Department of English

Department Meeting
May 8, 1990

Minutes

Chairman **Joe Kruppa** opened the meeting with a few remarks on the necessity of maintaining collegial and open debate on important issues within the department. (His remarks are reprinted in the May 1990 issue of the English Department Newsletter.) He then gave the floor to Linda Brodkey.

Item I. Changes In E.306:

Linda Brodkey, Director of Lower-Division English referred the audience to her memorandum of May 1, 1990, on E.306. She emphasized that the new, standardized E.306 would rely on three texts: the Rothenberg book, a composition handbook already in use in the department, and a packet of materials to include documents concerning court cases under Title VII (race, ethnicity, national origin and gender), Title IX (discrimination in education), and laws governing discrimination on the basis of age and disability. These texts represent a commitment by the Lower Division English Policy Committee to certain educational goals. The pedagogical strategies of the course are in the process of being worked out. Until that process is complete, it is not clear what rhetorical approaches will be used.

Professor Brodkey noted that we have not done well by E.306 in the past, and that it would have been necessary to standardize the course, and require its teachers to participate in a summer orientation program, in any event. She quoted statistics from course instructor surveys, indicating that the variation in ratings among sections is much greater for this course than for the sophomore literature courses. Students do not seem to be convinced that the course is valuable or that the instructors are in command of the material. We do not want any of our graduate students to leave here as uncredible teachers of writing.

After emphasizing that all of us have something to learn from the course, Professor Brodkey opened the floor to questions and comments.

Janet Luedtke (AI) asked if they had looked at students' written comments when considering the course instructor survey results. Professor Brodkey replied that they had in some cases. She said the course really isn't comprehensible to students, that it looks like a rehearsal to them, and compares unfavorably to some of their high school classes. As Director of Lower-Division English, she doesn't get such regular complaints about teachers in other courses as she does in 306.

Tony Hilfer asked if it would overburden the reading list to add an autobiography, such as *Parting of the Waters*. Professor Brodkey replied that the Rothenberg text includes writing in a variety of genres, including autobiography. Members of the audience expressed concern that the emphasis of the course not be shifted from writing to reading.

Jane Marcus asked if faculty members could attend orientation and learn how to teach the course. Professor Brodkey said she would love to involve faculty, and was sure the AI's would, too. She expressed concern that the timing of orientation — August 20-24 — would pose problems. Professor Marcus asked if we could do a second orientation sometime in the fall semester, and Professor Brodkey indicated that we might do another one in the spring, when we have input from fall classes.

Sheila Kearns asked if AI's from other departments would pose a problem, and if we would be able to insist that they attend orientation. Professor Brodkey answered that no AI who has not completed orientation will be assigned the course, and that we can compel AI's from other departments to participate in orientation. It was noted that the orientation requirement would facilitate earlier class assignments.

Kate Frost volunteered to teach the course in the spring 1991 semester, and asked how she could get oriented. Professor Brodkey said a more spread-out orientation could be offered during the fall semester.

Wayne Lesser asked how many faculty were scheduled to teach E.306 in the fall. Professor Brodkey said she and Linda Ferreira-Buckley were. Professor Lesser said this represented less of a commitment than the faculty usually show to E.306, and suggested that 10% of the faculty, about 8 people, should be teaching it. He thought that some people could be switched from small sections of E.316K, and, if necessary, some people could teach a three course load if such a commitment were crucial to the justification of the course. **John Slatin** volunteered to teach it, but not as a third course. He was concerned that taking on too heavy a load would reduce the quality of his teaching. Professor Lesser responded that each faculty member would know how much he or she could handle. **Sue Heinzelman** said she, too, would like to teach the course very much, and **Jane Marcus** said she felt strongly about wanting to do it.

