

DOCUMENTS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL

QUESTIONS FOR PRESIDENT FLAWN AND DEAN KING AT UPCOMING MEETINGS
OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL AND THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

James H. Sledd (English) has filed with the Secretary of the University Council the questions for the President set forth below.

Notice is hereby given that these questions will be addressed to the President at the University Council meeting on October 18, 1982.

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

QUESTIONS FOR PRESIDENT FLAWN AND DEAN KING AT UPCOMING MEETINGS
OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL AND THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

October 9, 1982

To: President Peter Flawn; Dean Robert King; Professors John Durbin and James Daniel

From: James Sledd
Department of English

In submitting these questions, I have three immediate purposes: to show (1) that proponents of the new requirements in English used simple misrepresentation to push them through; (2) that one main effect of the new requirements in English and of the new requirements for admission will be to make U.T. Austin still more nearly a preserve for affluent and exploitative Anglos--all in the name of raising standards; and (3) that the new requirements in English have weaknesses which ought to be remedied even if the requirements are not (as they should be) simply withdrawn.

It is obviously impossible for either President Flawn or Dean King to answer all eleven questions. I ask that President Flawn answer questions 1 and 2; that Dean King answer questions 3, 4, 5, and 6; and that Professors Durbin and Daniel give special attention to questions 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, which deal with some of the weaknesses in the new English requirements.

For the information of the University Council and the faculty of the College of Liberal Arts, I also ask that the eleven questions be distributed to members of the Council before its meeting on October 18 and that the questions be attached as an appendix to the minutes of the October 13 meeting of the College.

I must also tell you my ultimate motives and my intended procedure. The new requirements for admission and the new requirements in English are gross mistakes, serving the interests of faculty and administration but not the interests of the majority of students or the majority of citizens. My questions are an effort to persuade faculty and administration to reconsider; but since

I have no real hope that that effort will succeed (however necessary it is that someone should make it so that the University's centennial will not be shamed), on October 11 I will send my questions by United States mail, with a covering letter, to certain newspapers. The covering letter will emphasize, of course, that I write it as a concerned citizen, not as a representative of U.T. Austin.

Question 1. Since expensive coaching can raise scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and since students score significantly higher when they take the test a second time than when they took it first, the test has been called a test of achievement (for example, in learning the Latinate vocabulary), not really a test of aptitude. Whites regularly score a hundred points better than Blacks, and the scores of all students correlate well with parental income. Even a document recently submitted to the University Council at U.T. Austin calls the test culturally biased. Will not U.T.'s recent action in raising the SAT scores required for admission make the University still more nearly a private preserve for affluent Anglos?

Question 2. U. T. Austin's new requirements in English reduce the required composition course for freshmen from two semesters to one but introduce a required semester of composition for juniors and seniors. Does this change not mean that those entering students who most need help with their writing in order to survive are less likely to get it, while the tenured and tenure-seeking faculty will devote its attention even more largely to juniors and seniors, who already write well enough to have survived their first two college years?

Question 3. In the current revisions of curricula, administrators at U.T. Austin have insisted (a) that students' writing is extremely important and (b) that remedial courses are not allowed here. How many members of each of the following groups are now teaching the first freshman course in English composition (English 306)?

- (i) Graduate students with the title of Teaching Assistant
- (ii) Graduate students with the title of Assistant Instructor
- (iii) Lecturers without the normal privileges and expectations of regular faculty
- (iv) Tenured or tenure-seeking faculty

If freshman English is so important, and if the course is not remedial, why is English 306 consistently staffed in this way? Why are some of its teachers not even appointed until after classes have begun? If the teachers are competent, why are they so poorly paid? If they are not competent, why are they allowed to teach?

Question 4. In pushing for the required shift of one semester of composition from the freshman year to the junior or senior year, representatives of the English Department repeatedly argued that a study made in 1975 by Professor James Sledd provided a "strong mandate" for the shift. Sledd publicly denied that statement, pointing out that in the intervening years, his study had been either ignored or criticized. In fact, his study said just nothing of a required shift of one semester of composition from the freshman year to the junior or senior year, but asked the faculty for its opinion of a possible shift "at the student's option." Was the statement by the English Department's representatives true?

