

# Panel emphasizes importance of basic writing skills

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Of six areas of basic education requirements — social science, natural sciences, foreign language, mathematics, fine arts/humanities and writing — the Vick Committee considered writing the most crucial.

"Of primary importance is the ability to express one's thoughts clearly and correctly in writing," states the report by the University Council's Committee on Basic Education Requirements, chaired by James Vick, assistant dean for the College of Natural Sciences.

"This skill can rarely be achieved simply by taking courses in freshman composition, especially in the case of students who read little and thus have neither role models to imitate nor ideas to express. One should be capable of reasoning effectively from hypotheses to conclusions and logically analyzing the arguments of others," the report

said.

Before the Vick Report, the most recent general legislation dealing with basic education requirements was the 1955 Graham Committee Report, which required a minimum of 45 hours in basic courses for every undergraduate degree program.

Under the Graham requirements, undergraduates were required to take two three-hour courses of freshman composition and two three-hour courses of sophomore literature. In 1972 the course sequence was reduced from 12 to nine hours at the request of John Silber, former dean of the now-dissolved College of Arts and Sciences.

But with the nine-hour English requirement, Vick said, "We felt students weren't getting as much training and experience (writing) as they needed."

In spring 1979, Robert King, dean of the newly established College of Liberal Arts, set out to find "the best way to

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## The Vick Report

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### creating a core curriculum

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teach composition." A Department of English committee responded with what is known as the "Kinneavy Report," named for committee chairman James Kinneavy, then director of freshman English.

In the English department, debate over the proposed requirements centered on two issues: the degree to which composition should be emphasized and where in the curriculum the composition requirement should be placed.

Kinneavy said several problems in the Department of English prompted the revised English course sequence,

including the fact that the writing lab "was not doing the work it should be."

Kinneavy said the new requirements were partially motivated to solve the "lecturer problem" — the department's need to contract temporary staff every semester to teach extra sections of several lower-division English courses. However, he added, that end was not the main justification for the requirements.

"We had to hire 70 teachers on non-tenure basis, and that offends many of us who feel tenure is a necessary part of the University," Kinneavy said.

However, King said the new requirements were being planned "long before we had a lecturer problem. I couldn't have had more than about 20 lecturers (on staff) at that time."

James Sledd, professor of English, tried unsuccessfully in February to pass through the University Council a proposal to allow students the option of

taking a second semester of freshman composition, E307, instead of — or in addition to — the new E346K.

At the time Sledd said administrators were opposed to his proposal because "They want to cut the enrollment of freshman English in half ... They want to get rid of the course in hope of getting rid of the transient population (of lecturers) in the English department."

The Kinneavy Report, which was adopted by University Council as legislation separate from the Vick Report, recommended revising the required lower-division composition courses and spreading them out through the junior year. The plan will require students in all colleges who have not earned advanced placement in freshman composition to take English 306. All students will take E316K, a sophomore literature course, and E346K, an upper-division composition course.

The Vick Committee added to the

Kinneavy recommendation a requirement that students take two additional courses that have, in the language of the committee's recommendations, "a substantial writing component." At least one of these two courses must be upper-division.

Proponents of the new writing requirements say the new program will encourage "writing across the curriculum" — that is, students practicing writing within their chosen fields of study.

King said departments are in the process of identifying courses outside the Department of English that contain, or with some revision would contain, a substantial writing component. A Department of English committee will act as a "resource center" for teachers lacking experience in teaching writing, he said.

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*Friday: Planning ahead for the new requirements.*