

Geoff Henley
Editor

Anne Gainer
Associate Editor

John Sepehri
Associate Editor

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Low essay grades show need to examine E306 format

Provisional freshmen may learn more about bureaucratic rhetoric than composition from the Department of English this summer. The department, which is often a source of comic relief, has once again provided another example of incompetence.

In a worthy effort to follow directives from the College of Liberal Arts to reduce grade inflation, the department adopted a new system to grade papers for English 306. The leaders at Parlin Hall have resorted to panel grading, a system not unheard of but nevertheless unusual. Three professors — James Kinneavy, Wayne Lesser and Evan Carton — are responsible for the grading of all E306 sections taught by assistant instructors.

Kinneavy — who heads Lower-Division English — has now come under fire from parents and the administration. Lesser, the associate

chairman of the department, sent a memo to his instructors saying that after they concluded the second group reading, "the overwhelming number of first essays are receiving grades ranging from C to F — with a majority of those below C."

As one instructor said, "Basically, the memo said only three papers deserved a grade higher than a C minus."

The associate chair may not have intended to say that the Department of English is setting limits on how many provisional students can receive passing grades, but it's not clear whether he deserves the benefit of a doubt. Sufficient concern about Lesser's pronouncement has been raised that Dean Robert King has had to form a committee, including outside members in order to avoid the appearance of an administrative "whitewash."

When the committee meets, it should further examine Lesser's pronouncements, grading criteria and the entire organization of the course. In the recent past, E306 has captured more headlines than the University has oil.

The committee should examine what the associate chair meant when he described the papers' "shortcomings of conception and content." Lesser stresses that the majority of writers receiving relatively high marks failed to "see the essay's most significant [sic] purpose or insight as the heart of the argument, as the ambition toward which each observation ought to contribute."

Most likely, Lesser is just trying to encourage undergraduates to make sure that, when marshaling arguments, all the flanks move in concert. But since the students are required to write on a narrow range of topics — including

an essay that posits the bombing of Hiroshima as an act of terrorism — then something more sinister could be taking place.

That is, the department's leadership could be judging students on their ability to draw conclusions deemed to have insight and purpose. Content decisions like this one have been made before in the department, so such desires would not be without precedent.

Even if Lesser was acting in good faith regarding the content issue — because of the department's past misdeeds — the outside committee should thoroughly examine the curricula as well as the methodology employed.

But committee members should also consider just how well the E306 course has been run within the Department of English. Proposals for a separate Division of Rhetoric and Composition need now more than ever a second look.

EDITORIALS

'Industrial policy' misused by Bush

A new phrase is rapidly joining "liberal" and "tax and spend" in the Republican lexicon of vilification. That phrase is "industrial policy." Both Bill Clinton and Ross Perot stand accused. Enunciated with a proper curled lip, it implies that Clinton is a closet socialist and Perot is a closet fascist.

There are good reasons to be skeptical about industrial policy. But it's not a good reason merely to note that various proposals for modest government intervention in the economy come at a time when communism has collapsed around the world. Comparing industrial policy to communism is like saying, "Why summer in Maine when it's freezing at the North Pole?" Bush should be able to grasp the flaw in that logic.

Anyway, if industrial policy is a disease, it is one to which Bush himself is far from immune. His "economic recovery program" — the one that would solve all our problems if only Congress would enact it — is industrial-strength industrial policy.

A general definition of industrial policy is anything the government does to redirect the invisible hand of the free market. This does not include traditional government activities, such as national defense. It also does not include the use of fiscal and monetary policy to nurture the economy in general. Industrial policy means giving a push to particular economic activities.

That covers a variety of sins. Trade protection is industrial policy. But pure industrial policy would be something resembling Japan's notorious MITI: a government agency directing capital investment where it otherwise wouldn't go. Clinton isn't proposing anything like this, though Perot may be.

The nearest equivalent these days to those pure industrial policy visions is not Clinton's set of proposals but Bush's. Bush's chosen instrument is tax breaks, but the principle is exactly the same. It is the use of government policy to direct investment capital where it would not otherwise go.

