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A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

TO THE DEPARTMENT'S "COMPOSITION PROBLEM"

Working Draft Prepared by

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BACKGROUND

On April 4 in his meeting with members of the Rhetoric Interest Group, Dean King specifically asked for the Department's Rhetoric Interest Group's help in formulating a comprehensive solution to the "composition program" as he perceived that problem. The Dean's request for help represents a departure from tradition; it is the first time he has ever requested help from the Rhetoric Interest Group as a group.

Dean King represented the "composition problem" primarily as a logistical and a financial one. In this, the Dean was entirely consistent with his previously stated views, at least since the time in 1979 (???) when he met with the English faculty early during his tenure as Dean of Liberal Arts. It should be noted that former Chairman Moldenhauer's representation of the "problem," as expressed during the memorable English faculty meeting of 1979, and Chairman Sutherland's recent and public representation of the "problem" are consistent with the Dean's views, which may perhaps explain why Moldenhauer and Sutherland were appointed as chairmen.

These matters of history are important because they, in effect, mean that any proposed solution to the "problem" which does not address its logistic and financial dimensions will be unacceptable. The Dean, of course, stated that on April 4. Moreover, this history suggests that all other dimensions of the problem are, in the mind of the Dean, subordinate to the logistic and financial dimensions of the problem. And the Dean stated that as well. Neither the Dean's declarations on April 4 nor the history of the Dean's views should, however, be taken necessarily to mean that other dimensions of the problem cannot be addressed or accommodated in the comprehensive solution the Dean has requested from the Rhetoric Interest Group; that is to say, the Dean appears willing to implement solutions to other dimensions of the problem if those solutions do not threaten or undermine a logistic and financial solution.

In addition to articulating unambiguously the dimensions of the problem he wants solved, the Dean also--by asking the Rhetoric Interest Group's help in solving the "problem"--indicated that he is willing to respect the **principle of faculty expertise** in developing a comprehensive solution to the the problem, providing that that principle does not affect adversely a logistical and financial solution to the problem. The Dean also indicated that he is willing to respect the **principle of accommodation or adjustment** to the same degree.

The Dean's willingness to respect faculty expertise and the ability of faculty experts in composition to adjust curriculum to the needs of students so long as neither work against a logistic and financial solution to the problem should be seen as a new and significant development. Little of what the Dean has previously said and few of his actions over the past 6 years suggests this willingness. The Dean's invitation to the Rhetoric Interest Group to bypass existing Departmental administrative and governance structures in developing and bringing to him a comprehensive solution to the problem implies his willingness to respect these two fundamental principles. Nor is it insignificant that during the meeting with Dean King, Sutherland had placed in our mailboxes a memorandum announcing the Dean's "return" to the Department of the new governance document, a document which respects neither of the two principles. Despite the ambiguity of Sutherland's use of the word "returned," the point is that Dean King knew the status of that document before the meeting of April 4.

Given the current situation in the Department of English under Sutherland's leadership, the meeting with Dean King should be looked upon by the Rhetoric Interest Group as providing an opportunity for a creative and, from the point of view of the Rhetoric Interest Group, a professionally satisfying solution to the "composition problem." In addition to meeting the Dean's general demands for a logistic and financial solution to the "composition problem," the solution we propose must also respect the more specific parameters he outlined on April 4. From the point of view of the Rhetoric Interest Group, the solution we propose must also respect the professionalism that provides the basis for the Rhetoric Interest Group and the disciplinary integrity for composition studies.

SPECIFIC PARAMETERS THAT DEAN KING WANTS RESPECTED

Dean King set five parameters that must be accommodated in any solution to the "composition problem," as he sees it. Those five parameters are the following:

(1) Any solution must be workable within the "existing budget," which Dean King defined as not including the "soft money" used currently to pay lecturers' salaries.

(2) Given the current budget crisis at the University, any solution cannot involve "splitting" the current English Department as an administrative and budgetary unit within the College.

(3) Any solution must reduce substantially the number of students enrolled in **English** classes (note the emphasis on "English").

