

A Statement of Academic Concern

We regret the action of the English Department of the University of Texas at Austin that transformed English 306 "Rhetoric and Composition" into a course on "Difference—Racism and Sexism."

Specifically, we are concerned that the new curriculum for Freshman English distorts the fundamental purpose of a composition class—to enhance a student's ability to write—by subordinating instruction in writing to the discussion of social issues and, potentially, to the advancement of specific political positions.

We are concerned that assistant instructors in E 306 may have little or no training to prepare them to teach the complex legal, sociological, psychological, and historical issues of racism and sexism at a college level or to judge the adequacy of student arguments on these matters.

We are concerned that the instructional "packet" for students may not include materials on logic and argumentation. Without such materials, students cannot know by what standards their papers are being judged or to what extent an instructor's political opinions might be influencing the evaluation of written work.

We are concerned that the altered E 306 class may be biased in its examination of controversial political questions. In a course on writing, we believe that freshmen should be exposed to a full spectrum of cogently argued positions, not to a single hegemonic view.

Consequently, we urge the English Department to reconsider its decision to turn the University's only required English composition class into a course on racism and sexism.

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