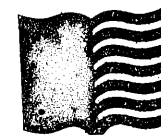


THE TEXAS WAY

Money, Power, Politics, and Ambition at
the University

WILLIAM H. CUNNINGHAM

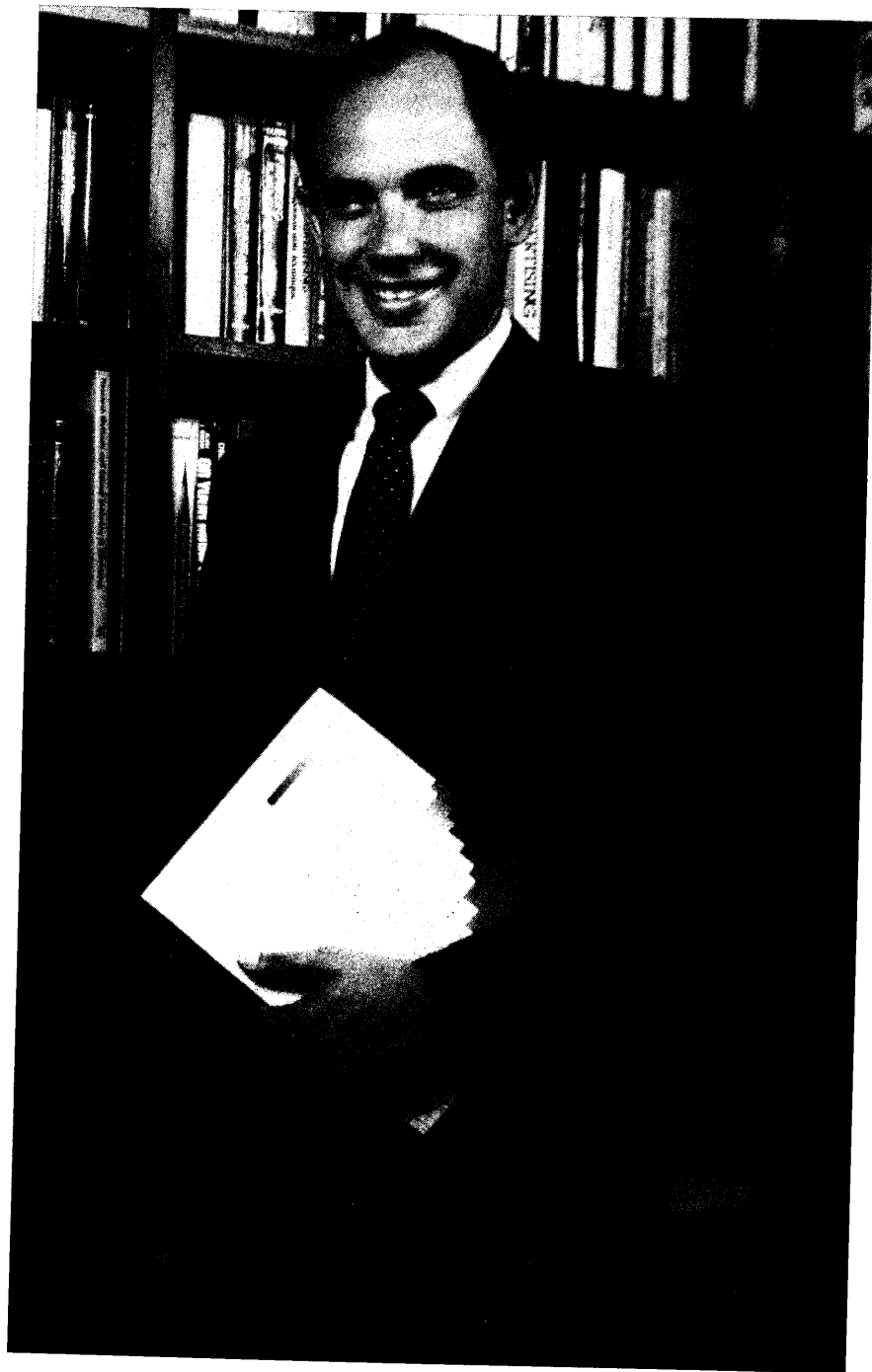
WITH MONTY JONES



LIBRARY OF
CONGRESS
SURPLUS
DUPLICATE

B BRISCOE CENTER
FOR AMERICAN HISTORY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Distributed by Tower Books, an imprint of
the University of Texas Press



This book is dedicated to my family and to the outstanding staff and faculty at the University of Texas at Austin. Together, they have brought great pleasure to me for more than forty years.

