

UNIVERSITY

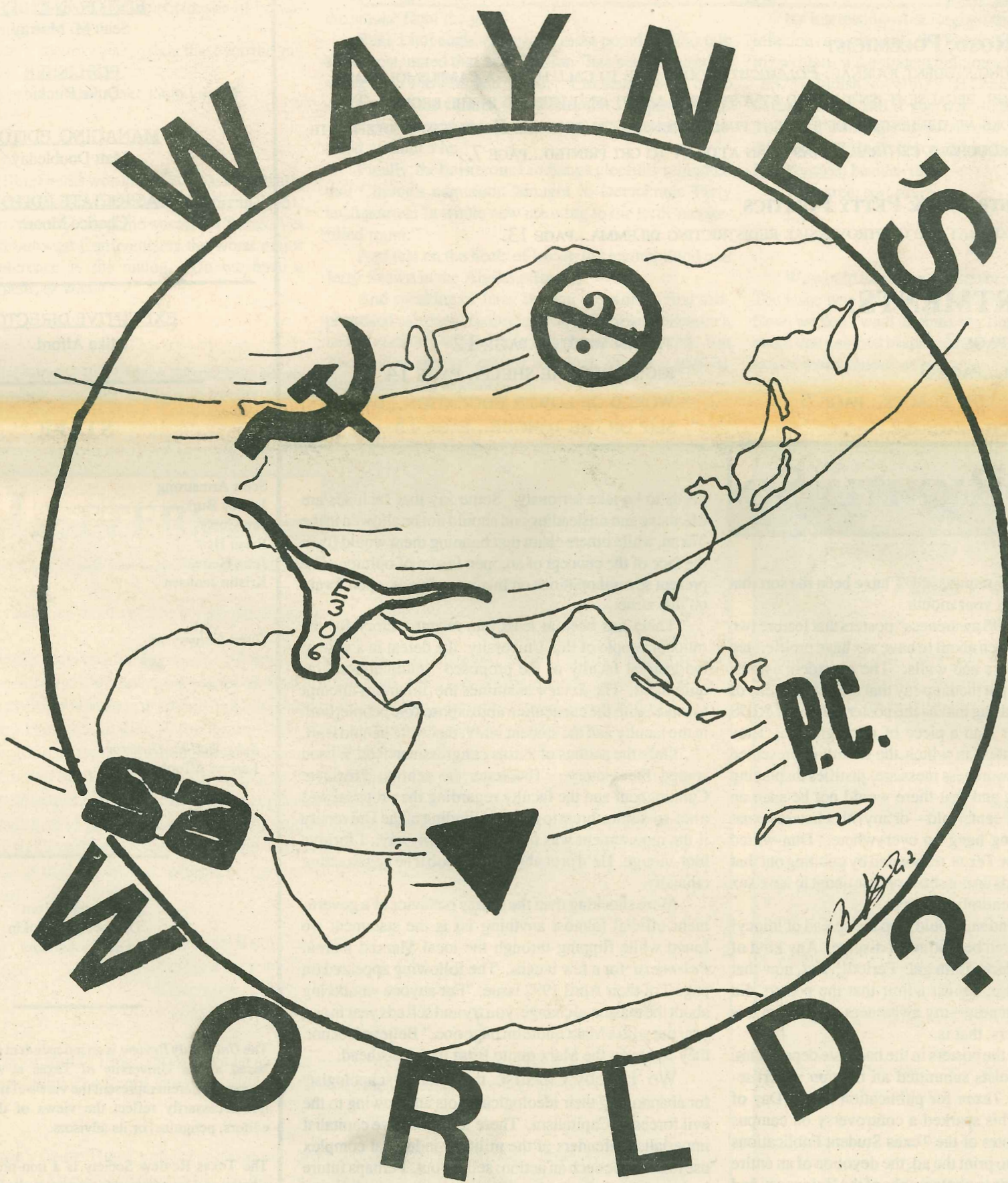


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REVIEW



(DR. WAYNE DANIELSON, THAT IS... SEE PAGE 4)

RON WILSON: A CASE

by Sean M. Murray
Editor-in-Chief

Disgust and outrage were the typical reactions to the letter Texas State Representative and UT alumnus Ron Wilson sent to President Cunningham, the Faculty Senate and the press this past March. The correspondence was sent in response to the faculty vote which rejected the proposed multiculturalism requirement and was a hap-hazardly disguised threat to cut state funding to the University if the faculty didn't reconsider its stance.

