

PROPOSAL BY THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS FOR AN
UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENT IN ENGLISH

The College of Liberal Arts recommends that all undergraduate degree programs at The University of Texas at Austin involve a sequence of three English courses: (1) English 306, Rhetoric and Composition, in the freshman year; (2) English 316K, Masterworks of Literature, in the sophomore year; (3) English 346K, Writing in Different Disciplines, (or an equivalent course offered in any department and approved by the Department of English, in the junior or senior year.

English 306, Rhetoric and Composition, is the composition course currently required in all undergraduate programs in the University. No basic change is envisaged for this course. It will continue to emphasize much expository and analytical writing, paying attention to mechanics, rhetorical strategies, and organization.

English 316K, Masterworks in Literature, is a new course involving readings in one of three alternative subject areas--World Masterworks, English Masterworks, and American Masterworks. Although the emphasis in this course is on literature, there will be significant amounts of writing in the form of critical papers and essay examinations.

English 346K, Writing in Different Disciplines, is a new course which will be offered in four topics: Writing in the Arts and Humanities, Writing in the Social and Behavioral Sciences, Writing in the Natural Sciences, and Writing in Business. The writing exercises will prepare students for the kinds of writing in these various areas and some of them will relate to readings in the respective areas. The Department of English is authorized to approve equivalent courses in writing, offered by individual departments as a substitute for E346K.

These requirements do not apply to Plan II; and Humanities 306 remains as a substitute for E306 in all regular programs. For foreign students there will be E306Q, E316KQ, and E346KQ, similar to the current alternatives. Finally, for the weakest students in the University we are proposing English 206 and English 106, courses to accompany E306 and mandating two hours or one hour per week in the language laboratory. These will be credit courses, but the credit will not count towards graduation.

This legislation supersedes the legislation of the General Faculty (D&M 10728-10729), approved by the circularization process February 20, 1973.

RATIONALE AND ANCILLARY SUGGESTIONS

Rationale for the Proposal

Considerable study by the Department of English has motivated this proposal. The legislation of 1973 on the English requirement for Plan I degree programs (degrees in Arts and Sciences) had asked for a review of the effectiveness of the program proposed at that time. The Department of English has attempted to comply with the spirit of that recommendation. Between 1974 and the present time there have been empirical research studies on many aspects of the current programs: mechanics (2 studies), use of the library (2), use of the laboratory, use of anthologized readings (2), teaching of supportive evidence, teaching of techniques of persuasion (2), use of tutors, use of free self-expression, use of exploratory heuristics, use of the computer (3), use of the part-to-whole (sentence-paragraph-theme) versus whole-involving-part (theme with functional paragraph and sentence and diction con-

siderations), University faculty reaction to program effectiveness, general effectiveness of the program (3), the relation of the program to the types of writing in different departments, the effectiveness of the use of graduate students as teachers in many sections of the program, and the problem of writing anxiety. Five of these studies have been doctoral dissertations by students in English Education, 2 have been follow-up studies of dissertations, 3 have been undertaken by the Measurement and Evaluation Center, 2 have been in-house studies by the Freshman English Policy Committee, the writing anxiety studies have been made by John Daly in the Department of Speech Communication, and one large study was initially funded by the office of the Vice-President.

A good number of the conclusions of these studies were used by the Department of English last year, when, at the request of Dean King of the College of Liberal Arts, an intensive study of the English requirement was undertaken. The Chairman of the Department appointed 6 study committees which worked independently and then under the umbrella of a large task force to examine the content, the sequencing, the admission requirements, placement options, and the staffing problems of the program. After more than a half year of intensive, often weekly meetings by these committees, the Department met in plenary sessions and approved the present proposal by a 76% majority approval--a singularly rare achievement for an English department.

The Upper Division Composition Course. The heart of the change in the proposal is the transfer of the second required composition course from the second semester of the freshman year to the junior or senior year and to require that the subjects of the themes be relevant to the particular discipline of the student.

Certainly the most compelling reason for the suggestion is the desire of the UT faculty and student body. In the Hereford-Sledd report of 1976, 78% of the 1358 faculty respondents (including Teaching Assistants) favored such an upper division course, and 83% of 2114 student respondents said that students would be more motivated in such a course. Yet 77% of the students also favored a freshman composition course. Such a response is a mandate for our suggestions.

