

# English Department is bad soap opera

Just when you thought that it was safe to refocus your attention on more important stuff, like studying and reading, those wacky English professors and administrators are at it again. The battles in the war over political correctness in the English Department are getting bloodier, but they are still really boring — unless, of course, you are James Duban.

The bloodshed began with the E306 debate over whether it was better to learn about white male Europeans killing people or about male and female Latinos, blacks, etc. killing people.

The result was an ad hoc committee created to report on something it had already made up its mind about and a lot of editorial fodder on this very page from both sides. Another result was the resignation of Mark Twain scholar Alan Gribben from the department.

Next, Liberal Arts Dean Standish Meacham, a quality administrator, resigned for personal reasons. Enter Robert King, an equally efficient administrator of old with a different political orientation and a "make things happen" attitude. Lots of people in Parlin got pissed, Cunningham seemed happy and the subtle purge of subversives with "politically correct" agendas ensued.

The English Department fought back. Kurt Heinzelman resigned as head of the English Faculty Recruitment Committee, an organization apparently charged to bring minority and female faculty to Texas. His beef was King's demolition of the Executive Committee, which included English teachers of all levels, in favor of a budget council that includes only full professors. It seems there are not too many minority or female full professors.

This week's *Texas Observer* carries an account of the recent nastiness, including some interesting but highly polemic facts of its own. *The Observer* asserts that Dean King received a \$21,000 salary increase as a perk to do Dr. Cunningham's anti-PC bidding, but that money was



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merely a salary allotment for the summer months and had nothing at all to do with the price of tea in China.

Finally, there is the recent, disappointing episode of "As Parlin Turns" in which dark horse Melville scholar James Duban said something against the multicultural cause and received a gag order from the PC patrol. Duban, a full professor and independently thinking human being, gave a speech to the University Council in that capacity and the walls came down.

A day later Duban was notified by English Chairman Joseph Kruppa, a proponent of PC causes, that his services as head of the Honors Program will no longer be needed. Causal link?

Regardless of what you think about Duban in the classroom or out, the way in which he was treated really stinks. For a long time now, UT's English Department has been a battleground for the national political correctness debate. It represents, in microcosm, the larger struggle currently going on on college campuses nationwide about who will get hired and who will hold the keys to the faculty bathroom.

Well, there is more to it than that, but many students are thinking "shut up and teach." The English Department is one of the largest departments, receives a lot of cash and churns out thousands of students. The politically correct agenda which most of the English faculty support is admirable only in its egalitarian ideal.

Carrying it out into practice by incorporating the necessary radical changes, however, is a diversion from the pressing business of teaching and researching — and it probably does not

have the support of even half of the English majors. Finally, it ignores civil liberties and individual will.

What if Biff Schmidt-do-me or Ellen Harolds-Outlet do not want to learn about Zambian culture? Does their lack of cultural awareness or contentedness with living in the bubble amount to anything? Many educated people are aware of the benefits of learning about other cultures, but it is not just cultural enrichment that is at question here.

Spreading the politicized "good word" to the multitudes in defiance of their right to remain ignorant or to even choose their own curriculum is reprehensible. Incorporating a political agenda into a required class is not right. No one should have to take anything (except for American history and government) which too many idiots know too little about.

And it is not just Ellen and Biff that have a problem with what is going on. There are people on this campus — people who are so bearded and dreadlocked that they look like Chaka on *The Land of The Lost* — who think that the multiculturalist ideal is unfair.

People should be allowed to take what they want to take. They should not be forced to take something that they have no interest in, no matter how good it may be for them. Again, this excludes the existing government and history requirements (Quick, who all fought in World War I?).

Overturning cultural bias will begin with the independent initiative that results from awareness. That awareness will come about through a number of ways, especially the way the breeze is blowing these days.

But an imposed curriculum, outside of the existing history and government requirements, should go the way of the Edsel. The English Department doth protest too much.

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