The "Honorable" Ron Wilson's crude and unethical attempt to infringe on the faculty's right to determine this university's curriculum is a blatant assault on academic freedom, and his statement that those who opposed the

requirement "will be forced to suffer the consequences" is a base misuse of the power of his elected position. There is no doubt that the content of Wilson's letter is nauseating, but there is something else one notices when reading the letter that really makes one want to "blow chunks": Wilson's wretchedly shoddy prose.

It amazes me that someone who graduated from this "University of the first class"—with a degree in the Plan II liberal arts honors program—could produce prose that would make even the most jaded TASP test grader laugh. There is hardly a sentence in Wilson's letter that is free of grammatical errors, and some are so badly composed that they are incomprehensible. The overall abysmal quality of the letter serves to contrast Wilson with our top-notch faculty and consequently to discredit any curriculum recommendations he makes (although he can still make threats). It also serves to discredit another, rather unrelated curriculum proposal: that of the non-traditional English 306.

What Ron Wilson's letter says about UT English.
The notion that the required freshman writing course

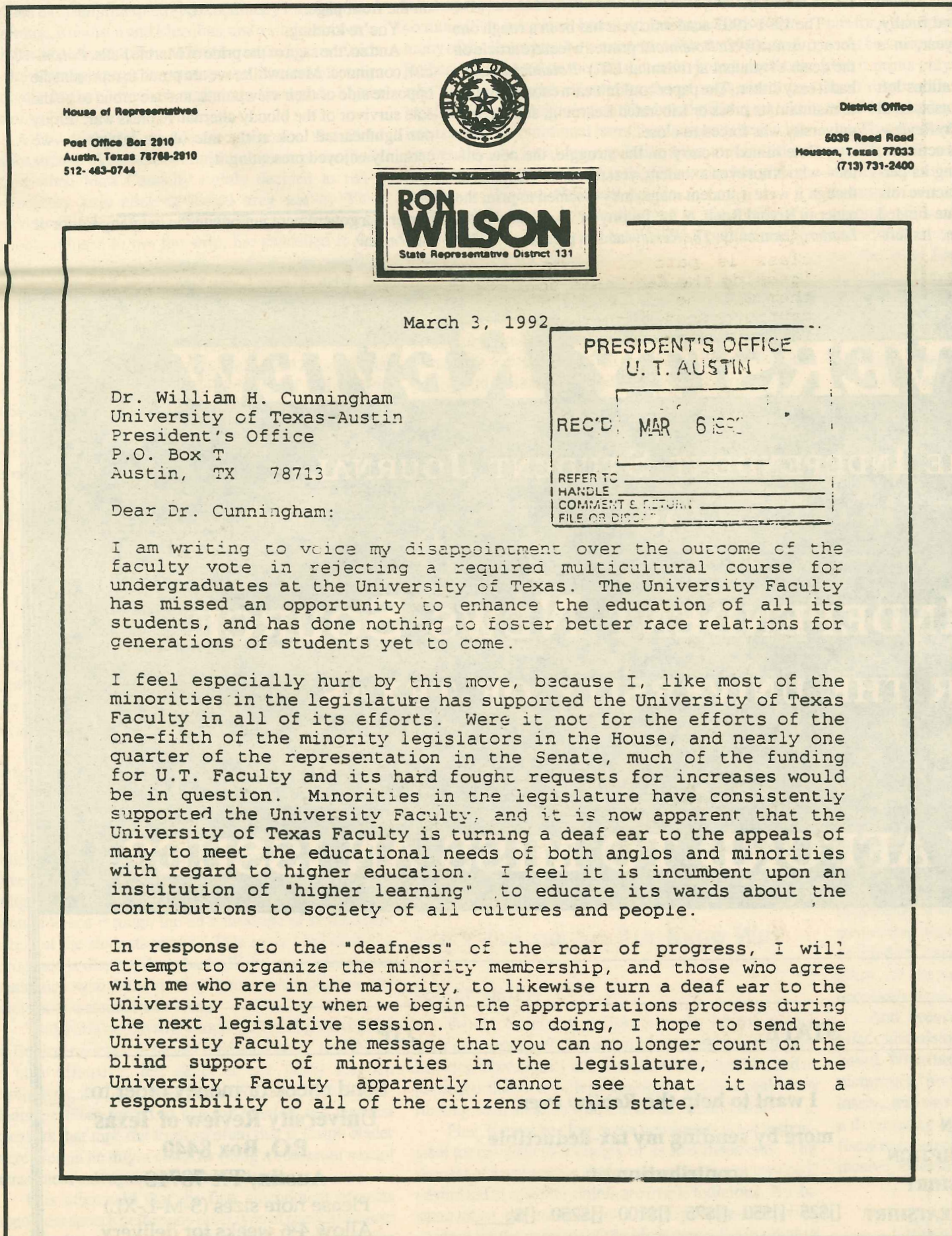
E306 should be changed from "Rhetoric and Composition" to "Racism and Sexism: Writing About Difference" is commonly believed to have been dismissed last year when the movement to mandate the text *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study* and the accompanying syllabus was defeated. But though the controversy may have subsided, many of the graduate students who teach the course decided of their own accord to do so in the non-traditional style, shifting the focus of E306 from the mechanics of proper writing to topical writings based on the analysis of "an inherently racist and sexist society." Each year, many freshmen are forced to take such a class.

