

SAME BOOK, DIFFERENT COVER

The new E306 syllabus is just another nightmare in the multicultural dream.

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Contributor

Well, the Lower Division English Policy Committee is at it again. If one were to grade on the basis of effort, Linda Brodkey and the Lower Division English Policy Committee (LDEPC) which she heads would surely earn an "A." When it comes to preparing texts for E306, they have tried every conceivable package in which to wrap their politics. As for the latest "new and improved" syllabus, it might best be described as (pardon the cliché) "the same book, different cover."

Last summer, a united protest of concerned students, faculty, and alumni successfully prevented the LDEPC from implementing "the book" - a highly politicized sociology reader entitled *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study* - as the standardized text for the compulsory freshman writing course, English 306.

The "Thing"

Undaunted and vision intact, Brodkey vowed on behalf of her committee to "do the same thing with the class,...working with a packet." The "thing" she wanted to do with the class? "Focus students and teachers on work that has been done on "difference" by people who work on and/or live with inequity." And the packet? It has already been assembled and approved by the Department of English and is scheduled for introduction next fall.

As for this new syllabus, it contains sixteen articles in all, of which only two deal with writing and logic. Of the other fourteen entries, seven are Opinions of the Court; five related articles accompany these Opinions; and there are two general, "academic" essays which are a little more comprehensive in scope. Each reading addresses a violation of civil rights, and each one takes the same condemnatory approach towards those who do not adhere to an "enlightened" perspective. Not one of these readings could be considered moderate in its approach to the controversial issues of race and gender.

According to the memo which Brodkey sent to faculty members in the Department of English, every E306 student will be required to "work with" the Supreme Court Opinion in "Sweatt v. Painter", its accompanying essay by Richard Kluger, and the two broader "academic" essays. In addition, each "Writing Group" will be assigned another court case along with an accompanying tract. There will be no choices.

Consider, for a moment, merely the titles of the three essays which will be required reading for all E306 students: "Making a Difference" and "Sources of Difference" from *Making All the Difference: Inclusion, Exclusion, and American Law*, by Martha Minow; "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," by Peggy McIntosh; and "The Spurs of Texas Are Upon You," by Richard Kluger.

Permeating all of these essays is an ideological agenda which includes a virulently political understanding of "difference" and which has as its goal a purely egalitarian social order. Evidently, the LDEPC supposed that they could best help students "focus" on such an agenda by bludgeoning them with article after article on the injustice perpetrated by the "empowered" in American society, namely, by everyone who is white, heterosexual, and male.



Serving as the packet's introduction to "difference" are a couple of selected chapters from Martha Minow's *Making All the Difference*. In this work, the author emphasizes the need to recognize the correlation between labelling/stereotyping and oppression. Minow states, "Ideology becomes a concern here because expressions of power, approval, and disapproval are at work in the links between categories of sameness and difference and the values of equality and inequality."

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Despite many acute observations on the dilemmas inherent in any civilized society, she proceeds to espouse some very dubious conclusions about the legal system: "There is no single, superior perspective for judging questions of difference. No perspective asserted to produce "the truth" is without a situated perspective, because any statement is made by a person who has a perspective." And the author finishes by invoking the unifying "goal of justice."

The incongruities of such a deconstructionist philosophy are many. For Minow, there can be no such thing as deviant behavior (because there is no such thing as "normal"). All behavior may therefore be excused on the basis of it being the result of an alternative perspective. Her "goal of justice" is thus necessarily relegated to the level of irrationality; in which case, one must wonder if there can be any justice at all.

In the subsequent article - which is also required reading - Peggy McIntosh provides an especially interesting account of "difference." In this essay Ms. McIntosh seeks to expose the tools of empowerment and oppression, i.e. gender and skin color. This "privilege," though, may be "fully recognized [or] acknowledged" by only the most perceptive of individuals (the reader must appreciate that Ms. McIntosh considers herself, coincidentally, to be one of these individuals).

As one student remarked, "This stuff doesn't belong in a basic writing class. It belongs in an upper-division sociology or philosophy class."

Fuzzy Focus

Following Minow and McIntosh's "scholarly prose" are a series of Court Opinions and related tracts. Concerning these readings, the supporters of the syllabus put forth the notion that the introduction into the classroom of Supreme Court decisions could in no way be considered indoctrination. But the Opinions included in the packet are not accompanied by dissenting opinions as they are in official Court pronouncements (this wouldn't fit with Brodkey's concept of "focus"); on the contrary, the relatively short Opinions are followed by long "academic" essays intended to sustain and encourage "correct" interpretation of the Court decisions.

For instance, the seven-page Opinion for "Sweatt v. Painter," which declared unconstitutional The University of Texas' exclusion of blacks from the School of Law, precedes Richard Kluger's thirty-page explication entitled "The Spurs of Texas Are Upon You." Similarly, the Opinion for a case entitled "Fricke v. Lynch" - which involved the right of a Rhode Island high school homosexual male to bring a male escort to a school social function - is nearly eight pages in the packet, while the following related tract, "Gay Youth and the Right to Education," is thirty pages long.

