

editorials

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viewpoint

English committee's proposal doesn't make the grade

An academic leper is a sorry thing to be. But on Wednesday, the UT Department of English just may banish 60 percent of us to the educational forbidden zones of night school, Austin Community College or summer school by voting in favor of the recent E 346K Committee proposal.

By now, it's no secret that the University is eager to be known as a "university of the first class." This fine ideal is guiding the Department of English through its current problems, but the ideal is being lost in the mechanics of an insensitive proposal.

In its present form, the E 346K Committee's recommendation is no way out of the trap. The committee merely shifts problems from the faculty to the students.

The product of a chronically mishandled situation, the E 346K Committee proposal

is an attempt by the department to redeem itself in the eyes of UT administrators, national English scholars, and last — and apparently least in this situation — students.

The issue is E 306, freshman rhetoric and composition. Forty percent of incoming freshmen place out of E 306. But how does the nation's largest English faculty handle the problem of staffing a course required of the unlucky students who don't place out? Stop teaching the course. Still require it, but let freshmen pick it up somewhere else.

The biggest problem the department has with E 306 is the volume of instructors needed to teach it. For years, the department hired gaggles of non-tenured faculty to teach the class. These temporary instructors divided the faculty and helped erode the department's national reputa-

tion.

Similar staffing problems arose when all UT students were required to take E 346K. Additional temporary instructors came on to teach the upper-division course. Some were fresh from their own bachelor's programs. Sort of like letting bus drivers pilot the Concorde.

So when E 346K was grounded last spring, the protests were loud and furious. The English faculty became entrenched in controversy as departmental infighting turned nasty.

So the E 346K Committee spent the summer trying to restructure the required English sequence. No easy task, considering the circumstances.

The staff necessary to teach three required courses just isn't there, but requiring anything less than nine hours would

upset the balance between writing and literature courses. Besides, the University requires that each student take nine hours of English, including E 306.

Faced with all this, the committee tried to make everyone happy. Everyone, that is, except the students.

With the staffing problems, it made the most sense at the time to pass off the easiest course to UT extension — night school — and let the Department of English concentrate on more sophisticated courses.

But the committee either does not realize or refuses to recognize the hardships their plan will cause. The cost of taking E 306 through UT extension would be \$108. That's on top of regular tuition and fees.

The committee also forgot that the students on financial aid won't be able to count extension or junior college courses

as part of their course loads. So to be eligible for aid, those students will have to take a full course load at the University *plus* the extension or ACC course.

But the University will be generous enough to teach E 306 during the summer — a time when students work to make money for the long session.

If that seems like a lot to ask of students, it is. That's why the Department of English must vote the proposal down.

Plainly and simply, this proposal stabs students in the back. If the department votes against the plan, it will have the chance to take a worthy ideal and consider more workable alternatives.

The Department of English can do better than this.

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