

# UT course opposition aimed directly at diversity

*Second installment of a three-part series on a cultural diversity and differences course scheduled to be taught at the University of Texas in 1991. Today: How and why did opposition to the course arise?*

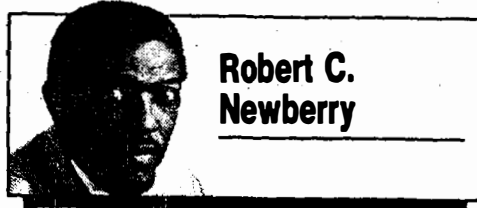
**A**USTIN — STANDISH MEACHAM, dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas, believes that most of the faculty in the English Department at UT are "more than prepared" to see English 306, a writing class, become a course on cultural diversity and differences (racial, sexual and ethnic).

But right now, Meacham is fighting off criticism of such a course from 54 faculty members who signed a petition saying the class material would be tantamount to an attempt at "indoctrination" of students.

That's what they claimed, so Meacham and the university postponed the introduction of the course until the fall of 1991.

Does he think there would have been as much opposition to standardizing the material in the existing course had the subject matter been something other than cultural diversity and differences?

Meacham: "No. I think stage one of the change would have gone through without a peep. It was when they decided that the subject matter was to be material on diversity and difference that the controversy



**Robert C. Newberry**

really arose. The controversy prior to that time was a controversy confined to the English Department."

Meacham expressed no doubt that the brouhaha was aimed directly at stopping the cultural diversity classes.

"Many of the people who are opposed to it feel that this is another way of saying, politicize the classroom or indoctrinate students in the 'right' way to think about an issue," Meacham said.

"Of course that's exactly what we are trying to teach them *not* to do — not to take accepted positions — but to come into this course with an idea about the issues of diversity and difference. Then they sit down and they think, they read, and they discuss with each other. And if they continue to hold the same position they came in with, that's fine.

"If they've changed their mind, that's fine, too. But the hope is that they would have really come to grips with an issue and

then — and this is the point about it being a writing course — be able to express themselves on these issues because of their being taught to write clearly, logically, and cogently about something that really matters in their lives."

Joe Kruppa, who became chairman of the English Department in January, says the opposition to the course was a campaign of misinformation spearheaded by two right-wing faculty members.

"It just seemed that we were on the right track" with the course, but it "got labeled with the tag racism and sexism because that was a possible textbook we were considering at one stage. In fact, the committee had adopted this book. And although it was unsatisfactory in some ways, it was the best they could find. It had some court cases in it, and it had some essays in it that they thought they could use.

"There was a standard handbook (in English 306) of rhetoric and composition that would be kept. And there was a choice of three different kinds of readers — a kind of hodgepodge of essays."

Krupper said the new material, with court cases involving civil rights, would show both, and sometimes more than two sides, of an issue. He added that they were the kinds of issues students were already asking teachers about, "and the teachers

didn't always have the framework for answering the questions."

Krupper said the opposition to the course represents a real cross section of people. "I don't think they are all of the same mind or that they all signed the petition for the same reason. Some of them are ultra right-wingers who are members of the National Association of Scholars. Others, I think, might have had legitimate worries about the nature of the class because it was misrepresented to them and they just didn't know enough. They were uncertain about what the course would do and they reacted against it."

He said that members of the National Association of Scholars misrepresented the course, and that they would like to have the course thrown out completely. "I think there are a lot of other people, some of whom might even have signed that petition, who are open to changing their minds about it as they learn more."

Kruppa: "My God, what we are asking students to do is read court opinions that take place in the courtrooms of America, and to involve themselves with issues... This isn't some strange, radical or un-American material on which we have to totally tune out our thinking apparatus."

**Wednesday: What's in class material?**