

February 9, 1993

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Department  
FROM: Joe Kruppa  
SUBJECT: Division of Rhetoric and Composition

The Departmental Committee on the Division of Rhetoric has provided the attached progress report.

To: Members of the English Department  
From: The Departmental Committee on the Division of Rhetoric  
Jim Kinneavy, Lester Faigley, John Ruskiewicz, Linda Ferreira-  
Buckley, John Slatin, Evan Carton, Terry Kelley  
Date: 2 February 1993  
Re: Interim Report on the Division of Rhetoric

### Introduction

The purpose of this memo is to inform members of the English Department about recent developments concerning the Division of Rhetoric and Composition.

- The Departmental Committee on the Division of Rhetoric and Composition recommended unanimously that Dean King name Lester Faigley Director of the Division of Rhetoric and Composition, with John Ruskiewicz as Associate Director. These appointments were confirmed by the President on January 21, 1993.
- The Departmental Committee met with the Executive Committee on December 3, 1992 to report on its work to date. At that meeting, the Executive Committee endorsed the Faigley nomination as well as Division recruitment efforts.
- Lester Faigley, John Ruskiewicz, and John Slatin met briefly and informally with incoming President Robert Berdahl on January 14. The President indicated that he intended to carry out the plan to institute the Division on June 1.
- Kermit Campbell of Ohio State University has been offered a junior-level, tenure-track position in the Division, beginning in August 1993.

The remainder of this document describes in more detail the deliberations leading up to these events.

### A Brief History of Deliberations

On October 12, Jim Kinneavy, Lester Faigley, John Slatin, Linda Ferreira-Buckley, and John Ruskiewicz held the first of what became a weekly series of informal meetings to discuss issues pertaining to the Division of Rhetoric and Composition, establishment of which had been announced on September 1. They were later named, along with Evan Carton and Terry Kelley, to the Dean's advisory committee on the Rhetoric Division and to the departmental committee. The departmental committee has continued to meet independently of the larger Dean's committee.

Initially, the atmosphere at these meetings was strained. There have been serious differences about writing instruction among us in the all-too-recent past. Moreover, five of us had told the Dean, publicly, privately or both, of our opposition to the proposed Division. We were convinced, however, that the Division would become a reality on June 1, and felt strongly that we should

begin discussing the many complex issues that had to be resolved if the Division were to work at all and if the English Department's interests were to be in any way served. A further rationale lay in our desire to bring a coherent, focused set of ideas and questions to what we believed would be eventual meetings with the interim Dean. Finally, we wished to address an old problem. The English Department has been criticized for a lack of commitment to undergraduate writing instruction, yet much of the blame for problems in the writing program attaches to the University administration for its failure to appropriate the funds to support programs developed by members of the Department and approved by the administration. We saw these meetings, therefore, as an opportunity to lay out for public consideration what we believe to be the components of a responsible, effective undergraduate writing program and to leave no room for misunderstanding about what it will cost the University to endow with real substance what Frank Bean, Chair of the Committee on the Undergraduate Experience, has called a "symbolic gesture."

### **Collegiality**

Our first meeting revolved around discussion of the way we wanted to work together then and in the future. All members expressed a strong desire for creative, highly collegial relationships, and we agreed that such collegiality would require sometimes difficult acts of faith in one another. The only way to avoid a repetition of the terrible internecine warfare of the 1990 debate over 306 would be to take the risk of trust and candor. Our meetings have not been easy by any means: we have made a point of identifying areas of disagreement among ourselves, and we have debated those disagreements vigorously and openly. The quality of the discussion has been a key element in persuading us that the Division might be workable despite its controversial, and to many disturbing, beginnings.

### **The Department and the Division**

All of us feel a strong allegiance to and identification with the English Department, and a desire to advance the Department's interests while assuring the success of the new Division. Our discussions of recruitment are a case in point, illustrating our efforts to balance what might-- but need not-- be competing claims.

### **Recruitment**

The Dean has authorized the Rhetoric Division to make two junior appointments for 1993-94. These are in addition to the three positions allocated to the English Department. We have not wanted to hire at the expense of the English Department, however, nor have we wanted in any way to usurp-- or appear to usurp-- the Department's prerogative.

### **Nomination of Lester Faigley**

Our concerns about recruitment, with respect both to UT's national

reputation and to our desire to establish the strongest possible cooperative relationship between the Division and the Department, led us to take several strong measures. First, we agreed unanimously on our choice of Lester Faigley for the Directorship and John Ruszkiewicz for the Associate Directorship. Soon thereafter, we requested a meeting with the Executive Committee.

#### **Meeting with the Executive Committee**

At a meeting on December 3 we informed the Executive Committee of our decision, then asked for and received the Executive Committee's unanimous endorsement of the Faigley nomination. In separate actions, the Executive Committee voted 11-0-2 to endorse the work of the Departmental Committee and endorse the Division's recruitment effort 11-2.

#### **Offers and Prospects**

We have made one junior offer to a strong minority candidate, Kermit Campbell, who visited Austin from 23 - 26 January. A second, prospect, Cynthia Sheard, will visit from 30 January - 2 February for an intensive on-campus interview.

We also outlined for the Executive Committee understandings we had reached among ourselves in other areas of concern, including governance, curriculum, and pedagogical training and supervision.

