

UT English classes changed to study civil rights cases

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University of Texas students this fall can enmesh themselves in the words that formed civil rights history as part of changes in the English department's classes in rhetoric and composition.

Changes in English 306 will allow students a chance to examine landmark court decisions on civil rights and affirmative action. 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, chairman of the department.

It is hoped students in the class will see, read and discuss primary documents such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and several court cases. In the past, students were told about the documents and cases, but many never read them, nor were they encouraged to think through their complexities.

Kruppa said the change is not a reaction to spring demonstrations at UT seeking ethnic diversity. The change was planned "concurrent" to the protests, he said.

The course also will unify reading materials under a single theme, Kruppa said. In traditional composition courses, students study from a "reader," or collection of essays, that have little or no thematic relation.

"Freshman composition will still basically be a course in argumentation — how to weigh evidence and build cohesive arguments," Kruppa said. Students also will continue to write compositions after receiving classroom instruction on how to plan and organize their topics.

Linda Brodkey, director of lower division English at UT, 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.

Students also will read selections from Paula Rothenberg's *Racism and Sexism*, which Brodkey said was chosen "to steady students

with respect to the topic of difference."

Concentrating on the single thematic topic of difference provides a dual advantage to students, Brodkey said.

In addition to a unified approach to writing essays, the difference theme will nudge students to critically examine how the American judicial system deals with discrimination.

Kruppa and Brodkey acknowledge that critics may claim that the change in English 306 is a dilution of traditional essay material taught in composition courses and an indoctrination to the liberal point of view. Kruppa said adoption of *Racism and Sexism* will purposely omit some standard works, but the change in readers is not an attempt to revise the canon of freshman reading material.

Changes in English 306 will probably require less adjustment for students than for teachers. "Actually, a lot of this was already happening in 306 last year because students wanted to discuss ethnic and racial issues on campus," Kruppa said.

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.