Bush's treasured capital gains tax cut would artificially favor one form of investment. His treasured "enterprise zones" would direct capital into certain geographical areas when the invisible hand would direct it into others. The 1988 Republican platform promises special tax breaks to farmers,

Michael Kinsley
The New Republic

small oil drillers and so on. The market distortion caused by each break like this is bigger than the break itself. The point of these breaks is leverage: a million-dollar tax saving may tip the balance in favor of a \$100 million investment. But that's \$100 million that isn't invested somewhere else.

Does Bush have some reason to suppose he knows better than the free market how much capital should go to different sorts of businesses? Sophisticated economists have developed some respectable answers to that basic industrial policy conundrum.

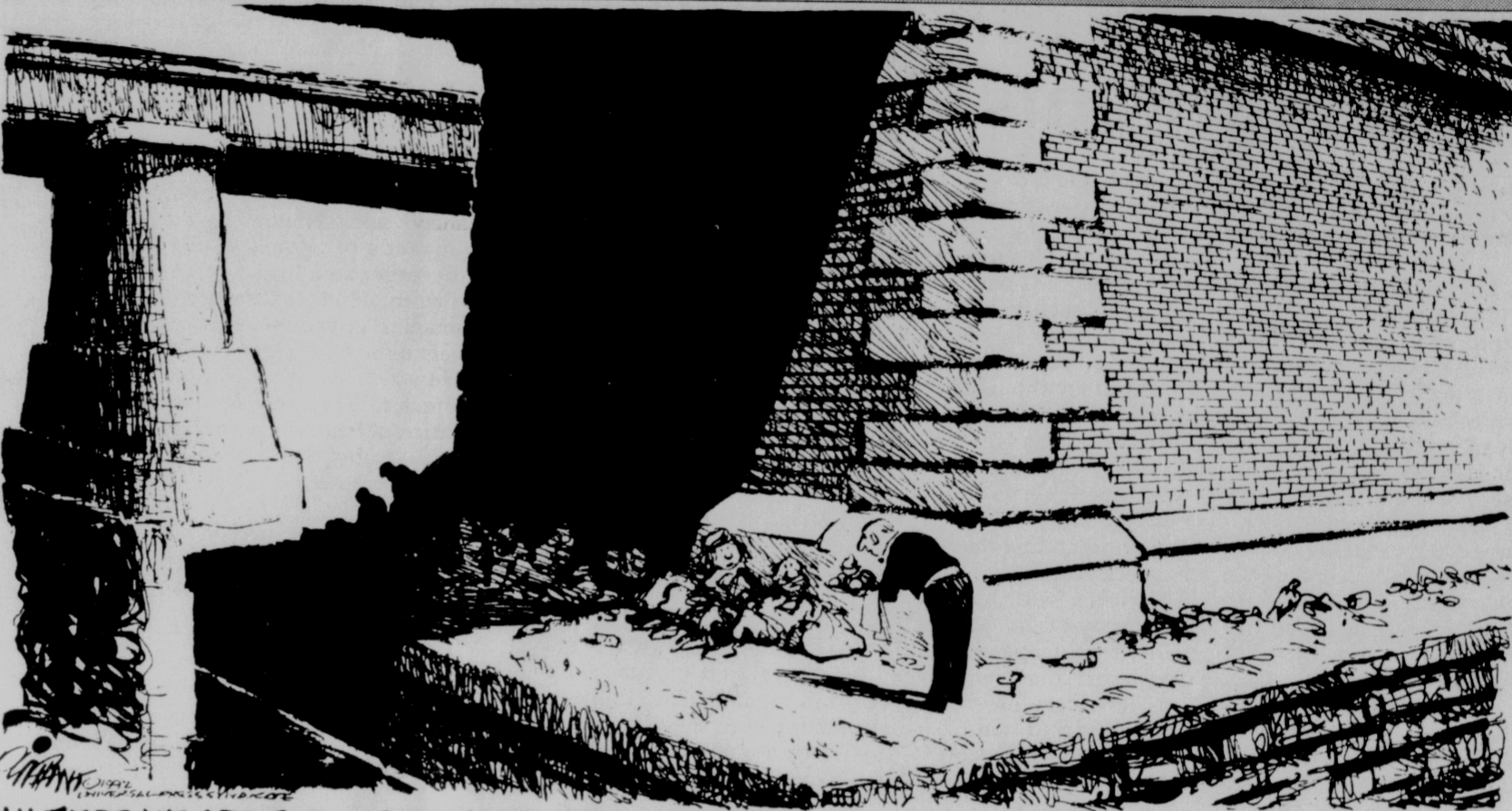
What Clinton proposes is actually less like hard-core industrial policy than the Bush approach. Clinton's emphasis is on areas that nearly everyone agrees are within the proper sphere of government, such as public infrastructure, education and scientific research. He simply broadens the definitions a bit and relabels such government spending as "investment."

