

Minutes, Freshman English Policy Committee

December 11, 1978

Parlin 8C

Members present: Kinneavy, Trimble, Ruszkiewicz, Witte, Newcomb,  
Cameron, Creel, Byars, Hart

Agenda:

Approval of minutes

306 syllabus

Grading Criteria Statement

1. After lengthy discussion, the minutes of December 4 were corrected and approved. During the discussion Dr. Kinneavy observed that minutes should reflect what was actually said during a meeting, not what members wished to have said.

2. Dr. Kinneavy reported that he had met with Sue Rodi, who had heard that copyright problems might interfere with publication of the syllabus. He had told her that he might be able to arrange with Harper and Row's English editor, Mr. Lininger, for us to publish the syllabus for two years. She had said that, the copyright problems notwithstanding, she would prefer to seek opinions and recommendations from instructors using the syllabus, before a decision on its publication.

Mr. Creel said that he could understand Ms. Rodi's position since she has worked hard on the syllabus, but pointed out that her concern with instructor opinion did not bear on the overriding issue of potential copyright violation. Dr. Witte offered the following motion:

Inasmuch as departmental publication and distribution to students, beyond the present academic year, of the current E306 syllabus or a revision thereof may constitute a violation of a contractual agreement between Mr. Kinneavy and Harper & Row, Publishers, I move that the Freshman English Policy Committee postpone any discussion of the E306 syllabus until such a time as exist no legal questions regarding its publication and use.

Discussion followed, during which Dr. Kinneavy explained that the copyright issue is an awkward one. He said that he was not sure whether Ms. Rodi could write and independently publish a syllabus based on the old E306 syllabus, which he had written. Of course she could not copy diagrams and words verbatim, but, he pointed out, an author cannot copyright ideas. He added that he thought Ms. Rodi might have in mind as an outside possibility publishing the current syllabus on her own.

Dr. Ruszkiewicz inquired whether Dr. Witte's motion would prevent Ms. Rodi from circulating the inquiry she had mentioned. Mr. Creel responded that nothing bars her from distributing a questionnaire to our instructors, and Dr. Kinneavy agreed, saying that she could do so either independently or under the auspices of the FEPC. Dr. Trimble added that he would not object to her using our name, but Mr. Creel said that he would not want the questionnaire to build up anyone's hopes until the committee had reached a decision about publishing the syllabus.

The motion to postpone discussion then came to a vote and passed unanimously. Mr. Hart was appointed to explain the committee's action to Ms. Rodi.

3. Next, the committee turned to another frustrating topic, the statement on grading criteria. Dr. Witte observed that one must regard the statement as a classification of kinds of papers. But, he continued, the basis of classification seems to shift: criteria come in and drop out as the statement progresses. He called particular attention to the description of an F paper, pointing out that it mentions meeting the assignment, a criterion which does not appear in the description of a D paper.

Dr. Trimble, perhaps the principal author of the statement, responded that it was intended to be read through from top to bottom so that the criteria would accumulate. Similarly, Mr. Cameron recalled that an older version, the "deep structure" of the current draft, explicitly states for instance that a C paper contains all the good features of a D paper as well as the extra virtues of a C paper. The present version, Dr. Trimble added, assumes that freshmen are reasonably intelligent and will see the criteria implied at each point. It was designed to be as brief as possible, he said, and to serve as a set of guidelines rather than as a definitive description.

Dr. Kinneavy then observed that several bases of classification obviously underly the statement: the assignment, the treatment of the subject, the organization, the mechanics, and the style. Dr. Witte agreed but said that mechanics and style get lumped together at some points but appear separately at others. He added that it might be useful to have particular features distinguished so that the criteria might include the degree to which a paper meets the assignment, its treatment of subject matter (including the development and quality of ideas), its organization (including beginning, end, and transitions), its prose style, and its mastery of conventional usage. Dr. Trimble ventured that style and usage sometimes get blurred not only in the present draft

but also in our minds as we evaluate student papers. Yes they do, Dr. Witte agreed; but still, he reiterated, it might be useful to distinguish between them in the criteria statement. He went on to say that the statement now contains much admirable language but that he was merely trying to see it from a student's point of view. Then Dr. Trimble agreed that from the standpoint of memorability and intellectual tractability, the statement might be enhanced by enumerating its basic categories at each point.

Dr. Ruszkiewicz, however, said that he wasn't sure such a plan would constitute an improvement because a categorical arrangement would almost certainly end up merely declaring the kinds of papers adequate, better, or worse in each category. Such would be the case, he added, whether we had a list of features or a list of paper grades, the nature of a matrix being what it is. Dr. Witte explained that he had envisioned a specifically stated document but one written out in prose rather than arranged as a mere list. Mr. Creel concluded that a compromise between a list and a series of separate essays might be ideal, and Mr. Cameron added that with care parallels across categories could be made obvious. Dr. Trimble then wondered whether an additional category should be included, one to cover rhetorical stance, but Dr. Witte said that he considered this category to be accounted for already as a part of the rhetorical assignment.

Extending the point begun by Dr. Ruszkiewicz, Dr. Kinneavy said that a matrix, whether of qualities or of grades, would still end up being the same matrix. Dr. Witte, he continued, seemed to be asking instead for a descriptive statement which included the categories. Dr. Trimble moved that Dr. Witte write up a new grading statement for the committee to compare with the present one so that it could choose the better or meld the two. Dr. Witte offered an amendment to the effect that his writing be done in consultation with Dr. Trimble. Dr. Trimble asked whether the document might start with a preface enumerating the chief criteria which English teachers normally use, but Dr. Newcomb expressed concern that students not end up trying simply to measure their essays. Soon, Dr. Trimble's amended motion carried unanimously.

4. As watches around the room pressed for adjournment, Mr. Cameron quickly introduced a new item, the meeting time for the spring semester. Dr. Trimble asked that this be listed first on the next agenda; but everyone realized that the spring semester would have begun by then, and the meeting ended with members rushing out to work.