

Freshman English Policy Committee Meeting

December 9, 1977

Calhoun 323, 3:00-4:00

Members present: Kinneavy, Trimble, Saldivar, Ruszkiewicz, Haney,
Wainwright, Creel, Cameron

Guests Present: Lee Pitre, John Durbin

Agenda: (starred items deferred)

- * Approval of minutes
- * Standing committee reports
- Special committee reports
 - Grade inflation
 - Apprentice program
- Other business
- * Faculty appointments to E306Ind.
- * FEPC Calendar
 - Teachers' use of student materials

1. At the request of Dr. Kinneavy, Jim Creel moved and the committee passed a motion to suspend the regular order of business and to attend the issues our guests came to talk about first. (The minutes of the meetings of November 4 and November 18 were ^{not} (never) considered.)

2. Lee Pitre presented a report on the effect of recent "privacy" laws on the conduct of teachers; basing her comments on her reading on the subject (see attached bibliography) and on her conversations with Franklin Cox, who teaches a course in school law in the School of Education, she noted the following:

- 1) Our current policy of obtaining a release from students to use their papers in class annonymously is not necessary, though Cox thinks the practice commendable.
- 2) Cox thinks highly of the sample English policy statements which Lee showed him.
- 3) The practice of some teachers to reserve the right to grade only a student's in-class papers if he is suspected of plagiarism is probably illegal.
- 4) For a teacher to consult with another teacher about the work of their students is not legal. --This item caused considerable discussion among committee members. Kinneavy asked about corporate grading, said this might affect our counselling program, etc. Most of the committee found this statement incredible, and Pitre said she would check with Cox further about the problem.
- 5) Pitre reported that, as the result of the privacy laws, two trends were visible:
 - i. The release forms presently available which allow a person to deny his further right to access of his own file may be discontinued.
 - ii. According to p. 470 of the Buckley amendment, all teacher records--including course notes, comments on students, etc., may be open to public inspection. This will likely cause considerable controversy.

The committee in discussion noted that items 3 & 4 above should perhaps be distributed in some form to the faculty. Action on the matter was deferred pending a subsequent report by Pitre.

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2. To begin our discussion of grade inflation, John Durbin of the Department of Mathematics reviewed a coming Faculty Senate report on the issue, noting that the report would enumerate grading problems, indicate the distribution of inflated grades, compare grade distribution by college, etc. Durbin says that Accounting solved part of their top-ended grading curve by merely mentioning the problem. He mentioned later in the discussion, though, that Accounting now requires all TAs to submit their class grades for inspection before officially turning them in.

Trimble next reviewed the specifics of the grade distributions in English. He attributed grade inflation to the institution of student evaluation of teachers in the mid-sixties; he suggested that one solution would be to return to the grading standards we used traditionally. He noted further that, while most people agreed that grade inflation is a problem, Dean Werbow is not sure that it exists, nor is he sure that the student evaluations are the cause of it, if it does. Werbow thinks teachers are "soft" graders because they don't know what criteria to grade by. Creel suggested, then, that we address a statement to the teachers of the courses rather than to the students, establishing a set of standards. Trimble suggested that the students should have access to the standards, too, but that only the teachers needed to receive a statement from the FEPC on the problem of grade inflation.

Haney suggested that students and teachers alike could profit from some examples of papers at all grade levels so as to establish a department-side standard. Creel posed the problem of how to address all the types of "C" papers there could be with one, or with even just a few, models. Kinneavy noted that A&M handles the problem by publishing models and criteria in their course syllabus, which every student must buy and which has a detailed teachers' manual.

Durbin brought up the possibility of breaking grades down further by providing a per-centile ranking within the class as well as a course grade. Trimble prefers a + and - system. Both Durbin and Trimble had talked with the registrar about the matter, and each noted that we may have a computer in the near future which can address this kind of suggestion. Present hardware cannot handle it. Haney noted that per-cent rank is useless in a seminar where half the class often deserves As.

Wainwright then made a number of points: our 306 classes are rather homogeneous, in that top students are exempted and poor students are admitted only provisionally, so no wonder the grades are lumped together; English is not a quantifiable course like accounting; teachers who encourage their students to revise papers will necessarily give higher grades than those who do not; as teachers have begun to focus more on teaching writing than on failing students, their interest in grades has naturally waned. Kinneavy noted that there is still a problem, in that students who get As and Bs do not have the skills which those grades would imply they have. Haney mentioned that because of this problem, Stanford not uses a pass-fail approach in the teaching of writing. Kinneavy further noted that at Harvard, Kitzhaber had studied all four student undergraduate levels and found that student writing ability declined from the Freshman to the Senior years. He concluded that Freshmen know they are being evaluated, and they produce. He said that if we would let the Freshmen know what we want, they will give it to us.

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Trimble suggested he

- 1) prepare a handout to all TAs and faculty and let them know of our grade inflation problem (65% As & Bs)
- 2) ask teachers to distribute a statement for grading standards
- 3) keep in touch with FEPC and eventually do a no-protest mail ballot.

Wainwright volunteered to work with him on the statement.

3. The committee adopted the apprentice program report (appended).