Clinton's model is the Interstate Highway System of the 1950s, a genuine public investment with a huge payoff for the private sector. Clinton wants to spend \$200 billion, not just fixing roads and bridges but creating "high-speed rail links" and a fiber-optic network "to link every home, business lab, classroom and library by the year 2015."

Nevertheless, anyone who flew into New York for the Democratic convention will not need convincing that we have allowed our airports and highways to deteriorate disgracefully. Public "investment" is not a nonsense concept, and there clearly hasn't been enough of it in recent years for the private sector's own good.

Republicans have been brilliant at quietly embracing the popular monuments of postwar liberalism — civil rights, Medicare and so on — while reattaching the labels — "Great Society," "war on poverty," "liberal" itself — to ugly fantasies of their own creation. The term "liberal" is worth fighting for. The term "industrial policy" probably isn't. But it's worth pointing out that Bush, as usual, is trying to have it both ways.

Kinsley is a senior editor of *The New Republic*, in which this article first appeared.



‘AH, THERE WE ARE, SIR. ALONG WITH STRONG FAMILY VALUES, OUR GOVERNMENT IS ALSO STRESSING FIVE SERVINGS OF FRUIT OR VEGETABLES PER DAY. BON APPETIT.’

New UT president must be an insider

The University has reached a critical juncture. President William Cunningham has ascended to the position of UT System chancellor, creating an opportunity for the University to make a fundamental statement about the purpose and organization of American higher education.

Unfortunately, the process will probably result in a president who panders to every conceivable whiner. What the University needs is just the opposite — a courageous leader who can rescue undergraduate education from overcrowding and from the lunatic deconstruction by the Department of English. The University needs a president who possesses characteristics of successful past presidents Peter Flawn and William Cunningham — familiarity with the Texas political system and the business world — but who also displays a tough leadership necessary to revitalize undergraduate education.

The next UT president simply must understand Texas politics. Lone star politics remain enigmatic and confounding to the outsider. For example, after the tumultuous year 1970 when the College of Arts and Sciences was divided and its dean, John Silber, left, UT recruited outsider Stephen Spurr from the University of Michigan as president. Spurr was perplexed by faculty-administration conflicts and by the management of a sprawling campus. He commonly clashed with the Board of Regents over non-institutional construction and faculty salaries. Also, Frank Erwin frequently acted as a de facto chancellor, often personally coming to campus to supervise operations. Nothing in Spurr's northern experience prepared him for such interference. So, on Sept. 23, 1974, Chancellor Charles LeMaistre fired Spurr.

Choosing a president from within the UT System or from elsewhere in Texas will mitigate the type of problems Spurr encountered, because

Jeff Hutchison
TEXAN COLUMNIST

"What the University needs is a courageous leader who can rescue undergraduate education."

such a president will understand the demands and desires of the regents and the state Legislature. Selecting a president who takes his barbecue sauce mild and lacks the political skills to work within the good ol' boy system will only lead to dissension that disrupts the stability necessary for improving the university.

