

# EDITORIALS

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## VIEWPOINT

# RECOMPOSITION

## Confusion reigns in the world according to Gribben

Alan Gribben's crusade to preserve the integrity of English 306 is touching, especially considering his last crusade was to do away with the course altogether.

In 1985, Gribben and a departmental committee recommended that the University stop teaching E306 while retaining it as a requirement. Gribben defended the proposal as essential to "academic excellence," and he assailed its critics, specifically *Texan* writers, as "obsessed with the convenience of the students."

The fact that those critics, inside and outside the department, may have been equally concerned with excellence does not seem to have entered Gribben's mind. Four years later, he still sees debates about E306 in the same narrow dichotomy. He and his allies are the keepers of academic excellence, and the rest of us just have axes to grind.

This time around, the question is about reforming, rather than chloroforming, the freshman composition course — but the sides remain the same. The English Department has recommended giving the course a central theme by adding readings on racism and sexism. Gribben, never at a loss for hyperbole, calls that "thought control."

In the world according to Gribben, then, it is better to have no freshman composition course at all than to have one with a central theme. Asking students to think about complex issues amounts to controlling their thoughts. Better to have students test out of the composition requirement than to risk exposing them to dangerous thoughts.

Gribben and the other 55 signers of Wednesday's "Statement of Academic Concern" are entitled to their opinion, but they should at least be honest. They are not concerned with academic excellence. If they were, they would recognize that challenging students to think and rethink questions of difference is a valid and essential part of any academic enterprise.

These professors, only six of whom even work in the English Department, seem concerned mainly about preserving the status quo and preventing the entry of other points of view into any academic discipline.

And Gribben's mode of communication is hypocritical, to say the least. In 1985, when College of Liberal Arts Dean Robert King kicked students off the Freshman English Policy Committee, the justifiably angry students voiced their outrage in a *Texan* ad.

What was Alan Gribben's reaction? He was "disappointed" with their methods. "They went to the media first before talking to the faculty," he complained.

Apparently, the new, improved Gribben is less shy about going to the media. In addition to the page-two advertisement, Gribben has sent letters — and, for some reason, copies of his resume — to *The Daily Texan*, *Austin American-Statesman* and presumably anyone else with a printing press and a post office box.

Perhaps such tactics are justified only when one is a Knight Templar in the service of academic excellence, valiantly fighting an unkempt rabble "obsessed with convenience."

— Kevin McHargue