

Chronology of English 306 at the University of Texas at Austin

1. Gregory Curtis, editor of Texas Monthly, a regional magazine. "The Bring-Something- Texan-That-You-Want-To-Burn Party," (Texas Monthly "Behind the Lines," May 1990): pp. 5-6.

This article describes a party where a bonfire was started to burn Texan items and the riff between the traditional professors and the radical ones. Curtis characterizes one side as "generally older and more established professors who believe in traditional literature and traditional teaching. On the other are generally younger professors who see in literature a 'tool of oppression,' as a typical phrase goes, and teaching as a way of proselytizing for their gender, race, or their radical--most often specifically Marxist--political beliefs."

"Personal political beliefs are inevitable in the classroom," says Kruppa. "He also claims that professors who 'foreground' their beliefs are preferable to those who don't."

"One professor in the department speaks openly of transforming students into 'literary terrorists.'"

"Kruppa says that he doesn't favor requiring multicultural courses; rather he favors 'infusing those variables' into already required courses."

2. Joseph Kruppa, chairman of English Department, University of Texas at Austin. "From the Chairman," (University of Texas at Austin, Department of English Newsletter Spring II, 1990): pp. 1-2.

Kruppa begins the newsletter asking the department not to leave hate letters in their colleagues mailboxes. He then replies to the TM article as encouraging "snide backbiting and paranoid vision. . . [that] have no place in a department and a university dedicated to the exchange of ideas." At the end of the newsletter Kruppa asks for "a spirit of cooperation, dialogue, honesty, and simple human respect."

3. Joseph Kruppa. Announcement of English Department meeting for May 8, 1990 with "attached memo from Linda Brodkey, Director of Lower-Division English, about the textbook change in E. 306," May 1, 1990.

4. Linda Brodkey, Director of Lower-Division English, University of Texas at Austin. Memo. May 1, 1990.

"Beginning in the Fall of 1990, students in English 306 classes. . . will read and write about 'difference.' In the first year, students will learn about some kinds of 'difference' from a textbook on social issues, Paula Rothenberg's Racism and Sexism, and learn about some others from Civil Rights cases and affirmative action policy statements."

"Students entering The University need to learn how to think, read, and write critically about civic issues. . . . If students don't begin exploring racism and sexism in college classrooms, then I can't imagine where else in this country anyone is likely to learn how to

broach these complex and critical issues--to say nothing of learning how to read, think, and write critically about them."

5. Scott. W. Wright, reporter, Austin American-Statesman, Austin, Texas. "Embattled UT Dean Quits Post," May 2, 1990: p. B1.

"A University of Texas associate dean, who has been an outspoken opponent of the school's affirmative action program for minority students and teachers, has resigned."

"'Because he opposes the University's fundamental principles involving minority students, he only exacerbates the racial tension and undermines the administration's credibility in its efforts to stymie racism and help minorities,' the editors of Tejas [a student publication that targets Mexican American readers] wrote."

"Horn defended his positions. . . saying he supports multicultural education. 'The problem I have with the proposals. . . is that they are blatantly ideological. . . . They advocate. . . the idea that discrimination in America in the past has produced such problems for minorities that we need a very radical restructuring of our entire system. . . . being called racist for his views. . . . 'I am actually the opposite of a racist. . . . I believe people should be treated on the basis of their individual merits. I don't believe in favoring one group over another.'"

6. William Murchison, columnist, Dallas Morning News, Dallas, Texas. "Radical Left Has Won Battle for Lecturns," Dallas Morning News, May 19, 1990: p. 31A.

Column about "the tribulations of Alan Gribben. . . . [His] apparent offense is upholding traditional academic standards. It goes back almost three years . . . [when] he voted against creating a concentration in ethnic and Third World literatures at the master of arts level. He suggested, not unreasonably, that entering graduate students need the English and American classics as [a] foundation. . . . multiculturalists were calling him a racist. . . sexist. . . . 'I became a virtual nonentity.' . . . Dr. Gribben, in long, respectful letters, has sought redress from his chairman and new liberal arts dean. No meaningful response has come. I called the chairman, Joseph Kruppa, to ask about the Gribben case. Dr. Kruppa declined to comment on a 'personnel matter.' He said the department has 'a lot of interchange and dialogue going on.'"