As one might assume, the LDEPC carefully selected these cases on the basis of their ideological content and not for their exemplary prose. Furthermore, Brodkey and her associates embellished the Opinions with text which Professor Alan Gribben called "a prefabricated condemnation of American values reflecting the reigning ideology imposed by low-risk radicals in English departments across the country." He added, "Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the faculty here has sanctioned a highly slanted set of readings that a hapless first-year student must now negotiate in order to fulfill the University requirement."

On the first page of her "academic" essay, McIntosh actually confesses, "This paper is a partial record of my personal observations, and not a scholarly analysis." But

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Campus News In Brief

English Multiculturalism Spreads

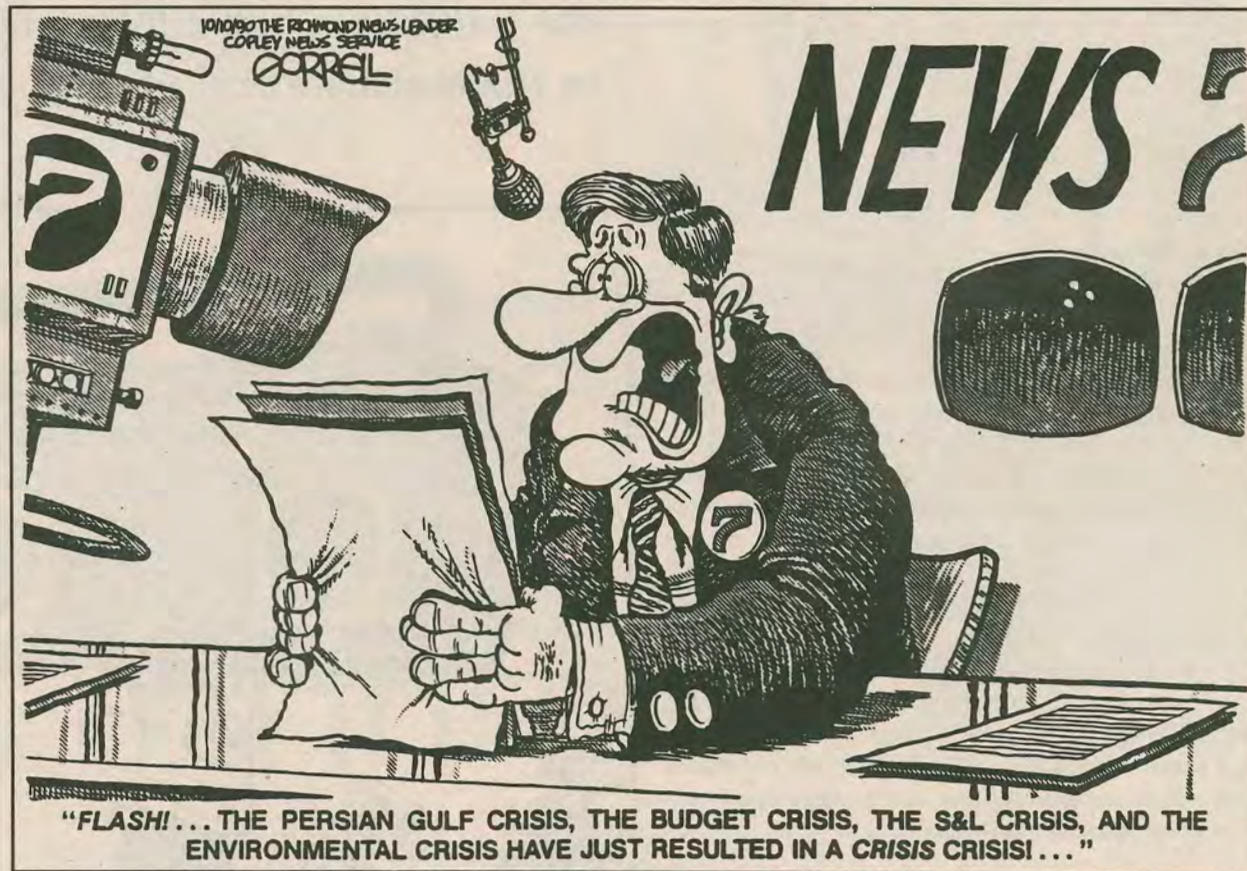
Not to be outdone by the Lower Division English Policy Committee's reorganization of freshman English, the ad hoc Sophomore Committee headed by Wayne A. Rebhorn recently revised the Sophomore English Literature Program.

Rebhorn and the Sophomore Committee proposed a revision of sophomore English — which passed the Department convincingly — to address three problems which they said “became apparent at the departmental meeting.” First, they said that the ethnic literature studied in E314 had been made to appear inferior to the “major author” literature of E316. They called the title “World Literature” a misnomer because of its focus on literature from Europe. And, although they recognized that the matter was “outside the jurisdiction of a committee appointed to deal with the sophomore program”, the Committee insisted on the “clear” necessity of integrating “ethnic, Third World, and world literature” into the upper-division English program.