Frontispiece: William H. Cunningham preparing to take office as president of the University of Texas at Austin, August 12, 1985. *UT Office of Public Affairs Records, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, the University of Texas at Austin, e_utopa_00010.*

© Copyright 2013 by the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

First edition, 2013

Requests for permission to reproduce material from this work should be sent to Office of the Director, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2300 Red River Stop D1100, Austin, TX 78712-1426.

∞ The paper used in this book meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (1997)(Permanence of Paper).

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012950877

Contents

Preface	vii
Foreword	ix
Acknowledgments	xiii
Introduction: From Michigan to Texas	1
Chapter 1: The Austin Adventure Begins	8
Chapter 2: Life with George—and Beyond	22
Chapter 3: Appointment as President and First Steps	41
Chapter 4: Hazing	56
Chapter 5: Enrollment Management	68
Chapter 6: Apartheid and Divestment Protests	82
Chapter 7: Minority Student and Faculty Recruitment and Retention	96
Chapter 8: The Blackland Neighborhood	118
Chapter 9: The <i>Hopwood</i> Case	132
Chapter 10: Progress in the Natural Sciences	142
Chapter 11: Teaching English and Political Correctness	160
Chapter 12: Crisis and Progress in the Fine Arts	168
Chapter 13: Fund-Raising at UT Austin	179
Chapter 14: Intercollegiate Athletics—Let the Games Begin	198
Chapter 15: Intercollegiate Athletics—Playing by the Rules	211
Chapter 16: The Demise of the Southwest Conference and the Birth of the Big 12	228

Teaching English and Political Correctness

My relationship with the College of Liberal Arts was closely watched throughout my presidency. As I have mentioned in earlier chapters, my background in business led some individuals to doubt that I was sincerely interested in strengthening the College of Liberal Arts. A few months after I became president, as I discussed in Chapter 3, *Texas Monthly* magazine published a long, mean-spirited article about me, the main point of which seemed to be that my background as a marketing professor made me thoroughly unfit to lead a great university. I knew from the beginning that I needed to make a special effort to persuade people that I had a vision for the university that encompassed its entire mission, including its pursuit of excellence in the liberal arts.

The record of my presidency demonstrates that I did, in fact, consider the liberal arts to be of central importance to the life of the university. For example, I strongly supported the effort to bring the renowned Pforzheimer Collection of early printed books to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center and focused much energy on raising the money that made that acquisition possible. I was able to help make possible the acquisition of the Natchez Trace Collection of historical documents by the Center for American History. And I made the initial contact and “the ask” for \$10 million that Robert and Nancy Dedman of Dallas donated for liberal arts scholarships. I will discuss these and other fund-raising successes in more detail in Chapter 13.

Other developments in liberal arts during my presidency that I am particularly pleased with include the James A. Michener fellowships for writers; scholarships for the Plan II liberal arts honors program; renovated facilities for faculty in economics, French, and Italian as well as a facility for a liberal arts placement center; the development

of new academic initiatives such as the Center for Social Philosophy and Policy, the Texas Center for Writers, the Edward Clark Center for Australian Studies, and the Conservation Education Program to help protect and preserve library materials. I am also proud that I was able to place the President’s Office at the service of the successful effort to create an endowment for the interdisciplinary seminar in British Studies, and that Isabella and I were able to contribute to this effort personally.

Much of my effort to work with Dean Bob King and his successor, Dean Standish Meacham, to strengthen liberal arts involved crises in the Department of English. While presidents of large universities will often disagree about many things, they almost always agree that faculty members in English can be very difficult to manage. There are at least three reasons for this. First, as Betty Sue Flowers, one of UT Austin’s most distinguished faculty members in the Department of English, once told me, faculty members in English are “social critics.” They are attracted to the role of literature as providing insights into, and critiques of, society, and in some cases they are carried away by the process of debate and argument so that the process becomes at least as important as the actual outcome. My experience is that many English faculty members would rather fight than win.