Ron Wilson, as a former Plan II major at the University, graduated from a liberal arts program that is publicized as one of the oldest and best in the nation. One can reasonably assume that this member of the liberal arts elite can write noticeably better than the average liberal arts student and considerably better than the poor fellows who graduated from other colleges. Yet the composition of the threats he sent to Cunningham and the faculty was abominable! The only conclusion one can reasonably draw from this is that UT students—even the best ones in the most prestigious and writing-dense programs—are not being taught to write. And, since English 306 is the course that is supposed to teach every UT student the fundamental of writing, we must look to it to find the problem.

That problem is clearly the one that was highlighted by last year's E306 debacle: the traditional focus of the course is being diluted in the effort to teach students political, social and moral ideas. It is commonly known that students are admitted into the English department's competitive graduate program only if they answer personal statement questions in such a way as to reveal a liberal political outlook. It is also well known that graduate students are encouraged, by a studious pretence of ignorance on the part of the radical professors in charge of the department, to teach that ideology in the classroom. Because of this, and because of too-generous curves (and placement test score requirements), we may never know how bad the writing skills of the average UT graduate are; by looking more closely at Wilson's letter, however, we can get some idea.

The Case of the Disappearing Subject. In several instances in his letter, Wilson joins two clauses with a "and" even though one of those clauses lacks the subject it needs to be an independent clause. For instance, in the first paragraph he says "The University Faculty has missed an opportunity to enhance the education of all its students, and [subject should be here] has done nothing to foster better race relations..." Who has done nothing to foster better race relations? (No, the answer isn't Ron Wilson. This is a rhetorical question that accentuates the one of Wilson's favorite writing errors.) Wilson apparently just wipes subjects from existence whenever it suits him. It seems even words can be made to "suffer the consequences."

Back to elementary school. It's hard to believe that anyone, even a Texas legislator, could fail to conjugate the verb "to have" correctly. But in the second paragraph of his letter Ron Wilson proves himself the exception, saying "...I, like most of the minorities in the legislature, has supported



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the University of Texas Faculty in all its efforts." Personally, I has a seven-year-old sister who have never made that mistake in her life.

Frankly, I am surprised no one has told Mr. Wilson the trick for remembering those verb forms; all elementary school students learn it. You simple chant and clap your hands as follows: "I have [clap, clap], you have [clap, clap], she has [clap, clap], we have [clap, clap], you have [clap, clap], they have [clap, clap]. I have [clap, clap]," Someone should warn him, however, that practicing too long will make his hands and throat very sore.

Tutor wanted for poor student of Wilson-speak. The most common error in Wilson's letter is the run-on. He states, or tries to, in the second paragraph that "Were it not for the efforts of the one-fifth of the minority legislators in the House, and nearly one quarter of the representation in the Senate, much of the funding for U.T. Faculty and its hard fought requests for increases would be in question."

Huh? Many English Ph.D.s would be hard-pressed to isolate and categorize the errors in this one. He mentions "the one-fifth of the minority legislators in the House," and says "the one fifth"—which tells us he is referring to a specific fifth—but he doesn't tell us which one. And why did he stick in the clause about the representation in the Senate? If he wanted the Senate representation to be part of a compound object with the unnamed fifth, he should have left out the comma between the clauses. As it stands it makes no sense without a decoder ring.

