

Writing shifts to new division

Rhetoric and Composition split from Department of English

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Department split an improvement, page 4

A new division has been created in the College of Liberal Arts to teach writing to students, a move that shifts that responsibility from the Department of English.

Beginning June 1, undergraduates will register for writing courses under the Division of Rhetoric and Composition, although their professors will likely continue to be from the Department of English.

The prospect of separating writing from the Department of English has been the center of controversy for years, and the creation of the division Tuesday caught many by surprise.

Some faculty members contacted Tuesday were unaware of the change and declined comment until they had a chance to review the situation.

On his last day before becoming UT System chancellor, former UT President William Cunningham established the division on a recommendation of the Special Committee on the Undergraduate Experience.

"The establishment of a Division of Rhetoric and Composition will be a great step forward in the continuing improvement of the undergraduate educational experience," Cunningham said in a prepared statement. "It is one of the most exciting undertakings that I have been privileged to participate in during my years as president of the University."

The plan will take courses such as Rhetoric and Composition, Advanced Expository Writing and Topics in Editing from under the supervision of the Department of English.

The department has been rocked by controversies since summer 1990 when some professors sought to

include more minority subjects in writing classes.

But Robert King, acting dean of the College of Liberal Arts, has said separating writing courses from the Department of English is unrelated to these controversies.

"I am disappointed that some people would think this has anything to do with past events in the English Department," King said after the proposal came under criticism from faculty in the Department of English in July.

"The teaching of writing and composition has been a problem at this university for the past three decades."

King did not return phone calls Tuesday, and Joseph Kruppa, chairman of the Department of English, who has previously opposed the separation, was unavailable for comment.

Frank Bean, chairman of the Presidential Committee on the Undergraduate Experience and a professor of sociology, said the committee made the recommendation to strengthen course offerings on writing skills.

"Having something devoted expressly to instruction on writing skills would also get away from some of the tension between the English Department and the College of Liberal Arts on who should assume the responsibility of writing instruction," Bean said.

There has been a tug of war between the Department of English, which includes literature and other classes in addition to writing courses, and other colleges "who say, 'Our students need to know how to write,'" Bean said.

The new division "focuses atten-

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tion on writing without saying it's only the responsibility of the English Department," Bean said.

John Ruszkiewicz, associate professor of English, said the Division of Rhetoric and Composition will help students as well as encourage better teaching among the faculty.

"I think it will help students immensely. This is a division where programs in writing will be devel-

oped consistently over time," Ruszkiewicz said. "In the long run, we'll end up with one of the best writing programs in the country."

Bean said the committee did not decide what changes will be made in the Department of English as a result of the new division.

"We saw ourselves as a committee to put forth ideas, not a nuts-and-bolts committee," he said.