(4) Any solution cannot require the use of more than 15 lecturers, although the Dean would prefer that any solution not

require more lecturer positions than the five presently listed as Departmental budget lines. (It is, of course, not clear whether this parameter contradicts (1) above.)

(5) Any solution must be a long-term rather than a short-term solution.

SPECIFIC PARAMETERS THAT THE RHETORIC INTEREST GROUP WANTS RESPECTED

Conversations with various members of the Rhetoric Interest Group indicate that any acceptable solution to the "composition problem" must respect five additional parameters. Those five parameters are the following:

(1) Any solution must, within the parameters set by the Dean, meet the needs of students for composition instruction, as defined by the Department's composition specialists. That is to say, any solution must respect the **principle of faculty expertise**.

(2) Any solution must respect the **principle of adjustment or accommodation** such that the expertise of the composition specialists in the Department becomes the basis for designing, developing, and administering writing and writing-related courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

(3) Any solution to the logistical and financial dimensions of "composition problem" must respect the necessary connection between undergraduate instruction in composition and the graduate program in rhetoric and composition.

(4) Any solution must guarantee the integrity and continued growth of the graduate program in rhetoric and composition as nationally prominent program in the English Department.

PROPOSED SOLUTION TO THE "COMPOSITION PROBLEM"

Quite clearly, the parameters set by Dean King and the parameters set by members of the Rhetoric Interest Group differ in kind. Not unexpectedly, the specific parameters set by the Dean assume that the "composition problem" is altogether a logistical and financial one. As the College's chief academic officer, Dean King's business is to work vigorously toward solutions to such problems, particularly when they affect adversely the quality of instruction (a judgment which should be based on faculty expertise) in the College. The parameters set by members of the Rhetoric Interest Group, on the other hand, while not denying the magnitude or the importance of the logistical and financial dimensions of the "problem," assume that the "composition problem" involves other important dimensions as well, dimensions which the Dean has not denied but which he clearly considers of secondary importance.

No less obvious, then, is that a solution to the "composition problem" that respects both sets of parameters must in some sense be a compromise solution. However, it must do more than merely reconcile or accommodate differences between the two sets of parameters outlined above; it must also meet the needs of the literature faculty to manage their interests in matters of curriculum and instruction in which they have demonstrable expertise and it must ameliorate the destructive tendencies within the Department caused by ideological and political differences between the non-literature and the literature faculty.

Such a solution is possible. That solution demands that three major changes in the Department occur. First, as Ruszkiewicz proposed on April 4, **all English courses** must be made elective except for those required for undergraduate or graduate degrees in English. Second, the English Department must take control of its own course offerings; that is to say, rather than responding to the demands of the higher administration, of other colleges, and of other departments to teach more courses/classes than it has hard budget lines to support, the English Department must decide which courses and how many of them it will offer. Third, the internal administrative structure must be changed to reflect what is a major theoretical and practical division in the Department between the interests of literature specialists and the interests of nonliterature specialists, particularly writing specialists.

Failure to implement any one or more of these three changes will not solve the "composition problem" within the Department, and that failure will leave unsolved the enormous morale problem that has existed in the Department for at least eight years. Failure to implement all three changes will (1) make the internal problems in the Department worse, (2) will result in an English department that is either incapable or unwilling to meet the needs of University of Texas students for good composition instruction at the undergraduate level, and/or (3) it will result in the dismantling of the graduate program in rhetoric, one of the few graduate programs in the Department to have achieved national prominence.

Adequate implementation of the first and second changes depends on the prior implementation of the third change. That is to say, administrative changes within the Department must be implemented before sound substantive and logistical decisions about an "elective" English curriculum can be made. If the change in the Department's internal administrative structure is implemented by the Fall of 1985, the details of the first and second changes--logistical and substantive decisions about curriculum--can be worked out satisfactorily and expertly by the opening of the Fall Semester of 1986.

