

EDITORIALS

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VIEWPOINT

ALUMNI RELATIONS

Gribben pushes 'receivership' for English department

Editor's note: The following is the full text of a July 9 letter from Alan Gribben, professor of English, to Dallas resident Anne Blakeney, a member of the UT Liberal Arts Foundation Council. We believe the letter's contents alone serve as a strong enough indictment of Gribben's positions. The letter was obtained through the Texas Open Records Act by Tom Philpott and Scott Henson, co-editors of the *Polemicist*.

Thank you for contacting me about the politicization of the English 306 course. I feel very strongly that academic courses at the University of Texas at Austin should not be politicized, and I have been vocal and public about this opinion. During my 16 years in this English department, I have witnessed its gradual domination by a highly politicized faction of radical literary theorists. Their methods include character assassination and intimidation. As an incredible result, among my 80 English professorial colleagues only a handful today agree that neither E306 nor any other English course should be politicized. My support on this issue comes mainly from faculty members in other departments and schools — psychology, sociology, chemical engineering, law. The fact that I — a traditionally inclined literature professor — have been the main thorn in the radicals' side has made me controversial. You have a right to know my status in the department. You will hear *highly* derogatory things said about me. But you may be assured that I am a dedicated teacher, a producing scholar with a national reputation and a principled person oriented toward stability in his family's life and activities. Can the same be said of my many detractors?

Your offer of assistance in my effort to halt the new E306 course, reform my out-of-control department and rescue my academic career at the University is more than I could hope for. If we accomplish one even one of these, we might accomplish all of them eventually. I believe that the University of Texas ultimately belongs to the state of Texas and the citizens who take an interest in its direction, care about the quality and integrity of its instruction and are willing to communicate with other like-minded individuals about its performance. Probably 30 or more people have contacted me since I began speaking and writing in public about the politicization of our freshman composition course, and all were well-intentioned and resolved to help in some manner, but only members of the Liberal Arts Foundation Council actually understand how the University operates and what it will take to effect any significant improvement in the English department situation.

As I mentioned in our conversation, I have come to the conclusion that our problems are so profound and likely to be longlasting that:

- The English department should be placed in receivership indefinitely, with someone like Donald Foss (chairman of the psychology department) as its director for several years; and then be governed by a new English chairman appointed directly by Gerhard

Fonken, executive vice president and provost; and

- During this period of receivership the department's faculty should be divided into a Department of Critical Theory and Cultural Studies and a Department of English Literature and Language. This division of the radical theorists from the remaining traditional scholars would give the latter the freedom to offer a true literature and writing program. Or

- Barring the accomplishment of these steps, the two University-wide required English courses (E306, E316K) should be abolished, thus ending the necessity of hiring additional English professors at the rate they have been recruited from the most radicalized (but prestigious) graduate programs across the nation.

Most vital of all will be a comprehending College of Liberal Arts dean with nerve and a determination to oversee the recruiting policies and decisions of the English department, which has lost all sense of tradition, direction, civility and academic freedom in the classroom.

In short, the UT Department of English has become dysfunctional. Its main motivational drives are basically fear of censure by the enforcing ideological element and hope of reward, financial or other, for adhering to their reigning dogma. Many of the faculty radicals in English departments are influenced by the Marxist conviction that *power* itself should be the end of all endeavors, even educational ones. This overbearing view that the individual is helpless and must align with a cause or network stymies any idealism suggesting that an undergraduate can trust his or her own abilities to exist independently of a radical political group. Newspaper reporters routinely remark to me about the pervasive "fear" they sense among our English faculty — something that puzzles them, since one associates a university with the protection of free speech and the contest of ideas. Yet just to say that our English department ought principally to teach the history and features of English literature, language and writing is viewed as outrageously heretical — so dangerous, indeed, as to warrant slanderous attacks.

If I could specify the most disturbing trend I have observed here in the past 10 years, it would be the selective recruitment of new faculty members with an expectation that they will bring with them an ideologized sense of *advocacy* — radical feminism, Marxist analysis, militant "ethnic" studies, anti-canonical campaigns, Third World oppression studies — to influence students inside and outside the classroom. Anyone who objects to these efforts at propagandizing and political sloganeering is branded as a hated representative of the bourgeois status quo. Rumormongering has replaced parliamentary discussion as an accepted form of achieving a departmental "consensus."

I look forward to working with the Liberal Arts Foundation Council to return this troubled academic unit to something resembling an English department that teaches English rather than politics.