

September 17, 1984

In a meeting of the rhetoric interest group on September 13, we identified these problems that make us believe the strength and integrity of the rhetoric and writing program in our department is being threatened. Although writing courses generate over 60% of the revenue for our department, we think that under the present situation in the English department, neither our graduate or our undergraduate students are being adequately served.

We believe that the current chairman of the department and the previous chairman do not see the writing component of the department as a legitimate professional discipline; that they do not believe that the faculty who specialize in teaching writing or in doing research about writing have any special professional expertise. Thus in spite of the strong publication record of our rhetoric and composition faculty and the national recognition that they enjoy, they are excluded from decision making about the writing program in the department and in the University and from other important policy making activities.

Items:

There is no rhetoric person on the departmental recruitment committee nor has there been for the past four years. Last year three nationally prominent people in rhetoric and writing sent applications to the department; one was summarily rejected with a form letter, one application was lost, and the third person was sent a form letter for entry level candidates. Other applications were screened and rejected by referees who have no knowledge of the field.

There are no rhetoric people in the group that revised the qualifying exam for the Ph.D., yet we have 20 graduate students in rhetoric. The Ph.D. qualifying now focuses exclusively on belletristic literature, ignoring those candidates who want to specialize in rhetoric.

There are no rhetoric people on the Committee for Excellence Graduate Education.

Only one rhetoric and composition person was appointed to 346K committee; it was chaired by a literature professor, yet it is our required junior level writing course.

Rhetoric and composition people were not included in the liaison group for the Writing Emphasis courses.

There are no rhetoric people on the Undergraduate Course Committee.

We believe that the integrity of the composition program is in danger. There is no coordination or sequencing among 306,

316K, and 346K; the more advanced courses do not build on the earlier ones.

Although 316K was sold to the University Council as a writing course, the sections have been allowed to go to more than 50 students. It simply cannot be a legitimate writing course under those circumstances.

346K was sold to the University Council as a junior level writing course that would teach students to write in their own disciplines and would take the place of 317 in engineering and the sciences. The course is being turned into a humanities course that stresses humanistic readings and asks students to produce paraliterary discourse. These courses are not going as they were represented when the proposed changes in the required writing sequence was presented to the University for approval.

The technical writing component of the program is being dismantled. 317, technical writing, currently taught entirely by Assistant Instructors and Lecturers, is being phased out and 346K for sciences and technology does not have the same goals. No attempt has been made to replace our senior technical writing faculty, John Walter and Gordon Mills.

The advanced expository writing courses, 325M and 379C, do not fit into any of the areas required for English majors, not even the catch-all of area VI. Therefore they cannot be counted toward the major, except as upper-division electives; this exclusion discourages English majors from taking these writing courses. Once more the implication is that learning to write well is not a proper part of an education for an English major.

We believe that we need a Coordinator of Writing for the department and that we should be working to strengthen our program by establishing a Master's Degree in Expository Writing and in Technical Writing.

The Department of English at the University of Texas has never been known for its strength in traditional literary areas; losing Gayatri Spivak diminished what strength we did have. Our strength at Texas is in the peripheral areas: bibliography, language and linguistics, folklore, and, in recent years, rhetoric. The traditional center of the department, literature and criticism, is declining; yet the faculty in those areas control policies in the department and are allowing the writing program to deteriorate. This group also recently tried to subvert the normal channels of government for the department by directly petitioning the dean for a drastic change in the requirements for voting in the department.

Question: What are the logistics and implications of

1. Establishing a Center for Writing within the Department?
2. Splitting off into a Department of Language and Rhetoric?