Rebhorn explained, “it seems desirable at this juncture in our national and local history to affirm fully the equal status of ethnic and Third World texts with the texts taught in other sophomore variants.” Never mind the literary merit of the work.

To remedy the problems, then, the new E316 will include two variants in addition to the study of the masterworks. The texts may also no longer be called “masterworks.” It remains unclear if this is due to the fact that sophomores won't be required to read genuinely quality literature or if this is just because the professors in the English Department are no longer able to distinguish between good literature and politics.

And for good measure, the Sophomore Committee announced that classes previously offered as topics courses under E314L will now be included as “variants” under E316. It's been rumored too that the Sophomore Committee is considering implementation of another “variant” for E316: Classics of American Literature: Dr. Seuss to Danielle Steele.



said that, although it was possible that some people slipped through the system, “precautions [taken by the Students’ Association] made voter fraud very unlikely.”

from the sixties are now doing. To those who aren't directly affected it is an insult. To the families of the servicemen it is an abomination.

* * * * *

Cleaver Angers Military

E306

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evidently, the LDEPC has no need for "scholarly analysis," nor even for competent prose. After all, they have a message to get across, and what better way to achieve this end than by preaching to a captive audience, viz. to a group of freshmen in a compulsory English class.

Brodkey and the LDEPC have not been exactly steadfast in their official position on the political nature of English 306, though. Initially, they insisted that the new syllabus in no way promoted any ideological agenda. Now, however, they defend the course's political slant with counter-charges that all courses are political anyway, meaning that the emphasis in E306 will be on "correctness."

Recently, a senior in the School of Liberal Arts

NO LEFT TURN



Read
The Review

approached the author of this piece requesting help with a paper due the following day. Having just received a failing grade for his previous foray into the arena of literary exposition, this individual was determined to amend in his second assignment the innumerable errors of his first. (His professor had marred the first essay with remarks on poor grammar, poor transition, fragmented sentences, fragmented thoughts, etc. He concluded by imploring the student to seek help at the Learning Skills Center at Jester Hall.)

However, despite the student's efforts, it seemed that his second paper was no better than the first, and what was intended to be a casual perusal and "touch-up" job became a three-hour reformation of disjointed prose. This restructuring was primarily cosmetic, though, for what the senior really needed was a lesson (albeit a long one) in expository writing. In fact, he said it best: "I know what I want to say, I just...well...you know."

It is just such a case which so clearly defines the essence of what is at stake in the debate over English 306: after four years of college, many students simply cannot write.

According to Linda Brodkey, there is "lots of tension on that campus [U.T.] over difference" among students. The new new freshman English course was intended to address this problem of difference as well as to teach university-level writing.

It seems apparent, though, that the new E306 syllabus not only fails to teach skills in rhetoric and composition, but it also actively promotes a militant ideology which doesn't belong in a basic English class in the first place.

On the LDEPC's efforts for "political consciousness-raising," columnist George Will astutely noted that, in effect, "nerves are rubbed raw by the competitive cultivation of grievances." He concluded, "The more brittle campus relations become, the more aggressive moral therapy becomes, making matters worse."

(Note: The syllabus and packet of readings are on reserve at the Undergraduate Library under "Brodkey.")

Tentative Table of Contents for E306 Course Packet

- 1) Writing Arguments: Claims, Grounds, and Warrants
- 2) Inductive and Deductive Reasoning
- 3) Martha Minow, "Making a Difference" and "Sources of Difference" from *Making All the Difference: Inclusion, Exclusion, and American Law* (Cornell UP, 1990)
- 4) Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies" (Wellesley College Center for Research on Women)
- 5) *Sweatt v. Painter* (citation: 339 U.S. 629)
- 6) Richard Kluger, "The Spurs of Texas are Upon You," from *Simple Justice: The History of "Brown v. Board of Education" and Black America's Struggle for Equity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975)
- 7) *Chambers v. Omaha Girl's Club Inc.* (citation 838 F.2d 1031)
- 8) *Gutierrez v. Municipal Court of S.E. Judicial District* (citation: 838 F.2d 1031)
- 9) Bill Piatt, "Toward Domestic Recognition of a Human Right to Language," *Houston Law Review* 23 (1986): 885
- 10) *Nelson v. Thornburgh* (citation: 567 F.Supp. 369)
- 11) Richard Scotch, "Disability as the Basis for a Social Movement: Advocacy and the Politics of Definition," *Journal of Social Issues* 44.1 (1988)
- 12) *University of Pennsylvania v. EEOC* (citation: 58 LW 4096)
- 13) *Fricke v. Lynch* (citation: 491 F.Supp. 381)
- 14) Donna L. Dennis and Ruth E. Harlow, "Gay Youth and the Right to an Education" *Yale Law & Policy Review* 4 (1986)
- 15) *Lantz by Lantz v. Ambach* (citation: 620 F.Supp. 663)
- 16) Beborah Rhode, "Association and Assimilation," from *Justice and Gender: Sex Discrimination and the Law* (Harvard UP, 1989)

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THE NEW E306?

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"CAN'T TEACH THIS"