

# Committee created to clarify rhetoric division

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Daily Texan Staff

Concerns about the powers that the director of a new UT writing division may have prompted members of the Department of English to create a committee to quell anxiety over the change.

Faculty and graduate students are concerned that nearly every area of the department, from staffing to course content, would fall under the jurisdiction of a single person, subject only to approval of the dean.

A special meeting of the Department of English was held to give students and faculty members a chance to air concerns about the recent approval to create a separate

Division of Rhetoric and Composition, which came as a surprise to many in the department.

"The prospect laid out in this proposal involves issues of course content at every level, issues of staffing the courses, the recruitment and retention of graduate students, the hiring and promotion of faculty who will be teaching courses under English Department [course] numbers ... without any involvement or control by any currently constituted administrative committee of the department," said Evan Carton, a graduate adviser and professor of English.

The group of about 50 people who attended the meeting voted overwhelmingly to create a committee to clarify objectives of the proposal.

"There is an enormous number of questions unanswered about this whole division business that have to be answered as quickly as possible," said Joseph Kruppa, chairman of the English Department.

The committee should be organized by the end of the week, Kruppa said.

The idea of separating composition and rhetoric from literature stems from more than 20 years of disagreements concerning the teaching of writing within the Department of English.

As part of its effort to improve writing instruction at the University, the Presidential Committee on the Undergraduate Experience issued a report in late 1991 recommending "that a Division of Rhetoric and Composition be established in the

College of Liberal Arts that would be responsible for the administration, staffing, and teaching of first-year and advanced composition courses."

The committee made no further statements concerning the division in its report.

Although members of the English department have been aware of the committee's recommendation, many were surprised to read the contents of a Sept. 1 memo issued by Kruppa. Attached to the memo was a letter from former UT President William Cunningham to acting Dean of Liberal Arts Robert King that mandated the new division's tentative implementation by June 1, 1993.

"As far as I know, very few people in this department have been involved in any kind

of deliberations leading up to the various announcements that such a division was in the works with even a starting date," Carton said.

Concerns about the proposal went beyond its actual test, said Kruppa. He said the "division" label was itself ambiguous.

"We're very vague about this whole idea of 'division,'" Kruppa said. "Some see it as a division of the English Department; others see it as a separate entity of the College of Liberal Arts. It's another question that needs to be answered to determine that indeed this thing is what [the creators of the proposal] want."

Friday's meeting was also a forum for

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# Rhetoric

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theoretical debate concerning whether splitting the English Department was the way to ensure the best possible education for students in the first place. Some said the decision was made too hastily.

"It's no surprise that I've been opposed to [the division] from the beginning," Kruppa said. "Now, I am in favor of some of its aims, but I don't necessarily think we need a division to do that."

Only one person at the meeting said he supported the creation of

the division.

Others said they wanted more information before committing their support, and felt that since the division was already mandated, efforts should begin to design it in the most constructive fashion.

"I'm pleased that the dean shares our concern for our desire to improve writing at UT," said Linda Ferreira-Buckley, associate professor of English.

"Now we must all try to figure out the best way to do that."

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