But there are several educational principles motivating this change in addition to this charge. Two research studies at Harvard seem to have initiated the concern over what has come to be called the deterioration of inactive writing skills. In reporting the second study to the faculty at Harvard, President Derek Bok pointed out that while graduating seniors in liberal arts disciplines wrote better than freshmen who had completed a course in composition, on the contrary seniors in the physical sciences wrote worse than their freshman counterparts--largely because of lack of exercise of these skills in the intervening years. Indeed this report was one of the major stimulants for the undergraduate core curriculum study which Bok then asked Dean Rosnovsky to undertake.

A goodly number of large and small institutions have attempted to face this issue. Large institutions like Michigan, Maryland, SUNY-Courtlandt, Bradley, Brigham Young, California State College (both San Bernardino and Long Beach), Carnegie-Mellon, and small liberal arts colleges like Beaver College in Philadelphia, Canisius College, Spelman College in Atlanta, etc., and others have adopted the junior level format, nearly always coupled with the writing in a particular discipline. The faculty involved in such programs almost universally praise the greater maturity of the themes, the better organization of the material, and the more noticeable motivation of the students. Research studies carried on at some of these institutions, particularly at Bradley and Michigan, document the accuracy of these faculty reactions. Our own experience here at Texas with the courses in technical writing and advanced expository

prose agrees with these findings.

Consequently, our proposal posits a writing experience in three of the four years of the student's undergraduate career. The sophomore year combines this writing experience with the literary experience. And the Department of English, in conjunction with the literary experience on the core curriculum, believes strongly that one of the components of a college education should be some exposure to the great masterpieces of the Western tradition of literature.

Changes for the Various Colleges. The present proposal does not change the number of hours required for graduation in any of the degree programs except that of the College of Fine Arts. All of the other colleges or schools already require 9 or more hours of English.

The major disturbance of this present proposal will be in the sequencing. This issue was discussed in December in an informal meeting with the sub-deans of the various colleges and schools. This problem does not seem insoluble.

There will be other logistical concerns which will have to be faced. The English department will phase out certain courses presently offered, will establish different prerequisites to upper division courses, will continually reexamine placement instruments, will work more thoroughly than ever with the Registrar's Office to attempt to predict enrollments, and will also continue to examine the criteria for exemptions from different courses. Nothing radically different from present procedures is envisaged in these areas, however.

Ancillary Suggestions.

The Department of English and the College of Liberal Arts hopes that the concern for literacy spreads to all departments of the University. We encourage all of the faculty and staff to take an interest in writing and possibly to cooperate with the Department of English in its Writing Across the Disciplines courses. And we encourage members of departments professionally interested in literature to cooperate with the Masterworks course.

The College of Liberal Arts likewise hopes that the current interest in limiting enrollment and growth in order to focus on quality is extended to the issues of a literate student body. Should an institution of the first class, so defined by the state constitution, include in its entering freshman class about 600 students who are in the lowest quarter of all college and junior college students in the SAT Verbal scores. This constitutes about 10% of the class. It is this group that is the clientele for the remedial laboratory work entailed in the E106 and E206.

Our pilot experiment with the laboratory handling this lowest 10% of the entering freshmen has been, by all reports from both faculty and students this year, a remarkable success. As long as these students are on campus, we intend to assist them. In any case, if the University ever succeeds in attracting more minority students than it presently has, such a facility will be useful in a different dimension.

In addition to considering limiting enrollments, the Department of English would like the University to consider earlier enrollment deadlines. Large midwestern universities like Michigan, with more numbers than we have, close admissions in early spring. It is therefore easier to predict class sections and the number of teachers needed for the fall courses. We have talked to the Registrar's Office about this issue and hope that eventually a deadline of May 1 can be established for admissions.

Finally, the Department of English and the College of Liberal Arts hope that the University community, the Regents, the Coordinating Board, and the Legislature will view the teaching of composition at any level as a function which carries as much dignity and importance as any other teaching function in the University. Instead of delegating this job mainly to poorly paid Assistant Instructors and temporary faculty not considered good enough to be given tenure status, we hope that the teaching of composition will be endowed with the respect which it deserves. This means that the salary, the academic status, and the teaching load of faculty engaged in composition teaching be commensurate with the rest of the faculty. Indeed the Regents and the Coordinating Board might come to recognize that the individual nature of much of the conferencing in composition classes approaches the tutorial solicitude of art and music teaching and might be formula funded on a basis different from the other liberal arts, as well as given different teaching load credits.