And why did he ever compose the last part of that sentence the way he did? He clearly wanted to say that [If it weren't for the efforts of someone-or-other] the faculty might not have received the funding increases it requested of the legislature. What it actually says is that the funding for the faculty and for the faculty's requests would be in question. Is he saying that paying our faculty is a questionable practice? Also, why should a faculty member need funding just to make a request? And why would these people in the House and the Senate try to keep such blatant misappropriation from being questioned? And why would anyone ever vote for Ron Wilson? Perhaps they admire a legislator who capitalizes the "f" in "faculty."

Small words can confuse small minds. One of the most amusing things about Wilson is that he does not know the difference between the pronouns "of" and "to." While I am the first one to say "oblivious to something" instead of "oblivious of something" just to rebel against the oppressive language known as Standard Written English, I don't substitute one pronoun for another when it changes the meaning of the sentence.

Wilson, however, does not let himself be constrained by such concerns. In the third paragraph of the letter he calls the way in which the faculty ignored the call for a multiculturalism requirement "the 'deafness' of the roar of progress" when he clearly meant to call it "the 'deafness' to the roar of progress." I know Wilson didn't mean to call the rejection of the requirement "the roar of progress." He actually meant to call the requirement "the roar of progress." His threats reveal his stance on that issue, even if his words

don't.

Errors are the rule, not the exception. Wilson's mistakes are innumerable. Because of space considerations and my weak stomach, it is not possible for me to comment on every type of error Wilson makes in his letter; I will, however, briefly list a few more. In the fourth paragraph he places a comma outside of quotation marks instead of within them, switches verb tenses at random, uses a semicolon where a colon is required, and generally does his best to make his prose unreadable. Among his mistakes in the fifth and last paragraph: he uses "closer" instead of "more closely" and even ends his letter with a run-on sentence. The pitiful ending, however, actually serves to aid Wilson's nearly nonexistent credibility on curriculum matters; it distracts the reader from the fact that he described the proposed six-hour course requirement as a three-hour required course.

It should be clear by now, especially considering that Ron Wilson is regarded as among the creme de la creme of our liberal arts graduates, that there is a problem with the status quo of freshman English. If graduate students

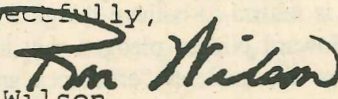
in English continue to teach "progressive" classes, the writing skills of our graduates will only get progressively worse; I'd rather not even think about what would happen if a "progressive" syllabus like "Racism and Sexism: Writing About Difference" were mandated. However, the prospect that the writing skills of Texas' college graduates could soon be indistinguishable from those of its high school graduates--or its legislators--is too frightening to ignore.

Murray is an electrical engineering freshman. However, he is considering changing his major to English and becoming a graduate student so that he may indoctrinate E306 students with a conservative ideology and a Judeo-Christian ethic. Fortunately, he placed out of E306.

In looking at the number and percentage of minorities on the faculty and in administration, it is apparent that the "country club" environment at the University is in no danger. Many of those who opposed the course are wrong in their perceptions that the class is part of "someone's political agenda", and are simply ignoring the fact that soon the majority of the faces seated before them will be black and brown. Furthermore, those who oppose this course oppose the march of progress and will be forced to suffer the consequences. It is becoming more and more apparent to educated people, that we must find a way to live together, where the achievements and contributions of everyone are noted and taught so that we may all benefit from the richness of life that is part of the very fabric of this country; cultural diversity.

As a graduate of the University, I implore you to use whatever means possible to include, as a requirement for graduation, a class on multiculturalism. It remains a mystery to many that a three hour class could do great harm to students who are required to complete 120+ hours to achieve a degree. Such a class could go far in fostering better understanding by all, of the world in which we all must live. It may also foster better understanding by members of the legislature when considering such items as faculty salaries, construction projects, expansions and the numerous other requests the legislature is besieged with around budget time. There are many of us who will be watching a little closer those items that we are so often asked for, but are ignored when we request something small in return of the University, such as a three hour course on diversity.

Respectfully,


Ron Wilson

RW/ecg

cc: Texas Legislative Black Caucus
Mexican American Legislative Caucus
Gov. Ann Richards
Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock
House Speaker Gib Lewis
Press
U.T. Faculty