Maxine Hairston said that a student in one of her graduate classes had done a survey of 306 teachers and found that they felt abandoned, and that the department didn't care about the course. She suggested there were many things we could do, including offering better and more sections of E.398T and excusing fewer people from the course. Professor Brodkey said that in the past year we had stopped waiving 398T on the grounds of teaching experience and she agreed that questions of pedagogy were of central concern. Professor Hairston then said that she had looked at the Rothenberg text carefully and felt it was an advocacy text and was not suitable for the course. She noted that Greenhaven Press has more balanced and thoughtful books on various "hot topics." She expressed concern that 306, a first course for students, was being turned into a cultural studies course that would be appropriate to a more advanced level. She was also concerned that we were asking graduate students to take on the burden of preparation for the curriculum changes, and felt that a week's unpaid preparation was not adequate or fair. **Kate Frost** asked if the closing limits would be lowered from 25 and if we would have a writing lab. Professor Brodkey answered that we were waiting for funding

decisions from the administration, but we probably would not have a lab and that the enrollment limit would remain at 25 per class. Addressing Professor Hairston's question, she said that we planned to institute a mentoring system and hoped to receive funding from the administration that would allow us to appoint seven AI's as "master teachers," with a salary increase, to assist other AI's. She said no AI would have to do this alone. She noted that many AI's had had the same question in her earlier meeting with them.

Jim Duban expressed his appreciation of the issues Professor Hairston had raised. He quoted from Professor Brodkey's May 1 memorandum (page 2, last paragraph) concerning the "reservations of a few who worry whether teachers and students will be able to conduct civil classroom discussions on such sensitive topics." He wondered if the point of that was to try to cut off debate by prejudging any criticism as uncivil or hostile. He said the question was about freedom of instructors to choose a text, not about the ability of students and faculty to engage in discourse. He observed that some teachers are simply more comfortable with one text than with another and wondered why it would not be possible to include Rothenberg in a list of texts approved for adoption. He expressed concern that we were depriving AI's of a choice in textbook adoption and setting a precedent that might ultimately result in limitations on textbook choices for faculty teaching upper-division courses. He urged that Rothenberg be kept, but that a choice also be made available.

Margot Fitzgerald (AI) remarked that in reality AI's often had no choice as it was, that they often did not have time to prepare their classes and choose texts. She felt it was important to give AI's the opportunity to teach well, and that preparation was more important than freedom of choice.

David Ericson (AI) said that the question of academic freedom was not the same as the question of choice in text adoption. He noted that most AI's were literature students with little preparation for teaching 306, and that it was important for them to have a support structure. He felt that the curriculum revisions would provide that, and would not impinge on academic freedom.

John Ruszkiewicz said that experienced AI's ought to have a choice. He felt that the problem in shaping a course around a single text was that each time the text was changed, the whole course would also have to change. He thought that the kind of rhetoric to be taught should be decided first, then a choice of texts would be possible.

Sara Kimball said that the LDEPC had not intended to inhibit experienced AI's from developing their own courses. She noted that there was a variety of courses addressing special needs, such as E.306Q, and that flexibility was built into the system.

Janet Luedtke (AI) asked what provisions there would be for feedback from teachers. Professor Brodkey said that new AI's are often inhibited about expressing their opinions, and hoped that the mentor system would be of help, that it would be easier for them to talk to their group leaders.

Bill Worthen said that course instructor surveys were a poor instrument for judging the success of the course. Professor Brodkey said that they had used the instruments available. In the future they would put better instruments in place, but would continue to use the course instructor surveys to monitor gross trends. Professor Worthen questioned further the validity of using them, particularly in comparing E.306 rankings with those in other, more advanced courses. Professor Brodkey said that there was a time when the variation in 306 evaluations was not as great as it is now. She felt that pedagogical issued were at the heart of the statistical changes.

Kenneth Kidd (AI) said that he was uncomfortable about teaching a course based on legal briefs. Professor Brodkey said that she understood his reservations, but felt that the legal materials would not be more formidable than other materials used in the class. Given the interest in law, literature and rhetoric, the fields are more merged now than they were ten years ago. **B.J. Fernea** said that to look at the Rothenberg book as a collection of legal briefs was too narrow. It covers a range of genres.

