

TACT AND THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE TEACHING OF WRITING

Contrary to the impression which some may have received, the executive committee of the UT-Austin chapter of TACT has until now taken no position on the controversy in the Department of English over the teaching of writing. The position endorsed by the executive committee at a special meeting on Wednesday, March 6, is as follows:

- 1) The Santa Rita Express will continue to solicit and publish expressions of opinion on all sides of the issue;
- 2) TACT is concerned that the faculty as a whole no longer has any role in the governance of the Department of English;
- 3) TACT is concerned that the commendable effort by the University administration to secure more extensive instruction in writing appears to be in jeopardy;
- 4) TACT is concerned that so many of those now teaching courses in the University have been hired without the careful scrutiny which customarily precedes the appointment of faculty to tenured or tenure-track positions and that people so hired are then treated as second class faculty.

The Executive Committee
TACT, UT-Austin Chapter

English 346K

The officers of the local chapter of the Texas Association of College Teachers met on February 20 with the English Department Lecturers (at their request) and with other interested faculty and students, about 65 all told, including five active members of the TACT board. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the recent and unforeseen administrative decision to shelve English 346K (the one remaining writing course required of all students, the Junior-level "Writing in the Disciplines") and the consequent anticipated severance of English Department Lecturers. Those assembled were told that all personal attacks and all discussions of motives would be ruled out of order; I am grateful to all that the result was a well-behaved and efficient meeting that addressed itself strictly to the issue of setting aside this very large course. TACT has not taken a position on this complicated problem, but the officers have felt it important to hear the case made by those immediately involved in teaching the course (about 40 of the faculty present) and to relay these arguments to the general TACT membership.

Resolution 1: To affirm support for E.346K and the overall writing program of which it is an integral part. Passed 43-1 (only teaching faculty voting).

Resolution 2: To endorse the discovery and publication of data concerning grade distribution in E.346K, and student evaluations of E.346K, and to compare this data with parallel data from other upper-division courses. Passed unanimously.

Resolution 3: If E.346K is dropped for the coming year ('85-'86), to request the reinstating of E.307, E.308, E. 310, E.317, and any other appropriate writing course for the duration of the suspension of E.346K. Passed unanimously.

Resolution 4: That TACT officers and the UT Faculty Senate check on possible violations of contractual obligations to students who were subject to the E.346K catalogue requirement. Adopted without opposition as a directive to the chair.

Resolution 5: To refer the entire matter to the Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility for investigation and possible action. Passed unanimously.

Vice President Fonken has described the situation, in carefully chosen terms, as an essentially pragmatic problem. It was felt, however, that the overwhelming feeling *on every side* is that several quite deep questions of principle are involved. It was hoped that the administrative decision on E.346K had not yet hardened into inflexibility, and that compromises (at least) are still possible.

The meeting wished it to be known that it felt we were on the verge of losing an important commitment to basic and general skills, and that whether or not E.346K has the shortcomings it has been claimed to have, it has nevertheless drawn to itself a wealth of resources (faculty, an investment of curricular planning) which, once let go, cannot easily be reassembled.

TACT officers will welcome comments on this issue from the membership.

Robert G. Twombly

Another Point of View

By Alan Gribben, Associate Professor of English

The English Department is catching its breath. Twenty years of soaring enrollments at U.T. Austin have placed severe strains on the Department of English, which must administer *three* required courses to students seeking bachelor degrees, an obligation greater than that borne by any other department. Our seventy-one professors take their turns at these lower-division courses, but they must somehow staff a total of 443 lower-division, upper-division, and graduate sections. In 1978, desperately seeking help, we resorted to the expedient of hiring out-of-work English Ph.D.s as temporary lecturers.

The breaking point for our department arrived with English 346K, a new required upper-division course that confronted us with a human tidal wave—7,500 students and 150 sections were anticipated next year. Equally discouraging, there were enormous problems with the experimental sections of 346K this year—rampant grade inflations (84% of the students received A's or B's), difficulties in convincing students to register for sections appropriate to their academic majors, and a genuine lack of course content.


Our departmental Chairman has received permission to postpone the implementation of the 346K English requirement until we can reexamine the premises of this troubled course. The faculty's first responsibility is the integrity and quality of the courses required of U.T. students; we cannot be expected to perpetually employ the sixty lecturers hired on one-year contracts. These lecturers will receive our utmost efforts to place them in comparable or better teaching situations elsewhere. They understandably resent the fact that they will not be necessary to our program next year, but we are relieved that the English Department will finally be able to staff its courses without relying on temporary teachers.

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