7. Kirby Moss, reporter, Austin American-Statesman. "UT English Classes Changed to Study Civil Rights Cases," Austin American-Statesman, May 31, 1990: p. B2.

"The changes are designed to show the necessity of understanding social implications in differences of race, ethnic background, age, gender, sexual preference and religion, said Joseph Kruppa."

"'Freshman composition will still basically be a course in argumentation--how to weigh evidence and build cohesive arguments,' Kruppa said."

"Linda Brodkey. . . said various U.S. Supreme Court decisions on racial and sexual discrimination will be the keystone of the 306 course because of their value in constructing arguments."

"All students at UT must have credit for English 306. However, about 40 percent of all incoming students test out of it, and more than 10 percent of students already have taken an equivalent course at another college."

8. Shane Utter, reporter, Daily Texan (student newspaper), University of Texas at Austin. "E306 To Add Readings on Racism," Daily Texan, ? : p. ?.

Kruppa said, "Freshman composition will still basically be a course in argumentation--how to weigh evidence and build cohesive arguments."

Linda Brodkey said the Rothenberg textbook "was chosen to 'steady students with respect to the topic of difference.' 'This approach takes the students seriously, and it takes their civic responsibilities seriously. . . . We're not asking them [students] to be lawyers. We're asking them to read like educated citizens by looking at primary documents such as [U.S.] Supreme Court decisions and analyzing how both the majority and dissenting opinions were argued.' Brodkey also noted the additional benefit of encouraging students to examine how the American judicial system deals with racism and discrimination."

Deirdre Hammons, engineering junior and chairwoman of the Texas Union Multiculturalism Task Force, said "It's a move in the right direction, away from the Eurocentric teaching. . . . I think it's warranted because of changes in society and Texas."

9. Editorial. "UT's Including Ethnic Study in Course a Good Step," Austin American-Statesman, June 4, 1990: p. A6.

". . . Kruppa appears to be meeting one of the important missions of education--making it relevant to real life."

"Because of the large number of students going through the course, it is a good one to use to increase students' awareness issues of race and gender."

"Clearly, progress in one English class is not going to eradicate the racial and cultural tensions on campus. But if additional departments follow suit, progress will be made. If efforts to change are made, change can take place."

10. Alan Gribben, professor of English, Univeristy of Texas at Austin. "New E306 Format Flawed," Daily Texan "Firing Line," June 18, 1990: p. 4.

Letter: "Without even pausing for a vote by its faculty, the English Department. . . will start explaining to presumedly benighted UT students how they ought to feel about issues of ethnicity and feminism. . . .[Instructors] will be compelled to pose as political scientists, legal historians, statistical sociologists, cultural critics, political philosophers, and group psychologists. . . . [Joseph Kruppa and Linda Brodkey] might yet be deluged with faculty protests about this arrogation of subject matter belonging to other fields, or undergraduate students conceivably could resist this presumptuous move to grade them on 'politically correct' thought in a required English course."

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11. Alan Gribben. "Politicizing English 306," Austin American-Statesman "Letters," June 23, 1990: p. A14.

Letter: "The largest required course at [UT]. . . has now fallen prey to the current mania for converting every academic subject into a politicized study of race, class, and gender. . . . if so fundamental a course as English 306 can be blatantly politicized, then the state Legislature and the UT faculty, administration and board of regents have a right to consider abolishing required English courses."

12. "Civil Rights is Theme for Writing Course," New York Times "The Living Arts," June 25, 1990: p. ?

"The course has been taught almost exclusively by graduate students, with about 50 classes of 25 students each."

Brodkey: "It became apparent that it was floundering as a course, and I think everyone in the department agreed it was floundering."

". . . the committee tried to choose cases in which the Court was sharply split between strong arguments on both sides, so that students would learn that laws can be interpreted in different ways."

"Mr. Gribben, who estimates that about 15 faculty members hold deep reservations about the change, said he thought that it was an issue of academic freedom and politicization."