John Ruszkiewicz asked where in the course materials the students would be supported in argumentation and logic. Professor Brodkey said the original plan was to send AI's home this summer with materials on argumentation. This is a syllabus question that will be worked out. Professor Ruszkiewicz said that since this is a course in writing, the issue of argumentation should be more fundamental than that.

Randi Voss (AI) expressed concern that the AI's would be using orientation week not only to hone their pedagogical skills but also to take a crash course in law. Professor Brodkey said no special knowledge would be needed. The legal materials in the packet would look very much like decisions regularly published in *The New York Times*, which prints Supreme Court decisions.

Joe Kelly (AI) suggested that senior AI's — those running up against the time limit — could be of help, too. **Terry Kelley** replied that the Graduate School would permit a sixth year of teaching, but it was not clear if the English department would have staff slots available for sixth-year teachers.

Susan Warshauer (AI) asked why the term "differences" rather than "social issues" was being used. Professor Brodkey replied that it requires a great deal of background reading to do a "social issues" course. The "difference" topic seems more contained and more fair.

John Zuern (AI) asked how master teachers would be chosen. Professor Brodkey answered that they would be chosen primarily on quality as writing teachers, evaluated by the usual methods. She said they might be able to do it by application, to find out who really wants to do this.

Jim Kinneavy said he felt impelled to support the proposal, if certain qualifications are maintained. He said that Professor Brodkey had assured him that the

course would be about differences of all kinds, not just racism and sexism; that the papers would be exploratory as well as argumentative; and that there was no pre-judging on the part of the committee. The packet of supplementary materials will be very important. There will have to be strong rhetorical papers in the packet, and they will have to be included in the course systematically. That will have to be carefully worked out this summer. Given those qualifications, the course could work. We will have to keep our eyes open and listen very carefully to the teachers.

Margaret Downs-Gamble (AI) asked if anyone else has done this type of course. Professor Brodkey replied that it had not been done before, and Ms. Downs-Gamble remarked that when our graduate students are on the market, people will look at them in terms of whether they had been involved in a successful program or in an unmemorable one. Her remarks were followed by applause.

Joe Kelly (AI) said the emphasis on argumentation is something we could all benefit from. It will be hard work for everyone, but he thinks he will learn something of value to his own writing, and that it will make him a better teacher.

Joe Kruppa, noting the time, agreed to accept one more question before moving on to the next item on the agenda.

Kurt Heinzelman asked what success would look like, and whether or not it would be measured by the current evaluation forms. Professor Hairston said that a while back the NCTE had spent two years designing tools for evaluation. Professor Brodkey said we were fortunate to have Lester Faigley here, who is experienced in evaluating writing programs. She said she had thought seriously about evaluation, and would not rely on the course instructor survey except for broad measurements. Professor Heinzelman made a remark that elicited laughter.

Joe Kruppa gave the floor to Rita Copeland and Barbara Harlow.

<u>Item II. Petition regarding changes in sophomore English.</u>

Barbara Harlow distributed a modified version of the second part of the petition, dealing with E.314L.

Rita Copeland suggested that E.316K and E.314L be discussed as separate issues. She said 316K-World is usually taught as a European masterpieces course, although some instructors give it a broader focus. Students have no way of knowing ahead of time which kind of course they will get. In the interest of "truth in advertising," we should bifurcate 316K-World into two variants: European and Ethnic & Third World.

Terry Kelley said she would want to continue to teach the course as a combination of European and Ethnic & Third World.

Purnima Bose (AI) asked if the issue pertained just to the World variant, and noted that the American and British variants also vary in focus. Professor Harlow said these variants had not been considered in the proposal. She noted the over-

lap among the three variants, citing the *Texas Monthly* anecdote about the student who had left a 316K-World with a 3rd-world emphasis for a more traditional one which led her to an appreciation for Melville.

