

# Writing Right

## Keep focus on composition

After studying the undergraduate writing program for more than a year, a University Council committee determined that college students just weren't learning how to write anymore. These findings led the UC, at its Monday meeting, to approve the committee's proposal that undergraduate writing curriculum and requirements be substantially changed.

The proposal includes 13 recommendations. Some of them, such as using graduate students to help faculty evaluations of student writing or strengthening the undergraduate writing requirement, seem like reasonable methods of improving the University's writing curriculum. But the proposal contains one objectionable suggestion: that all UT courses should feature more writing assignments.

The idea of a composition quota for each and every course at this gargantuan University is both laughable and impractical. First, it is doubtful that paper assignments for, say, physical education or equipment-oriented engineering classes would significantly contribute to anyone's understanding of the subject matter. By being forced to write a paper about aerobic exercise, a student may indeed exercise his writing skills, but his physical ability to aerobicize will not be any better.

Second, many professors on this campus are simply not trained, prepared, or accustomed to instruct students in composition. As Students' Association President Eric Bradley put it, "I don't want my calculus professor trying to teach me to write."

It's unreasonable for the UC to push for an increase in writing assignments for all UT courses when professors dedicated to teaching composition and academic structures geared toward improving student writing skills already exist.

The University formed the Department of Rhetoric and Composition last year in order to improve student ability and the quality of instruction in the field of writing. It is the job of that department and its professors to teach all undergraduates the rudiments of decent writing.

Additionally, every student at this University must take at least six writing-component hours. Professors of writing component classes are necessarily experienced at teaching composition. Their assignments attempt to make students remember their lessons in composition and as such reinforce the primary instruction provided by rhetoric and composition.

If the UC really wants to see student writing ability improve, it should not attempt to spread the responsibility for composition instruction all over campus. It should instead use the good resources available and increase undergraduate requirements for rhetoric and composition or writing component classes.