

Recommendations for a New Writing Program

Quick summary of our recommendations:

(1) Change the University English requirement to 9 unspecified hours of English.

(2) Retain the present version of E.306 as our introductory Freshman Composition course.

(3) Reinstate E.310, E.317, and E.346K so as to offer students a full panoply of composition options, but offer only as many sections of each as we ~~can~~ staff without having to rely on more than a handful of lecturers.

(4) Create a new administrative entity, called the Writing Committee, to oversee all undergraduate writing courses in the Department of English. This entity would consist of a Director of Writing (appointed by, and reporting to, the Dean of Liberal Arts), a Coordinator of Upper-Division Writing, and a Coordinator of Lower-Division Writing. The writing program office would be staffed by one senior secretary and one secretary--the same staff as required by the pre-1984 Freshman English office--and would be housed in the same offices as those currently used by the Freshman English Office and duplicating room (Farlin 14, 16, 18, and 19).

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Major selling points of our plan:

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UCLA, Iowa, Yale, Brown, Harvard--these and other major universities have committed themselves to offering an introductory writing course that trains freshmen in the basic competencies required for writing in college and after graduation. We believe that UT should do no less. The rest of the University and the general public expect students to write competently, and complain loudly when they can't. Since students are required to take English courses, we are held responsible for their being able to write. We can't shift that responsibility back to beleaguered high school teachers. Nor can we realistically expect Austin Community College, which is already straining its resources, to absorb the thousands of students who will need to take freshman English if the University abandons E.306.

We therefore recommend that E.306 be retained as the introductory freshman English course, and that it be taught on campus. Here are our particular reasons for endorsing it:

(1) Unlike a literature-based composition course, it goes well beyond imparting an appreciation of literature. And unlike its remedial counterparts, it goes well beyond imparting rudimentary mechanical skills. Because of its emphasis on teaching students to write for different purposes, to adapt their writing to different audiences, to think critically about the writing of others, and to learn to do research and report it, it does an

at some other schools, /

excellent job of preparing freshmen for the intellectual demands of writing in college.

(2) It has been evaluated and validated by numerous independent studies, and is considered a model in the nation. In fact, this type of composition course--a rhetorically based course stressing expository writing and an introduction to library research--is now the norm at major universities.

(3) It undergirds our entire graduate English program. Most dependent on it, obviously, are those students in our graduate rhetoric program. As future writing teachers and administrators, they look to it for professional training and experience, and use it as a place to test the knowledge they get in their rhetoric courses. But graduate students in literature also depend on teaching 306--not only to earn their stipends but to prepare them for the rhetorically based composition courses they'll be expected to move right into upon taking their first appointment. Were E.306 eliminated, it would be hard to see how the graduate program in English could continue.

(4) It helps ensure quality control over the writing instruction given our students, for the many graduate students teaching E.306 do so only after receiving careful training and supervision.

We also recommend reinstating a limited number of sections of 310, 317, and 346K--though no more than we can readily staff with AI's, regular faculty, and a handful of lecturers. We contend that every student at UT should have the opportunity to take a writing class every year if he or she wishes to do so. Currently, our students cannot. They are limited to just two--the first-semester Freshman course, E.306, and the upper-division advanced course, E.325M, which is so formidable that it's hardly an option for most students.

Here is our rationale for E.310, E.317, and E.346K:

E.310 would serve as an intermediate expository writing course for students who have completed E.306 or who have placed out of it. At least two groups of students particularly need this course: Liberal Arts students who are in a pre-law program and Business majors. Both groups know that they will need to write a great deal in their profession and view these courses as part of their career preparation. This course could be taught by advanced graduate students, *as in the past.*

E.317, Technical Writing, would fill the degree requirements for students in Nursing, Home Economics, and Engineering and technical fields until those schools could establish their own programs to provide the needed courses. This course could also be taught by advanced graduate students; in fact, many of them would love to teach it since it would provide valuable training and enhance their job opportunities.

E.346K would provide a junior-level writing course for students eager to write in their major field. The number of sections would be limited because the course could not be taught by graduate students. Were we to rely on interested faculty and a few highly qualified lecturers, we could probably offer roughly 30 sections per semester.

Afterthought: If, after a few semesters of having the requirements in English be nine unspecified hours, it becomes apparent that student demand for writing courses is high, we could begin to hire more regular faculty to staff additional writing courses.