Rita Copeland said the other side of the problem is even worse: students should be able to get more "world" in the World than what is offered in the *Norton Continental Masterpieces* edition. **John Slatin** noted that there was a good anthology available for the American variant which included ethnic materials. An Assistant Instructor said we needed to work on selection of a book and other materials for an Ethnic & Third World variant now. Professor Copeland noted that it has been done by xeroxed packets in the past. Professor Harlow quoted Kate Frost in referring to the variants as World and Real World.

Kurt Heinzelman asked if the proposal was for a fourth variant, on top of the three we have now. Professor Copeland said yes, but the proposal was to bifurcate World, not just to add a new topic to the three we have now. **Leah Marcus** said it would be even more truthful to offer a European, a World, and an Ethnic & Third World variant, and asked if we could have five. The consensus was that we could offer as many variants as we thougnt necessary.

Jane Marcus noted that Ms. Bose's syllabus was an excellent model for an Ethnic & Third World variant.

Jim Duban noted the possibility of too much confusion for AI's.

Mark Taylor (AI) said that we aren't giving students enough information about the content of the course. He characterized the problem as one of logistics, how to get information to the students in a timely manner. He noted that a great variety already existed under the World rubric, and that it needed to be conveyed to students. Professor Harlow said there was a cultural as well as "truth in advertising" justification for renaming the course, to acknowledge the importance of cultural contributions from outside the mainstream.

Joe Kruppa said it was too late to change anything for the fall, and that an ad hoc committee would be constituted to submit a proposal in the early fall.

Lance Bertelsen noted that for the first 45 minutes the talk had been of the importance of standardization; now it was about offering an incredible selection of courses. Professor Brodkey said that graduate students know a lot about literature, but not about writing.

Purnima Bose asked if graduate students could have a representative on the ad hoc committee. Professor Kruppa said yes.

Barbara Harlow then moved the discussion on to E.314L. She said it is good for nothing except SWC credit; it satisfies no other requirement and is not much use to students. She remarked that the ethnic literature courses had all been dumped into 314L, and were treated like step children. Students' only motivation for taking

the course was interest in the subject matter. The status of the course is inferior. It should do for students what 316K does.

Bill Worthen noted that the proposed requirement is for English majors, and asked what the advantage would be of proposing a major requirement at the lower-division level. Professor Harlow said the upper division also needed to be reworked. E.376M counts or does not count toward the major requirement on an ad hoc basis. English majors should be exposed to ethnic literatures in English. Professor Worthen agreed, but was puzzled by the addition of a requirement at the sophomore level. Professor Harlow said ethnic literatures should be there all the way through, at the beginning of the program through to the end. **Wayne Lesser** said that it would create problems to start dipping major requirements into the sophomore year. The problem was in the whole major requirement, and the proposal was premature, considering that the whole major was to be evaluated. Professor Harlow, addressing the issue of problems that would be created, said that where there's a will there's a way. She said that the proposal had been made before the formation of a committee on the English major was known.

John Velz expressed concern that the course would be swarmed under because of the SWC credit, and there would be no room for English majors. He noted that there are very few lower-division SWC courses on campus.

Wayne Rebhorn said it was premature to make a requirement for the major, although the discussion of it would be useful to the ad hoc committee. He said that there is something that can be done now: expand the sophomore literature requirement to include all 314L's. There is no common denominator for existing 316Ks, anyway. **Leah Marcus** said that then everybody would want to take 314L, to get simultaneous sophomore literature and SWC credit. Professor Rebhorn said students would not be able to get credit for both. **Jerry Bump** objected to opening up the sophomore requirement that much, noting that a wide variety of topics was offered under 314L, genre studies as well as ethnic literatures.

Joe Kruppa closed the meeting, since it was necessary to vacate the room, which was scheduled for a final exam. He invited members of the department to communicate their thoughts to him, to be passed on to the ad hoc committee.

The meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m.