

Minutes, Freshman English Policy Committee

February 21, 1979

Parlin 214

Members present: Trimble, Ruszkiewicz, Witte, Newcomb, Cameron,
Byars, Hart

Agenda:

- Approval of minutes
- Report on memo to Dean King
- Discussion of Cameron report on lab course
- Report on "Checkers Speech"
- 306 syllabus

1. The minutes of January 24 and February 14 were corrected and approved.
2. Since Dr. Kinneavy was attending an emergency EC meeting, there was no report on communications with Dean King.
3. Dr. Trimble asked Mr. Cameron to begin discussion of his report. After describing how he had produced the report via computer, Mr. Cameron indicated that without FEPC involvement, the lab must be either closed or continued as is. Especially pressing, he said, is the need for a policy on the use of TA's in the lab.

Dr. Trimble asked whether the lab might provide resources for handling remedial students, and Mr. Cameron replied that the current lab course demands a quality which remedial students often lack: self-discipline. Dr. Witte said that the procedural changes Mr. Cameron had made in the lab course, changes away from a self-paced format, seemed appropriate to him inasmuch as a semester-long, self-paced course is somewhat self-contradictory. He added that students are often miscounseled to take this course and that in a similar program at Oklahoma State he had found that students wanted regular instructors and closed classrooms. Mr. Cameron explained that he had already rearranged the lab room to make it seem less open and that the grading changes he had instituted were a partial response to the problems inherent in a self-paced course. He said further that like self-pacing, contract grading assumes an open-ended course.

After Dr. Trimble asked that discussion return directly to the problem of how to deal with remedial students, Dr. Witte said that according to his information, UT doesn't offer remedial courses. Mr. Cameron asked whether Dean King had called for a remedial course or rather for a remedial lab. Dr. Trimble recalled that as far back as 1975 a dean's committee had recommended the creation of a writing center. Mr. Cameron observed that some parts of the current lab course might be useful in a writing center but that before creating one we would need to decide what we wanted

such a center to accomplish. He added that a center should probably be designed for students at every level since even some master's students have writing problems. He also offered to supply copies of a report he had co-authored last year with Ann Lozano and Jana Wainwright, a report which included recommendations for a remedial course.

But, Dr. Witte reiterated, according to Dr. Abrahams the department cannot offer remedial courses. Berkeley has a bonehead English course, Dr. Trimble noted, called "Subject A," and 52% of the freshmen there take it before becoming eligible to enroll for regular English courses. Ms. Byars speculated that only the best students, those who care about their writing, would go to a voluntary lab. But, Dr. Witte said, UT doesn't get severely remedial students--to which Dr. Trimble replied that the matter is relative. Dr. Witte agreed and added that if admission standards are raised we'll have still a different set of students. Yes, Dr. Trimble said, but that's not likely to happen, at least not soon. Dr. Newcomb nodded and said that UT will probably not have finished responding to the enrollment crisis until 1991, by which time it will have passed and we can assume that we have solved it.

After the committee had chuckled its agreement, Dr. Trimble said that the incoming president is apparently considering several new policies. Dr. Newcomb then asked Dr. Trimble whether the new dean would act decisively before or after the new president takes office. Dr. Trimble would venture no opinion, but he did say that President Rogers is notoriously slow. Dr. Newcomb suggested that we have a package of proposals ready for the dean when he does decide to act, a suggestion which Dr. Witte furthered by saying that the dean supports the Hairston Committee's recommendations for a writing center. Perhaps we should look at Dr. Hairston's report, he added, and consider ways to use the lab as a supplement.

Mr. Cameron then called attention to the recommendations at the end of his report, stressing again the need for FEPC involvement. Dr. Newcomb pointed out that the report is descriptive rather than evaluative and asked whether anyone had a strong evaluation of the lab, something upon which to base a vote. But, Dr. Witte said, we have little evaluative data on regular 306 either, although the K-W-C study should provide some for both courses. Mr. Cameron noted that some preliminary data from the study might be available in a month, but Dr. Witte hastened to add that no final conclusions would be available until fall.

Dr. Newcomb then explained that even some informal evaluations would help, some statements from students, for instance. Mr. Cameron

replied that six students who had dropped the lab course in the fall had signed up for it again this semester--an indication that they, at least, considered the course worthwhile. We could also, he said, look at course-instructor evaluations and at instructors' self-evaluations. Dr. Witte added that apparently students in the K-W-C study last semester rated tutorial instructors and courses lower regardless of course content.

Mr. Cameron mentioned a related problem: because of poor advising during registration, freshmen have no way of determining whether to take the lab course. Dr. Trimble responded by suggesting that we create an information packet for the catalogue, and Ms. Byars said that advisors at orientation also need better information. Mr. Cameron added that our non-lab tutorial variants and even 306 regular also need publicity. Ms. Byars and Dr. Trimble agreed, Dr. Trimble suggesting an expanded brochure, one which would include 314K, 310, 317, etc. and would thus help students plan for their entire nine hours of English. Alternatively, Mr. Cameron said, we could have a number of brochures.

Dr. Trimble then asked how Mr. Cameron would propose to get the appropriate students into the lab course and, if it were well publicized, what would happen should, say, 500 students sign up. In response to the second of these questions Mr. Cameron ventured that a large enrollment would certainly indicate something about the course's popularity. In response to the first question, Dr. Witte said that there is nothing in the literature to tell us which students learn best in which environments but that, again, the K-W-C study might give us some indications. Indeed, Dr. Witte continued, we might do well to keep the lab open despite what we don't know, not only because having alternative courses is inherently good but also because the lab provides a resource for helping us answer the sorts of questions we've been asking. Yes, Dr. Newcomb said, the lab should be continued if only as a variable for research.

Next, Dr. Ruskiewicz asked whether keeping the lab open might involve any problems, such as with funding or staffing. Well, Mr. Cameron replied, funding for computer time might be a problem. UT, Dr. Witte explained, has shifted from Chinese dollars to real money for this; that is, computer expenses have become an in-line item in departmental budgets.. How much money is involved? Dr. Ruskiewicz asked. Now, some \$4000 a year, Dr. Witte replied, which is not enough: the current study, for instance, has almost run out of computer time. The lab course, then, costs about \$500 extra per section, Dr. Ruskiewicz figured. Yes, Dr. Witte replied, but only when we use computer instruction. If necessary, perhaps we could charge a small lab fee for the course,

Mr. Cameron suggested.

Dr. Trimble then mentioned that Dean King wants to cut back the use of AI's in favor of TA's, and asked how such a change would affect the lab course. Mr. Cameron explained that a lab section requires double staffing, an instructor plus a TA. He said further that he does not like forcing first-semester TA's to do as much work as a lab section requires, a 398T and two other courses being a heavy load, but that if the lab course is to be a legitimate variant of 306, the apprentices need to have experience in it.

Next Dr. Trimble said that he might not want to see the lab retained if Mr. Cameron were not running it, unless some other responsible manager could be found. Who else, he asked, might be available? Mr. Cameron explained that several people have experience in the lab but that most are AI's or instructors. He mentioned Martha King and Sue Rodi in particular. Then, in response to a direct query from Dr. Trimble, Mr. Cameron confessed that he has a year of AI eligibility remaining.

As the meeting drew to a close, Mr. Cameron reminded the committee that we might lose the lab room along with its computer terminals if we let the lab course lapse.