

CRASH COURSE

E306 changes should get a trial run

You might have noticed on page 2 of Wednesday's *Texas* a rather nondescript advertisement, titled "A Statement of Academic Concern," in which 56 UT instructors voiced their fears about changes for English 306 that will focus the freshman composition course on issues of racism and sexism.

The ad is the latest installment in the turbulent, albeit brief, history of this course's transformation. The changes were conceived only a few months ago and will not go into effect until September, but already they have garnered a flurry of attention within the UT community and in the state and national media.

Faculty members throughout the University, as the ad indicates, are taking their seats on either the pro or con side of this litmus-test issue. English Department faculty members, such as Alan Gribben, are waxing uncommonly vocal both among their peers and in the press.

The attention — which will not subside in the least if staunch opponents like Gribben have their way — indicates one thing: a lack of healthy debate before the action was taken. Joseph Kruppa, English Department chairman, and Linda Brodkey, the director of lower-division English, have both bragged that the course will be the best freshman composition course in the nation, leading the way for all other universities to diversify traditional classes. They should have realized in their excitement that any step so bold would also engender considerable opposition.

In this respect, Gribben and his colleagues opposing the changes have a legitimate gripe. Now that the issue's been thrown to the press, a much more contentious, damaging process of compromise will have to take place.

But Gribben and company, regardless of how they base their complaints on the "lack of proper debate" argument, have never really been interested in compromise. Whether the debate had occurred within departmental channels or not, they would never have been satisfied with anything less than maintaining the status quo for E306. And this is where the problem lies.

The opponents, throughout this argument, have agreed with the supporters that educating students on racism and sexism is a noble goal. Their only doubt is whether it can or should be accomplished in a composition course. Why then, are they not willing to give the class at least a semester's chance? If they truly believe in the good multiculturalism will bring to our University, why not at least give the course a trial period and discontinue it if students do begin to be graded on the "political correctness" of their social beliefs?

If the opponents really support making the University and its students more tolerant, aware citizens, they should give the course the benefit of the doubt. If they are unwilling to do this, their argument rests on a lie.

— Randy Kennedy