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To: Members of the Freshman English Policy Committee
From: Greg Myers, Textbook Subcommittee
Re: Textbook Survey and Textbook Selection
Date: February 8, 1984

I received 20 responses (out of the 73 teachers of E306) to the Fall 1983 textbook survey. I would not give much weight to the statistics, based on such a small sample, in making textbook selections. But the written comments of some dissatisfied users of the current selections might help us decide what sort of alternative rhetorics and readers we need.

Survey Results

The survey asked teachers to rate texts on a scale from 4 (very successful) to 1 (ineffective), so 2.5 is the midpoint of the range. After each rating I have put the number of teachers rating that title in parentheses, and I have included some of the comments, especially criticisms.

Text Selection Process

Val LeClercq, David Jolliffe and I will each review all the texts to be considered, and will make recommendations to the full committee. We do not plan to change the handbook this year, but hope to add at least one rhetoric and one reader. I have received the following new titles:

Rhetorics

McCrimon, Sommers, Trimmer, Writing with a Purpose
Crews, The Random House Handbook
Podis and Podis, Writing: Invention, Form, and Style

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Rhetorics (cont.)

McMahon and Day, The Writer's Rhetoric and Handbook
Scholes and Comley, The Practice of Writing
Kane, The Oxford Guide to Writing

Readers

Muscata and Griffith, The Borzoi College Reader
Cowan, Readings for Writing
Maimon, et al., Readings in the Arts and Sciences
Brent and Lute, Rhetorical Considerations
Bloca, The Essay Connection
Hairston and Trimmer, The Riverside Reader
Fishman, Responding to Prose
Lute and Brent, The Perennial Reader
Booth and Gregory, The Harper and Row Reader

Please let us know about any additional titles you would like us to consider; we'll try not to look annoyed.

P.S. You will also receive a bonus gift inspired by President Reagan's accusation that the Democrats are using rhetoric. Yes, your special new subscriber's bonus will be five pounds of rhetoric.

You have heard famous TV anchormen talk about it. Now you will have rhetoric in your own home. Think how proud you will be to watch the respect and awe on neighbors' faces when they see rhetoric beautifully mounted over your fireplace.

Listen to what K. W. of Loochee, Fla., says of how rhetoric changed her life:

"For years I was so nervous about now knowing what rhetoric was that I put on 55 pounds eating chocolates to calm my nerves. Then your bonus gift, that lovely five-pound mass of rhetoric, was delivered by the postman and..." *

*Russell Baker, The New York Times (reprinted in The Daily Texan, February 9, 1984, p. 4).

Freshman English Textbook Survey - Fall 1983

Handbook

Guth, New English Handbook 2.61 (18 responses)

"Uses terms students don't understand to correct grammar/writing errors. Explains obscure by the more obscure."

Rhetorics

Ruszkiewicz, Well-Bound Words 3.4 (10 responses)

"I like R's discussions of the topics; however I was not pleased with the exercises and found I had to supplement them with ones from other texts."

"I used it twice. I don't like its organization (some chapters too long or its many 18th century examples. Students find parts of it quite boring."

Cowan, Writing 2.5 (5 responses)

"It shows much enthusiasm but little precision for the writing we do."

"Condescending to students' I.Q. level/dishveled organization/redundant."

"Tone is too condescending--seems written for 14- or 15-year-olds, not freshmen, and they pick up on that. She has no idea of a good thesis statement. I won't use it again."

Readers

Stubbs and Barnet, The Little, Brown Reader (3rd ed.) 2.2
(5 responses)

No written comments

Kennedy and Kennedy, The Bedford Reader 3.2 (10 responses)

"I like their philosophy and style, their questions and teacher's manual. Students find boring many of the selections--though I like them."

"Predictably, there were some successful assignments (Mitford; I read Froude aloud in class to some effect)--but I found toward the end of the semester that there didn't seem to be time to really use the readings effectively."

"A good selection of essays, essays with contemporary flavor, appealing and interesting for students--(and for teachers)-- I wish the book had incorporated more controversial essays, more ambitious essays like the Rodriguez one, more essays in language and writing."

"Helpful in the beginning of the course, when I discussed the modes. Maybe a little less useful when we started discussing persuasion. The students' reactions were generally positive for the readings. They seemed to find them interesting."

Shrodes, Finestone, and Shugrue, The Conscious Reader (2nd ed.)
2.25 (4 responses)

"Not enough types of reading to correspond to types of essays being taught."

"Wide selection--bias toward 'consciousness-expanding' syndrome."

Jacobus, A World of Ideas 4 (2 responses)

"Contains challenging readings--Jacobus' introductions are good because they helped 'fill out' the modes and aims framework...Freshmen need to be challenged to integrate models with ideas."

"It is excellent--very challenging to the student, and for the most part they seem to like the challenge--also each reading is put in context through the biographical and historical data-- as well as ideas re: rhetoric of each work."

Shugrue, The Essay 3 (1 response)

No written comments.

Cooley, The Norton Sampler 2.5 (2 responses)

No written comments.

McMurrey and Caspman, Writing Fundamentals 3 (3 responses)

"Too many exercises--not enough on theory."

"I found the concise discussions of the various topics useful in preparing my own lecture notes. I think the exercises, and their abundance and variety, are excellent."