

## DOCUMENTS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL

MOTION TO CHANGE ALL U.T. AUSTIN UNDERGRADUATE  
DEGREE PROGRAMS THAT ARE WITHIN THE SPIRIT OF THE REPORT  
OF THE COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

James H. Sledd (English), Member of the University Council, has filed with the Secretary of the University Council the motion set forth below. The Secretary has classified this motion as major legislation. The 21-day circulation rule for major legislation will be complied with on December 10, 1982.

Notice is hereby given that this motion will be presented to the University Council for action at its meeting on December 13, 1982.

*H. Paul Kelley*  
H. Paul Kelley, Secretary  
The University Council

MOTION TO CHANGE ALL U.T. AUSTIN UNDERGRADUATE  
DEGREE PROGRAMS THAT ARE WITHIN THE SPIRIT OF THE REPORT  
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Colleges and schools are now in the process of proposing, and the University Council is in the process of approving, changes to the U.T. Austin Catalogue in order to bring undergraduate degree programs within the spirit of the report of the Committee on Basic Education Requirements (the Vick Committee). Those changes include a required sequence of three English courses -- E.306 (Rhetoric and Composition), E.316K (Masterworks of Literature), and E.346K (Writing in Different Disciplines), plus two additional courses certified as having a substantial writing component. In order to allow students at the freshman level the option of taking a second semester of composition, the motion shown below will be made.

MOTION:

At every point where the new Writing Requirements for U.T. Austin undergraduate degree programs specify E.346K, students will be given a choice between E.346K and a second semester of composition at the freshman level.

Of the following arguments for this motion, Numbers 1-6 are criticisms of the new requirements, and Numbers 7-10 are a justification of the choice proposed in the motion.

1. The new requirements as they stand are a mere logistic device, not an educational device. Their primary purpose is to lighten what administration and faculty consider the "burden" of teaching freshmen to read and write. A concomitant purpose is to reduce the size of the English Department's transient population and second-class citizenry (TAs, AIs, lecturers).

2. In the discussion before the adoption of the new requirements, the representatives of the English Department systematically misled the faculty and the Council.\*

\*Documentary evidence of this misrepresentation will be made available for anyone who wants it.

3. The educational consequence of the new requirements will be that the students who most need help with their writing will not get it, while the faculty will concentrate its efforts on small sections of upperclassmen--precisely the students who have proved their ability to survive in college without much help with their writing.

4. The Vick Committee offered no serious justification for the new requirements in English but instead accepted the English Department's proposal; but the Vick Committee did imply a severe criticism of the State's secondary schools when it remarked that 82% of our entering freshmen cannot pass the exemption examination for E.306, although all of them should be able to pass it. It would logically follow from that judgment that U.T. Austin would inaugurate a major program of help to teachers of composition in the schools, as the University of Michigan, often cited as a model for the new requirements, in fact has done; but U.T. Austin has adopted only that part of the Michigan model which reduces enrollment in freshman composition, just as the English Department inaccurately reported only selected features of the 1975 Sledd study. Thus we create bad feeling and short-change our students by saying that the schools should teach the skills of E.306 yet at the same time refusing to offer any significant help.

5. The new requirements, if they are really enforced on all students, including transfers, will create further ill feeling by devaluing the second semester of freshman composition, a part of the cherished "core curriculum" at other institutions. If the new requirement of E.346K is not enforced on all students, including transfers (and the English Department's documents say flatly that it will not be), then anybody can evade the requirement by simply taking a second semester of freshman composition at a community college. If the new requirements were based on educational considerations, that loophole would have been firmly closed.

6. The new requirements have been imposed so hastily, and with such inadequate discussion, that they are not accompanied by even the most elementary safeguards. For example, "a substantial writing component" remains undefined, and no provision has been made for a review of the working of the new requirements after a reasonable trial.

7. The 1975 Sledd study was insistently cited as "a strong mandate" for the new requirements, but in fact the faculty in 1975 voted for an optional shift of one semester of freshman composition from the freshman year to the upper division, not a required shift. This proposal gives the faculty what it voted for. There is a huge difference between may and must.

8. In the 1975 survey, over 75% of the students said that systematic instruction in composition is most effective in the freshman year, though motivation would be higher in the upper division. The proposed option would allow both majority and minority wishes to be satisfied.

9. For almost a decade now, an option of some sort has been allowed in the second semester of composition (the present choice is between E.307 and E.308). That option was introduced by the Sagik Committee, which was appointed by the administration and which had James Kinneavy among its members. Another administratively appointed committee, chaired by Maxine Hairston (also of English), reviewed the present program at the instruction of President Rogers and reported that the program was working well. The provision of an option would thus be in accord with past actions by administratively appointed committees and representatives of the English Department.

10. Allowing the student to choose between E.346K and a second semester of composition at the freshman level would answer arguments 1, 2, 3, and 5 above and would reduce the level of distrust and resentment which the new requirements have dangerously raised. This proposal would allow faculty and administration to say honestly that at its Centennial, U.T. Austin has improved its program in composition while respecting the wishes of all concerned, including the wishes of students.