

Though I've been retired for eight years now, I had some twenty years acquaintance with the English Department's writing courses, including two years as director of freshman composition.

In my time at the University, the writing program was never successful, though it did provide several openings for ambitious careerists. (You can probably get copies of the university-wide survey that I did in the mid 70s-- get them from Measurement and Evaluation, which collaborated.)

The writing program has failed for just one reason: neither the general faculty, the English Department, nor the administration will support it. Teaching writing is demanding work--demanding, because each student needs individual attention. Since raises and promotions depend primarily on "research," faculty don't want to risk their careers in actual teaching, though directing the program can earn lots of brownie points.

The newly established outfit will just provide another arena for politicking and career-building. It's an administrative no-solution to a problem that isn't administrative. The proposed shift to computer-assisted instruction will be a further disaster, though it may serve the covert purpose of ridding the University of the burden (so-called) of real teaching, especially the teaching of supposedly "remedial" courses.

Since there's no chance that the writing program will ever have the support it needs, the least objectionable action will be to abolish it. Long ago, I made that suggestion to then Dean R. King. He replied, "I can't do that; people would say that I had abdicated my responsibility." But the fact is that nobody for the past thirty-five years has ever assumed genuine responsibility.

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