

# Complicated explanations behind E 346K controversy

**T**he only observation that can be made with certainty about the E 346K controversy is that anyone who ascribes it to a single cause is clearly mistaken. The demise, premature or not, of the course reflects a variety of problems in the state and the university. No doubt, the threat of budget cuts prompted the suggestion that the course be waived and, assuredly, the demonstration value before the Legislature was duly noted. The problem of non-tenure-track faculty reaching the appropriate length of service for tenure consideration may have been solved. And then there is the fratricidal English department itself, with its undeclared wars for jobs and graduate students between the tenured and the non-tenured, the rhetoricians and the literature teachers. And, of course, there is the staffing problem.

The author of the proposal, James Kinneavy, holder of a few chairs in liberal arts and former director of freshman English, remembers that the institution of the course required the approval of the department, the college, the University Council and the general faculty, a process that took several years of debate. But when the course was made an elective in a period of about a week none of those august bodies was polled. And Kinneavy says that a dean, who would like to remain anonymous, told him that even the deans were presented with a *fait accompli*.

The stir over E 346K will probably be the last crisis witnessed by UT President Peter Flawn and, in a way, it is an unfortunate finale. The president has largely reached the goals set for this administration and perhaps traveled a little beyond them. Flawn came to the university at a time when the campus was known for unrest: his immediate predecessor had been hired despite not being on the final list of the search committee, and the previous president had been fired. With an able assist from the more conservative tenor of the times, Flawn leaves campus more peaceful than he found it. He has put the university on a more business-like footing, controlled enrollment and rattled the tin cup with skill. And he has, at times, shown a vision unique among those who have occupied the office, as in his concern for minority enrollment.

Still, once again, a department has exploded at the university, as government did five years ago, and the now-disassembled College of Arts and Sci-

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ences before it. After a number of these things happen, one begins to suspect that there is some sort of pattern operating here, some sort of structural flaw below the periodic tremors. The University has the distinction of being one of the few, and perhaps the only, major American university to have a book, Ronnie Dugger's "Our Invaded Universities," written about its political struggles, not only those taking place on the Forty Acres, but those which have traveled north along Congress Avenue.

That is the other thing, besides the oil money and the football team, for which the university is famous. One cannot think of outlawing "politics" from campus: wherever humans meet to allocate resources — and the University is above all a resource — "politics" is simply the vague term used to describe the decision-making process.

Some University eminences recently went to the Legislature to complain that the budget squabbles were scaring away the large names in engineering. Perhaps it takes a willful Legislature to frighten engineers; large names in other fields have been avoiding the University for years. The situation has, it is true, eased recently with higher salaries and the Ph.D glut, but anyone who went to a professional conference in the 1970s heard about Frank Erwin's police pulling students from trees and the firing of John Silber, dean of Arts and Sciences, just as an earlier generation heard of the firings of writer J. Frank Dobie and UT President Homer Rainey. This problem is not of Flawn's making, it must be admitted; but it does indicate a limitation in his vision of the University and that of those who chose him that, once again, the process, has been restricted to the precincts of the tower.

One will miss the departed colleagues, but the real lesson of the E 346K fiasco lies in what it reveals about the process at the University. The means are the ends. There are universities in the nation where the departments elect their own chairs, where search committees are respected and catalogues are not altered without departmental input. The University of Texas struggles toward "excellence" in spite of itself. The invaded university remains invaded.

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