

New English requirements criticized

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Daily Texan Staff

As James Sledd, professor of English, sees it, if the University Council does not amend the new English requirements, "A lot of kids who need help with their writing won't get it."

Sledd argued at the council's Dec. 13 meeting that future UT students should have a choice between a new, upper-division composition course, E 346K, and a second semester of composition at the freshman level.

The English curriculum proposed by the council's Committee on Basic Education Requirements — "the Vick Committee" — would require students in all colleges to take English 306 followed by E 316K, a sophomore level course.

Students would then be required to take two upper-division courses "with a substantial writing component," in the language of the committee's proposal. One of these courses could be, but would not necessarily be, E 346K.

In a 19-page memorandum Sledd states: "I believe there is strong evidence that the new requirements in English are intended as a step toward the complete abolition of freshman composition, even though our entering freshmen score much worse on their exemption test than they did a dozen years ago ... It is

unquestionable that a high proportion of our freshmen still can't handle the conventions of the English writing system even though they have passed E 306."

Sledd, who distributed the memorandum to council members on Dec. 7, said Tuesday, "I just want to give students a choice and give freshmen help when they need help.

"If a lot of students flunk out before their junior year — and a lot of them do — there'll be less students to teach in those junior and senior classes," Sledd said. "The new requirements deny help to students and count on a substantial flunk-out rate.

"They want to get rid of the burden of teaching freshmen. They want to get rid of the course in hope of getting rid of the transient population (the lecturers) in the English department."

But some members of the English department faculty disagree.

James Kinneavy, professor of English and former director of freshman English, said Sledd's proposal to continue offering second-semester freshman composition courses "would deprive the student who chooses the freshman option of a professional teacher of writing to assist him in his writing in his major area at a time when he has a mature grasp of his field."

Sledd said Tuesday that Kinneavy's

statement was "just nonsense from beginning to end" and that he will issue a statement Friday correcting the "misrepresentation." He also said he will bring up the proposal again in the University Council's Jan. 24 meeting.

In his memorandum Sledd states that "logistic considerations," such as staffing and scheduling problems, were the primary reasons behind the new English requirements.

Kinneavy called the charge "irrelevant" and "inaccurate."

Joseph Kruppa, associate chairman of the Department of English, said Tuesday of the new English requirements: "Obviously we were being pressured in lots of different directions. A lot of people weren't satisfied with the way the English program was working ... It wasn't just a numbers game. Anyone who participated in the lengthy discussions of the English department knows that's simply not true."

At the meeting, R. Neill Megaw, professor of English, said: "I think it is important to disabuse you of any idea that the English department is a united phalanx in opposition to Dr. Sledd on this issue. I think it would be a pity if we conveyed in the discussion the idea that we have some sort of party line on this matter."