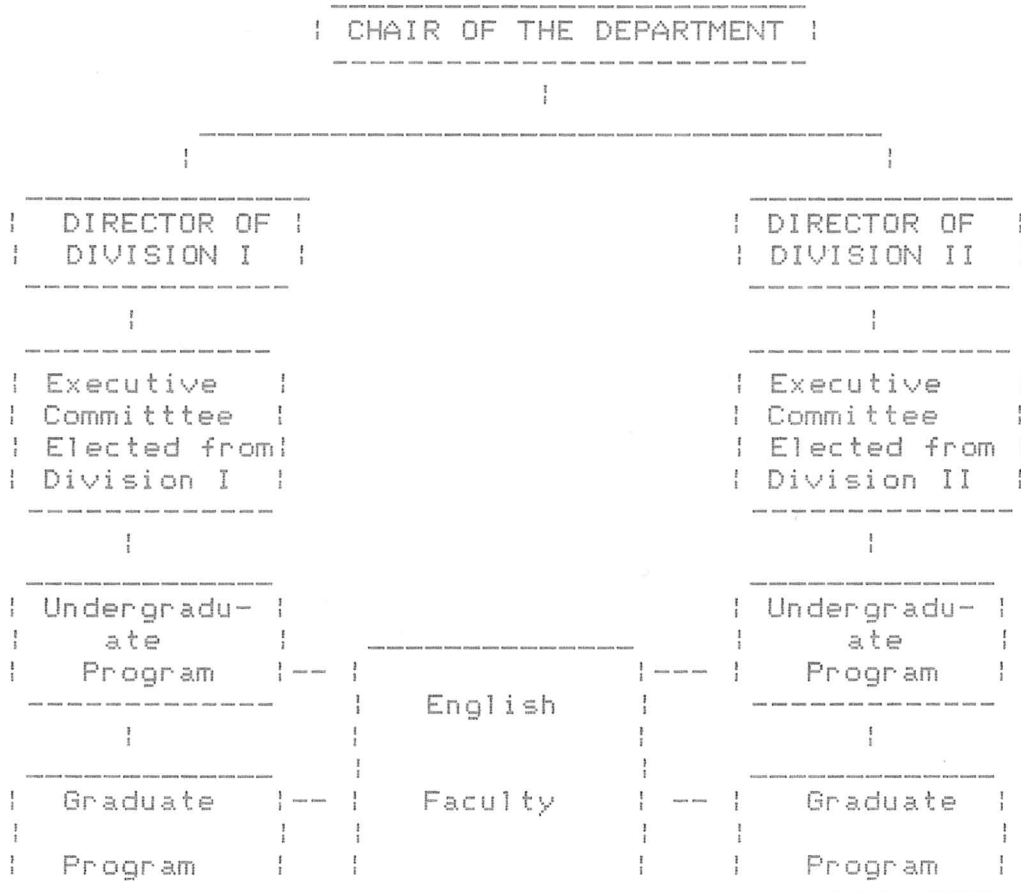
Because the change in the Department's internal administrative structure is crucial to solving the "composition problem" so that the solution meets the parameters set by Dean King **and** the

parameters set by members of the Rhetoric Interest Group, details of only that change are presented here, and those will, to be sure, have to be elaborated on and refined at a later date.

The necessary changes, which are depicted graphically in **Figure 1**, in Departmental administrative structure are these: (1) the regular faculty of and the undergraduate and graduate courses taught in the Department must be divided into two groups or divisions, one representing primarily the interests of literary specialists and one representing the interests of nonliterary specialists; (2) each group or division must elect a director who serves under one chair of the Department, a chair who functions primarily in the manner of a "managing editor"; (3) each division must elect its own executive committee which is responsible for making all personnel and policy decisions within that division and which is empowered to appoint standing subcommittees that can help determine policy in all matters except personnel (e.g., undergraduate curriculum, graduate studies, advising, etc.) affecting curriculum and instruction with that division.

Figure 1

**PROPOSED ADMINISTRATIVE/STRUCTURAL CHANGES WITHIN
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**



The administrative/structural configuration depicted in **Figure 1** accommodates all of the parameters for solving the "composition problem" set by Dean King and all the parameters set by the Rhetoric Interest Group. However, its real strength lies in its ability to accommodate both sets of parameters simultaneously. Accordingly, the configuration provides a simple yet robust and situationally specific problem-solving model that addresses the problem of the needs of students enrolled in English courses and programs and the problem of the needs of faculty responsible for those courses and programs.