John Ruskiewicz "who sat on the committee, strongly opposed the use of Ms. Rothenberg's work as a standard text, calling the book a 'far left view with no countervailing opinion.'"

Brodkey "intended to take precautions to make sure the course did not swerve into indoctrination. 'One of the things I made clear with the assistant instructors when I met with them is that this is not a course in identity politics. I said, 'If you don't feel you can do than, we'll definitely put you into another course where you can.'"

13. Alan Gribben. Telephone interview with Ted Burns, America Talks, June 25, 1990. (National talk show that is heard in northern Texas.)

Talk about politicization of freshman composition and opposition to Rothenberg book as textbook. Call-in audience recount own experiences of politicized courses from continental U.S. and Hawaii.

14. Alan Gribben. Telephone interview with Don Crawford, KFIT radio, Austin, Texas. June 25, 1990.

Call-in from Alan to talk about politicization of freshman composition. Crawford invites Alan back in two days for longer studio show.

15. Todd Ackerman. "UT Comp Class Fuels Controversy," Houston Chronicle, June 27, 1990: 9A-12A.

"English department officials call the curriculum change a 'side effect' of the need for Americans to understand the social implications of differences in gender, sexual preference, age, ethnic background, race and religion."

Gribben: "A class on good writing has been converted into an

instruction course in the correct social and political thinking. Failing to convince people in the English department it was utterly inappropriate, I'm turning to the Texas public to see what they think."

"Gribben said his phone has been 'ringing off the hook' since he wrote letters to the editor."

Kruppa calls "Gribben's concerns 'nonsense.' The class, he said teaches the students the process of writing, not instilling them with any ideology. The only person with a political agenda is Gribben. . . The class is about getting students to think about issues and then put their thoughts into effective writing. No one is going to be graded on their position."

The course "is taken by 2,500 to 3,000 freshmen."

"John Ruskiewicz, an associate professor of English and committee member who voted against it, said opponents include classical liberals who think the topic of 'difference' should be broadened. More professors have reservations about the change, but they're hesitant to speak out for fear of being called racist or sexist. . . . I think the concerns of the class reflect certain people more than all professors."

"The most controversial aspect of the class was the sociology textbook. . . which Kruppa acknowledged could be characterized as 'radical.' Committee leaders decided this week to drop the book, although they still hope to use some of its selections."

16. Candice Driver, reporter, Daily Texan. "Officials Cancel E306 Textbook," Daily Texan, June 27, 1990: pp. 1-5.

Joseph Kruppa "said the textbook's cancellation was due to the controversy within the English Department. 'A lot of people had trouble with the book because it had weak material and we were only going to use a small part of it. . . . We're going to do the same thing with the class, but we'll be working with a packet including essays, poems, government documents and the like.'"

Mentions that there was a March 20 memo to the members of the policy committee to revamp the course. Mentions the April 3 policy committee meeting presenting Brodkey's plans to "standardize the E306 curriculum and require assistant instructors to attend orientation sessions before teaching the new course."

Gribben said he had three major objections to the textbook: "First, it's a sociology textbook and a rather extreme example of that. . . . Secondly, assuming the situation on campus and in America is so dire that students have got to be indoctrinated and we have to subordinate the basic teaching of writing, that book still doesn't meet the standards of the University because it is so out of balance. . . . [third] its 'Marxist line of questioning. It's whole point of view is that America has failed its mission and I just happen to believe that freshmen shouldn't have to subscribe themselves to this very jaundiced point of view."

Gribben: "My whole life has been a fight against racism and sexism, but this is a matter of principle involving the integrity of the subject matter for an established course."

Duban: "I have worried about the implications for academic freedom of a one-reader (i.e., textbook) adoption policy for so many instructors. I also have reservations about the potential for politicizing Freshman English: I see no advantage to restricting the issues--however vital--which students are allowed to address persuasively in an introductory writing course."

17. Alan Gribben. Don Crawford, Don Crawford Show, "Politicization of Freshman Composition," KFIT, Austin, Texas, June 27, 1990.

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