Second, English faculty, like some other liberal arts faculty, are consistently upset over their absolute pay as well as how they are paid relative to faculty in the professional schools. Early in my presidency I met with the senior faculty in the English Department for breakfast. One of the first questions was how could I justify paying a twenty-six-year-old assistant professor in the Department of Accounting twice as much as the average full professor in English. I told the group that if the university paid the English faculty the same salaries that it paid the accounting faculty, we would have the highest paid English Department in the nation. In contrast, if we paid the accounting faculty what we paid the English faculty, we would not have an Accounting Department. I explained that this is how the market works, as a university competes for talent not only against other universities but also against the private sector. If there were more of a private market for experts in literature, universities would pay more for English professors. My answer was received with deafening silence.

A third issue that leads to friction with an English Department is the traditional role of teaching writing to students from across the

university. This is at best a tough job that requires intensive student-faculty interaction, and it involves instruction to a very high percentage of the university's total undergraduate population. English faculty members in research universities, like UT Austin, have received their doctoral degrees from prestigious schools where they focused on highly advanced and specialized topics in the study of language and literature, and now they are faced with twenty-five freshman business and engineering majors who really do not care about learning how to write a cogent memo. It is not a pretty picture.

The standard solution to this problem is for an English Department to hire a large number of teaching assistants to teach writing so the faculty can remain focused on the specialty of their choice. This solution works reasonably well if the TA's are dedicated to their jobs and are properly supervised. The alternative of taking basic writing courses away from the English Department is almost always resisted by the English faculty because it is a clear statement to the world that the faculty do not care about the teaching of writing and because it represents a significant loss of resources. The TA's who teach the course are always doctoral students in the department. If they are not needed to teach writing, then the size of the department's doctoral program will be reduced.

This issue of teaching writing was combined in the 1980s with a nationwide debate over "multicultural" education in a way that brought the UT Austin Department of English to the verge of self-destruction. A controversy within the department over English 306, the main rhetoric and composition course for freshmen, veered off into a contest over what was widely described as "political correctness" and "multiculturalism," including a proposal to use a highly disputed sociology anthology on racism and sexism as the central text for the course. The textbook was eventually dropped, in favor of a packet of readings to be assembled by faculty, but the controversy continued until the end of my presidency.

The controversy was part of a larger debate at universities across the country over how to guarantee that undergraduates received a broad education that included exposure to cultures other than their own. From this seemingly simple and universally accepted goal, the nationwide "multiculturalism" movement quickly descended into academic warfare over charges of indoctrination and political bias. At UT, the debate was heavily influenced by other factors, including

the desire to finally overcome any vestiges of the institution's legacy of racial discrimination, debate over affirmative action programs for recruiting minority students and faculty, long-running internal divisions in the English Department, and the department's budgetary challenge of providing writing instruction to most of the university's growing number of freshmen.¹ These complexities of the debate meant that the dispute was not simply a matter of political liberals versus conservatives, but that oversimplified view often prevailed. I believe the campus and media debate that could be placed under the headings of "political correctness" and "multiculturalism" generated far more heat than light, more confusion than insight, and more sloganeering than clear thinking. There was widespread agreement with the venerable idea that a university education should broaden students' horizons and make them conversant with cultures and ways of life different from their own. Beyond that ideal, it often seemed, there was nothing but disagreement.

Strong personalities among the faculty also shaped the debate. Among the department's most passionate advocates for a new, multicultural approach to teaching writing was Linda Brodkey, at one time the head of the committee charged with drafting a new course syllabus for English 306. On the other side, favoring more traditional approaches to teaching rhetoric and composition, were equally determined faculty members such as Alan Gribben, a distinguished Mark Twain scholar and later the author of a biography of Harry Ransom. Brodkey and Gribben, as well as a number of others who were highly active in the debate over English 306, later left UT for faculty posts at other universities, and it may be that such changes in the personality of the faculty contributed a great deal to the ultimate outcome of the issue at UT.

The matter took numerous twists and turns over the years, most of which I will spare the reader, but it reached a climax during the two years (1989 to 1991) that Standish Meacham was dean of liberal arts. King had served as dean with great distinction (and considerable heroism) since 1979 and richly deserved an opportunity to put aside administrative burdens and return to his teaching and scholarship in the Department of Linguistics. I named Meacham as his successor in June 1989 and he took over in September. Meacham had been on the history faculty since 1967 and had twice served as chairman of that department.