ADVANTAGES OF THE PROPOSED ADMINISTRATIVE/STRUCTURAL CONFIGURATION

(1) It allows appropriate faculty expertise to be brought to bear on the logistical and substantive decisions that must be made in order to move the Department toward an elective curriculum and thereby reduce its dependency on the Dean's "soft money."

(2) Rather than demanding an increase in financial resources, the proposed administrative/structural changes merely reallocate existing resources in a more productive and professionally satisfying way.

(3) Assuming an "elective" English curriculum, the configuration places the responsibility for designing, offering, and administering successful English courses in the hands of appropriate disciplinary experts or specialists. That is to say, it respects the **principle of faculty expertise** in matters of curriculum. Accordingly, if English courses--whether literature or nonliterature courses--fail to demonstrate their viability in enrollments, the responsibility lies with the disciplinary experts or specialists in the two proposed Divisions.

(4) Given the operation of the principle of faculty expertise in (3), the proposed administrative/structural configuration allows for the free operation of the **principle of adjustment or accommodation** whereby faculty in each of the two Divisions are required to employ their special expertise in adjusting courses in each Division to meet the needs of students who may enroll in them. With a completely "elective" English curriculum, courses offered in either Division would survive only to the extent that enrollments demand that they survive.

(5) Collectively, the principle of faculty expertise in (3) and the principle of accommodation in (4) represent the academic equivalents of the economic principle of supply and demand and evolutionary principle of survival of the fittest.

(6) Given (3), (4), and (5) above, the proposed administrative/structural configuration provides for pragmatic solutions to the internal problems of the Department. That is to say, it makes pragmatics rather than "self-interest" the basis for sol-

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ving political problems.

(7) The proposed administrative/structural configuration guarantees, given the financial constraints specified by Dean King, that University of Texas students have access to the best curriculum the Department's experts can devise.

(8) In addition to placing the design, development, and administration of undergraduate courses in the hands of appropriate disciplinary specialists, it places the design, development, and administration of undergraduate and graduate programs in the hands of disciplinary specialists.

(9) The proposed administrative/structural configuration, in concert with an "elective" English curriculum, provides a pragmatic solution to the problem of faculty recruitment in the English Department.

(10) The proposed administrative/structural configuration forces cooperation between the two Divisions through the sharing of cross-over faculty, funds for maintenance and operation, physical facilities, and undergraduate and graduate courses for degree programs in English.

(11) The proposed configuration guarantees that appropriate faculty expertise is brought to bear on the evaluation of faculty, courses, and degree programs.

(12) The proposed configuration allows nationally prominent undergraduate and graduate specializations in English to become stronger, and it places the responsibility for strengthening and/or developing other specializations in the hands of appropriate faculty experts.

(13) Because the proposed configuration presupposes an "elective" English curriculum for all students except those majoring in undergraduate or graduate programs in English and because appropriate faculty experts would decide curricula for undergraduate and graduate programs in English, the proposed administrative/structural configuration precludes sapping the strength of one program in order to enhance the strength of another.

(14) The proposed configuration does not require the creation of new course numbers; it only requires that some old numbers (e.g., E310, E317) be reactivated.

(15) The proposed configuration can be implemented in a matter of weeks, thus allowing the critical logistic and substantive problems facing the Department to be solved by qualified experts in specific areas within the Department.

(16) Once in place, the proposed configuration does not create additional "administrative headaches" for the Dean of Liberal Arts. In fact, it reduces the severity and number of

those "headaches" by providing for structural and pragmatic bases for eliminating many current "headaches" at the departmental level.

(17) The proposed administrative/structural configuration respects the professional integrity of all English faculty, and it guarantees the survival of multi-faceted discipline of English.

(18) The proposed configuration allows graduate programs in English to inform, through the development of new knowledge, undergraduate programs in English.

(19) The proposed administrative/structural changes allow for English faculty to move across the two Divisions as they develop expertise through research and subsequent publication.