#### **Governance and Decision-making**

We agreed immediately (and unanimously) that the structure outlined in the September 1 document on the Division, giving full authority to a single director appointed by the Dean, was unacceptable. We wanted our decision-making processes (both in these meetings and in the Division) to be democratically organized, with full participation by all members (the Dean has since agreed in principle, asserting at both the November 5 and November 19 meetings of the advisory committee that he had intended all along that Division faculty should determine their own governance). We agreed, also, that close cooperation with the English Department was an absolute necessity, both for the Division and for the Department. We have been discussing how best to insure both that English Department concerns are well and formally represented within the Division and, conversely, that the Division is similarly represented within the Department. We are aware, of course, that some members of the Department do not regard the possibility of a mutually beneficial relationship between the English Department and the Division of Rhetoric and Composition as a serious one. Nonetheless, we feel very strongly that we should seek to construct such a mutually beneficial understanding and to craft procedures and administrative structures that implement those understandings in ways that do not depend upon the personalities presently involved.

#### **Curricular Responsibilities**

The Division of Rhetoric and Composition will have greater responsibilities than the current writing program within the English Department, but will give the University a composition program equal to the best in the country while enhancing the resources and energies of the English Department itself. Faculty in the Division will maintain and develop all of the existing writing courses—providing training, syllabi, and course materials for composition classes routinely taught by Assistant Instructors from the Department of English (E 306, E 306Q, and the three versions of E 309).

In order to insure stability in a program that has been too frequently disrupted in the past, we have agreed to retain the current syllabus for E 306, unanimously endorsed by the full department in Spring 1991. We have reached general agreement on establishing a coherent sequence of undergraduate writing courses, beginning with E 306 and continuing through E 379C (Topics in Composition). We will pay special attention to re-shaping E 309, so that distinctions among the three variants will be clearer and more meaningful both to AI's teaching the course and to undergraduates enrolling in it. We will also clarify the relationships among E 306, E 309, and E 325M (Advanced Expository Writing).

#### **Pedagogical Training**

The Division will make the training of new secondary teachers of English a priority. We expect every future teacher the English Department graduates to be a competent writer and a capable teacher of composition. Expanding what is already done in E 360M, the Division hopes to make supervised tutoring opportunities available to English Education majors and eventually to establish a portfolio system to evaluate their progress as writers.

The Division will explore ways of enhancing the training of AI's, especially those teaching E 306Q and E 309, who currently receive little or no training. Faculty will explore new procedures for evaluating AI teaching so that Assistant Instructors are assured of having useful evaluations when they enter the job market. AI's having difficulty with their teaching will have regular and dependable assistance from the administrators of the Division.

Faculty in the Division will establish procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of its courses, programs, and facilities. (There are currently no programmatic evaluations of writing courses in the English Department.)

#### **Computer Writing and Research Lab**

The Division will move quickly to computerize most of its composition classes, thereby assisting the College of Liberal Arts in claiming a fair share of computer assets on this campus. The Division will provide a base for the Computer Writing and Research Lab, which will continue as a facility devoted to innovative pedagogy in literature and language as well as composition. John Slatin will serve as Director.

### **Establishment of a Writing Center**

We have agreed (and again the Dean has agreed in principle) that it is vital to establish a drop-in Writing Center, with a professional director and a properly trained staff, to assist students throughout the College who want or need help with their writing.

### **Substantial Writing Component Courses**

Finally, faculty in the Division of Rhetoric and Composition expect to play an important role in coordinating and improving the University's Substantial Writing Component courses. This is a major responsibility, but one with great potential for encouraging faculty across the disciplines to understand what they can do to enhance literacy on this campus. The Computer Writing and Research Lab expects to play an important part in supporting the drop-in Writing Center and, eventually, the Substantial Writing Component courses as well. We must stress, however, that we can do nothing unless the University is willing to commit significant resources to fund and support such efforts.

### **Rationale for English Department Support**

This report has implicitly addressed the principal concerns expressed by English Department faculty at the Department meeting earlier this fall, at University Council and Faculty Senate meetings, and elsewhere. To summarize:

1. The mission and structure of the Division of Rhetoric and Composition have been shaped by members of the English Department (especially those specialists in rhetoric and composition who form the core of this committee), people with a continuing stake in the quality and collegiality of the Department and in the welfare of all its students and programs.
2. The Division will be run neither by the dean (Dean King himself will have left office before it becomes fully operational) nor by an autocratic director but by a committee of Division faculty. That faculty will be composed principally of current--and continuing--English Department members (many will eventually split their formal appointments between the Department and the Division but will inevitably wish and need to remain engaged Department members). This governing committee of the Division will function democratically and will work cooperatively with the English Department Executive Committee on matters of mutual concern.
3. The English Department graduate program, its graduate teaching assistantships and assistant instructorships, and its graduate admission committee's ability to award these instructorships based on promise and merit, will not be jeopardized. Instructors in lower division writing courses in the Division will be drawn principally, as they are now, from students in the English Department's graduate program. Lecturers will not be hired to replace Assistant

Instructors. Supervision of graduate instructors and teaching opportunities in the writing program are likely to be enhanced, rather than diminished, under the Division.

4. There will be more resources in the form of additional faculty hires (beginning with the additional authorized English Department hire that the shift to the Division of the advertised junior position in rhetoric will facilitate), staff support, instructional technology, the re-establishment of a Writing Center and tutorial positions for graduate students within it.

#### Conclusion

The University has made a substantial public commitment to improving the quality of writing instruction at UT Austin. We pledge our best efforts to meet that goal. But we cannot do it without the support of our colleagues in the English Department. For the reasons outlined above, we believe that the Department stands to gain from cooperation with the new Division of Rhetoric and Composition. We welcome our colleagues' comments and suggestions.

Our efforts will be meaningless without administrative and material support. The administration must provide the resources necessary for the new Division to operate successfully. The English Department must be given adequate resources as well. Neither the Division nor the Department can succeed without proper resources, and neither can succeed without the other. Faculty cannot be expected to cooperate in establishing the Division of Rhetoric and Composition without guarantees of adequate support from the University administration. And it is the students who stand to lose if that support is not forthcoming.