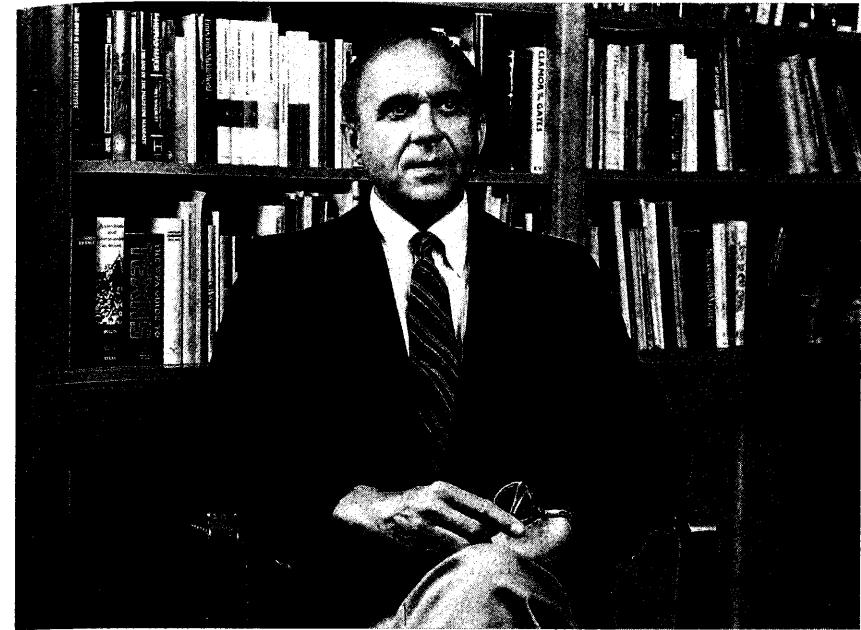
In the late spring of 1990, Dean Herbert Woodson of the College of Engineering announced that if English 306 was going to be turned into a “multi-cultural sociology/anthropology course,” his college would ask the central administration to drop English 306 as a required course and would hire its own faculty to teach writing. The deans of the College of Natural Sciences and the College of Business immediately followed Woodson’s leadership and stated that they wanted to examine the possibility of creating their own writing courses. I responded that it would be difficult for the central administration to mandate a writing course that a college did not want as part of its curriculum.

By July 1990 it was clear that the plans for overhauling the teaching of English 306 were so divisive across the campus that more time was needed to decide what to do with the course. Meacham postponed any changes for at least a year so the faculty could further refine its plans and hopefully develop a course that would have broader support across the campus. The postponement was widely hailed as a victory by the more conservative factions.²

The postponement was followed a few months later by Meacham’s decision, which was announced on January 8, 1991, to step down as dean and return to his faculty role in history. He cited “personal reasons” for this decision and dismissed talk that he was being forced out because of his liberal views.³ While I agreed with Meacham that a change was desirable, I believe he found it more difficult to continue as dean after members of the committee that was charged with redesigning English 306 decided to resign as a group. The committee members’ decision predated Meacham’s but became public on February 5, 1991, less than a month after Meacham’s own announcement.

The committee, led by Brodkey, had had a contentious history, with two members resigning in the spring of 1990 over a dispute with the group’s procedures. Some fifty faculty members from various departments signed an advertisement in the *Daily Texan* that spring criticizing the work of the committee.⁴

The resignations of the committee and of Meacham eventually provided an opportunity to take control of this seemingly never-ending issue and cut through the tangle of campus politics that seemed to be preventing a reasonable course of action. The first step I took was to persuade King to return as acting dean effective June 1991 while a search committee sought candidates for a permanent dean. At first,



Dean Robert D. King. UT Office of Public Affairs Records, e_utopa_00030.

our hope was to fill the position by the fall of 1992, but after a few months it was clear that more time would be needed, and King agreed to continue as acting dean until the fall of 1993.