As well as possessing political skill, the next president should have experience in the business world. Though much criticism was directed at Cunningham because of his marketing discipline, his background served him well, enabling him to sell UT to parents, prospective students, alumni and, of course, businesses interested in investing in the University. This led to the accusation that "Dollar" Bill Cunningham was a "pimp" who sold the University to the highest bidder. But during a time of fiscal chaos, when the University rapidly became more of a state-assisted than a state-supported institution, Cunningham more than doubled the UT budget.

Any attempt to define the University as a sacred and inviolable hall of learning, where outside interests must not interfere, will surely diminish private sector largess. If cooperating with business interests means sitting on several corporate boards, then so be it. Admittedly, immediate student concerns are occasionally neglected in favor of lucrative business con-

tracts. But such relatively mild sacrifice is necessary if the "University of the First Class" is to receive the funding it deserves.

Any effort to increase revenues will be in vain, however, if undergraduate education is neglected. This is the one legacy of Cunningham that should be discontinued by his successor. We need someone with courage to give more than lip service to the issues confronting the average student. We need a leader who will act boldly in accordance with convictions — something Cunningham never seemed able to condescend to.

A principled president should insist admissions and hirings be based purely on merit. He should continue the trend towards raising admission standards and restricting enrollment in order to decrease the overcrowding that has depersonalized and bureaucratized the University. He should unequivocally state that a radical egalitarian agenda does not belong in introductory writing courses and that business and engineering students simply do not have time for six hours of multicultural indoctrination. Furthermore, he must fight obstructions to free debate embodied in the wave of college speech codes recently declared unconstitutional. Finally, he should prevent the University from becoming a sleazy motel replete with condom vending machines and homosexual pornography.

It may seem improbable in today's university forged by Woodstock, Vietnam and loads of LSD, but somewhere amid the ruins of the once venerable academy, there just has to be at least one man or woman committed to excellence. If the University makes the effort, it can find someone who knows how to deal with political constituencies, how to bring in large amounts of private funding and how to restore classroom intimacy, free speech and decency to campus.

Hutchison is a Plan II junior.

FIRING LINE



Traffic death conclusions flawed

Mr. Vreeland, you have missed the point ("Traffic fatality illustrates problems present in U.S. system," *The Daily Texan*, July 17).

You may have thought that your firsthand account of the traffic fatality you witnessed and how you linked this to the problems of America is above reproach. It's not.

First, what does a traffic accident have to do with Peru, Rodney King and the general discord of the universe?

Additionally, what solutions have you offered us? The next few paragraphs may reveal a small amount of cynicism, but I feel that the ultimate in cynicism is a hollow complaint that lacks a solution — your column, for example.

I am sorry that you had to see such a grisly occurrence. But hey, James, people die every day. Grandmothers have their necks mercilessly whipped into the front windshield at top speed. Twelve-year olds on

their way to baseball practice end up taking huge bites out of dashboards.

People are stabbed, robbed, laid off, made fun of and railroaded every minute of the day all over the world (in Peru, too). The guy who draws the cards up there to tell when a person's number is up is indifferent, comic and cruel and cares nothing for traffic laws.

Mr. Vreeland, why don't you solve your pet problem you have with the world and quit driving? Wouldn't it be a little more useful than throwing a truck driver in jail for the rest of his life because he made a mistake?

By the way, where do you get off judging the truck driver? Cars are the problem, not stoplights. People feel powerful and immune to death in cars. But, they can't give them up — not even an enormously sensitive person like yourself.

It's really hip to blame every little problem on a higher entity, an ideal or a boogey man. But the people who do this (such as

the guy with the pony tail and the Greenpeace sticker who secretly longs to kill someone, the blue pin-striped young conservative out to save the world and put a few extra dollars in his bank account) talk the talk but they don't walk the walk.

I am convinced that people such as yourself hold getting laid as your highest ideal, and this hollow sensitivity and equivocation that you flaunt is just a means to an end.

Hell, I would have admired your column, if the gist of it resounded an honest and true, "Better her than me."

Regardless of any of my previous logic, I know life is for the living and July Fourth would be more enjoyable with a typically fat American with a river of chicken fat flowing down his blubbery, glistening stomach than a whining, killjoy busybody such as yourself.

Patrick Million
English