

Austin American-Statesman

COMMENTARY

Beyond P.C.

The Nov. 16 letter by Maxine Hairston about the English 306 course is a prime example of how the allegation of "political correctness" depends upon subtle rhetorical sleights-of-hand. Professor Hairston, a renowned rhetorician who has often spoken publicly on this issue, says that "the facts about the course speak for themselves." The fact she underscores is that "the sole book of readings required" was "left-oriented" and edited by a self-professed Marxist feminist, Paula Rothenberg.

Technically, she is correct. This was the sole book of readings. Still, there was also required a book-length packet of photocopied materials including essays that countered Rothenberg's selections.

There was also another book required, though not one of readings.

This was *Handbook for Writers* written by Professor Hairston herself (in collaboration with another outspoken opponent of this course, John Ruskiewicz).

So why does Professor Hairston's letter omit these other textbooks? It is presumably because she believes the course was, in her words, "built around the writings of this teacher" — that is, Rothenberg.

But again, notice the sleight-of-hand. Professor Hairston makes the Rothenberg anthology sound like a collection of Rothenberg's own writings. Then, by asserting the course has

been "built around" these, she suggests the course mindlessly reproduces Rothenberg's political prejudices. While maintaining that Rothenberg's text is the sole biased one, Professor Hairston never mentions her own, equally biased text — the sort of text that Professor Hairston has repeatedly and cheerfully asserted writing courses ought to be built around, for hers is the correct way to teach writing.

The real problem here is that facts do not speak for themselves. They are spoken by rhetoricians with positions — whether radical Marxists like Rothenberg or normative formalists like

Hairston — who have agendas for what is "correct." I want college faculty to get beyond the sophomoric taunt of "political correctness," which defrauds debate, and teach students argumentative and critical skills sufficient to rebut Hairston or Rothenberg — or me.

KURT HEINZELMAN
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Bullet train

There may soon be a "bullet train" rumbling through your community. I have just seen the maps for this project. They have gone so far as to list elevations, etc. on a route that will come through or near my farm in Caldwell County.

The director of the Texas High Speed Rail Authority has been quoted as saying that the noise level will be 98 decibels from a distance of 82 feet. These trains will run at 200 mph every seven to 15 minutes.

It will cut off a portion of my farm and I will have to detour about a mile and a half every time I want to plow on that piece of land.

This is to be financed by private funds. I understand while they cannot use state funds, they have applied for other public funds from federal and local municipalities.

Two counties have pledged to stop this. More should.

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Non-writing book

In the Nov. 14 *American-Statesman*, Professor Kurt Heinzelman attempted to rebut Professor Maxine Hairston's protest about English 306. Specifically, he asserted that the *Handbook for Writers* by Hairston and John Ruskiewicz is as biased as is *Racism and Sexism*, Paula Rothenberg's anthology serving as principal textbook of 306.

To label as biased the teaching of traditional English is simply to deconstruct the dictionary. Most of those who bother to peruse these books will conclude that *Handbook for Writers* conforms exactly to the title and has no political agenda whatever. I defy

anyone to find a single ideological passage in it, unless you choose to count its condemnation of sexist language. The Rothenberg book, by contrast, has very little to do with rhetoric and everything to do with class war, surely a strange basis for an English course. Rothenberg's book doesn't teach writing merely in a non-traditional way; it doesn't teach writing in any way at all. That Heinzelman proclaims his fair-mindedness and in the same breath so deviously compares the two textbooks should make everyone the more suspicious of what English 306 is really meant to accomplish.

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Recycling rates

Odeen Hibbs's letter (Dec. 9) derides the state Railroad Commission's taking action toward equalizing transportation rates for recyclable materials hauled within Texas with those for hauling across state lines. As a trucking industry member witnessing the loss of fellow haulers, Hibbs should greet the news that additional commodities will become available for hauling. The urban mines and concrete forests are rich in untapped resources. Unfortunately, their transportation costs often exceeds their value.

It has been cheaper to haul Texas recyclables to out-of-state facilities and vice versa. But that's changing so recyclables can compete with their virgin material counterparts. Raw materials are usually hauled the relatively short distance from forests or mines by industry members themselves, exempt from high regulated freight rates. The Champion International newsprint mills near Houston and Lufkin

are good examples. Reasonable freight rates must be available for old newspapers to substitute for the trees Champion consumes. Until the Railroad Commission completes its tasks, the only reasonable rates for Champion are interstate rates that could favor Champion's consuming New Orleans newspapers. Texas newspapers would be hauled by garbage trucks and Texas truckers would be left out.

Flexible recycling freight rates will mean good business for the Texas recycling industry and truckers.

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Truth in advertising

I am writing to express my support for *The Daily Texan's* refusal to run the ad questioning the occurrence of the Holocaust.

Running this ad promoting serious untruths and bigotry would only spread Bradley Smith's white supremacist views. What ads would other groups want to run next — that child pornography is really good for Americans, that cigarette smoking is really healthy, that blacks deserve to be treated as second-class citizens?

Freedom of speech is a basic and important constitutional right. Opinions and other similar comments belong only in the editorial section. A newspaper, even in its advertisements, should take a stand to ensure its accuracy. This should hold true for political ads as well.

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Nix the camel

I was appalled at the medical profession's reaction to the news that kids are more familiar with the Camel logo