of individual writers. Teaching in the context of modern rhetoric involves fewer absolutes, less teacher control, and more student involvement. . . the teacher's voice is joined by student voices in an environment where right thinking is not the possession of one and merely the aspiration of others but rather, as in the rest of life, a collective achievement, born out of negotiation and continuously evolving" (p. 102-03).