Question 5. If that statement was true, why did Dean Robert King of the College of Liberal Arts write as follows, on June 8, 1981, to Joseph Moldenhauer (Chairman of the English Department) and to James Kinneavy (Director of Freshman English)?

I do not believe that any mandate for the English revision can or should be derived from that earlier report. I urge you not to speak of that report as a "mandate," nor indeed to regard it as a "mandate" for the revision. Further, I urge you to convey to others who in future serve as spokesmen for the English revision that they should not speak of or regard the earlier report as a "mandate."

Question 6. In Sledd's 1975 study, 2,381 students replied to the question, "At what point in a student's undergraduate career do you think systematic instruction in English Composition would be most helpful?" Of those students, 30 favored the senior year, 128 the junior year, 399 the sophomore year, and 1,823 the freshman year. This fact was perfectly familiar to the representatives of the English Department, whom Sledd allowed to examine all his data thoroughly. Why have the English Department, the University Council, and the U.T. administration ignored the students' overwhelming preference? Should not that preference prompt a reconsideration of the new requirements in English?

Question 7. In current legislation, a good deal is said about allowing any upper-division course with "a substantial writing component" to count as a course in composition. One document reads as follows: "These upper-division courses will not necessarily be courses designed to teach writing, but they will require substantial writing by students, and the written work will be evaluated on form as well as content. ...it is essential that the courses satisfying this Writing requirement be taught in small classes" (H. Paul Kelley, Secretary of the University Council, February 16, 1981). Has any firm and enforceable definition of substantial writing component been offered? What is there to prevent teachers of odd courses which attract few students from enticing enrollees, avoiding contact with despised freshmen, yet still claiming to teach composition--all by the simple device of announcing that their pet courses include "a substantial writing component"?

Question 8. During the past fifteen years, the English Department and what is now the College of Liberal Arts have repeatedly tried to reduce what is considered the "burden" of teaching freshmen to write. "Composition stinks," said one eminent full professor. The new requirements promise to cut the "burden" by about one-half, and enrollment in freshman English could be still further reduced just by lowering the test score which is required for exemption from English 306. The present exemption score is 550 (the minimum which has been required at the University of California in Berkeley to keep the testee out of the bonehead course, and 100 points lower than was required, some dozen years ago, at Ball State in Muncie, Indiana). In 1969, James Sledd (then Director of Freshman English) had to prevent the planned lowering of our score from 550 to 450. If one director can keep the score from being lowered, what is to prevent another director from lowering it? Should not the determination of the exemption score require the approval of the University Council?

Question 9. Just as a very few people have been able to control exemption scores, so the nature of English 306 (the freshman course in composition) and of English 346K (the junior-senior course) can at present be determined or changed by relatively small groups within the English Department, who are also the primary judges of the effectiveness of the courses. Should there not be a University-wide Committee on Composition or Composition Board (as at the University of Michigan, allegedly one of U.T.'s models) to supervise courses which faculty and administration repeatedly say are highly important?

Question 10. How will the new requirements apply to students who transfer to U.T. Austin after one term or several elsewhere? Is U.T. required by law to give credit for composition courses which transfer students have taken at the State's junior colleges? Could and would a transfer student be required to take English 346K as well? If so, would not that requirement automatically devalue the second semester of freshman composition at other state institutions? If, on the other hand, a transfer student with two semesters of freshman composition were exempt from English 346K, could not students frustrate the whole new scheme simply by taking their two semesters of composition at a community college?

Question 11. When the present requirements in composition were set, there was extensive debate by the faculty at large, and the legislation included provision for a committee to review the working of the requirements within three years. Should there not be a similar provision in the new legislation?

Question 8. During the past fifteen years, the English Department has been... what is there to prevent teachers... composition--all by the single device of announcing that their... During the past fifteen years, the English Department has been... what is there to prevent teachers... composition--all by the single device of announcing that their... During the past fifteen years, the English Department has been... what is there to prevent teachers... composition--all by the single device of announcing that their...