In the fall of 1991 a University Council committee proposed a multicultural course requirement that would begin in the fall of 1992 with a three-hour course and would increase in later years to six hours. I always felt this was one last attempt by the same group of people who had been working so hard to modify English 306 to force the university to require a multicultural ethnic studies course on the entire campus. The University Council approved the proposal in October, but there were enough letters of protest from faculty members that the proposal was required to be submitted to a vote of the entire faculty.⁵ This resulted in the first called meeting of the faculty that had a quorum in many years, as several hundred faculty gathered in the LBJ Auditorium. Gerry Fonken and I were concerned that a vote only by those who were motivated enough to turn out for the meeting would result in approval of the course requirement. We felt that while the goal of exposing our students to a varied cultural experience

was a noble one, we were also strongly convinced that the proposal that had passed the University Council was politically motivated and would not represent a significant academic advancement for our students. In addition, there were many practical logistical questions that remained unanswered, such as who would teach the courses and how they would be paid for, that were not even discussed in the University Council's proposal.

In order to avoid a vote at that meeting, Fonken and I decided that he would ask Austin Gleason of the Department of Physics to make a motion at the General Faculty meeting that a ballot be mailed to all faculty members to deal with the issue. Fonken and I felt confident that if the faculty as a whole was ever given an opportunity to speak on this issue, they would vote it down.

The meeting took place on December 6, 1991. There was clearly a quorum of the faculty in attendance. I opened the meeting and called for discussion. Gleason immediately raised his hand and made the motion that a mail ballot be sent to all of the faculty concerning the University Council's proposed multicultural course. I asked for and received a second, and while I did ask if there was "any discussion," I waited less than five seconds before calling for a vote. I am not sure that everyone in the auditorium knew exactly what they were voting on, but as chair I heard the motion pass. I then said that seeing no other business, the meeting was adjourned. The meeting was concluded in less than seven minutes.

We were correct about the results of the mail ballot. The vote was 759 (64 percent) against to 434 (36 percent) for, with about 900 eligible faculty members not voting. Because of a glitch in the list of eligible voters, some 430 faculty members did not receive ballots, but they were invited to vote in person at the office of the University Council secretary, Paul Kelly. Among those, the vote was 30 in favor and 33 against. Proponents of the multiculturalism requirement inevitably complained about the voting process.

I felt that we had made a great deal of progress just in avoiding the implementation of a radical multicultural course either under the label of English 306 or some other required courses as envisioned by the University Council. However, the fundamental issue still existed—how to teach English 306 effectively to a large number of undergraduates. King, Fonken, and I had discussed this issue on numerous occasions during the spring semester in 1992.

King felt that the only way to solve this problem once and for all was to create a separate division for this purpose apart from the English Department and under direct control of the dean's office. The course would be taught by professional full-time teachers, many of whom would have a Ph.D. in English but who would be focusing their attention on teaching writing, not research. King, Fonken, and I met on August 31, 1992, the last day I was president of UT Austin. I wanted this problem solved before I officially left office at midnight that night. King was a little nervous over this issue because he knew that the English Department would go ballistic, but I was ready to approve his proposal. My concern was that if we did not solve it now with King in control, we would never get another chance. After much discussion, I finally said, "The stars are aligned. If we don't do this and do it today, it will not happen. Bob, if you will recommend it to Gerry, and Gerry, if you will recommend it to me, I will approve it." King then made his recommendation, and Fonken made his, and I kept my word and it was done.

The creation of the Division of Rhetoric and Composition was the last official act of my presidency, just before I fed the turtles one last time on the fourth-floor balcony outside my office and turned out the lights. Some people may still debate whether that was the best way to handle a seemingly intractable problem, but some people just like to debate. Everyone can thank me, King, and Fonken for the fact that undergraduate students are receiving excellent instruction in rhetoric and composition from professional instructors who enjoy teaching writing to undergraduates. On a personal note, I was greatly relieved that King was there to oversee the college with a steady and forceful hand during this difficult time of transition, and I will always be grateful for his willingness to sacrifice his own scholarly pursuits for the welfare of the college and the university. When he returned as acting dean, he had already served as a dean for a total of thirteen years, having been dean of the old College of Social and Behavioral Sciences for three years before his first stint as leader of the College of Liberal Arts, and he had taken far more punishment than any one university administrator should be expected to suffer. The fact that he was willing to come back as acting dean for two additional years shows how deeply devoted he was to the university's liberal arts program and the education of all UT students.