

Letters

Editor:

I am writing to protest the remarks of Jennifer Evans in the April number of *Austin Writer* concerning the suspended English 346K requirement at the university. Ms. Evans' account of the matter is ill-informed, distorted, and seriously misleading.

I'll take up the distortions sentence by sentence, in itemized order:

1. To begin with, E. 346K was not quite "adopted . . . as a standard requirement for graduation of all students." There was an important misunderstanding at the time this course was adopted. Most English faculty understood that upper-division transfer students would be exempted from the requirement. But the requirement was interpreted, after adoption, as a requisite for graduation of all students, no matter when they entered the university, and no matter what sorts of courses or experiences they had had elsewhere. This interpretation of the requirement has caused enormous staffing problems.

2. The course has NOT been demoted from required to elective. The requirement has been suspended for a year, period. (As Evans goes on to say in her next sentence, the course will not even be offered as an elective next year.) The course is on "hold" while the complex issues of the matter are rethought.

3. The course is NOT "the only solid writing course required of college graduates from UT." In the first place, there is widespread doubt as to whether E. 346K is itself a "solid writing course" — many people regard it as deeply flawed in both theory and practice. Secondly, UT students still have to take the traditional freshman English class (which is closely similar to E. 346K) as well as two "substantial writing component" courses. These are all as "substantial" as E. 346K.

4. Evans is correct that lots of people in the English department are "inflamed" about the suspension of E. 346K. What she doesn't say is that the suspension was requested by the chairman of the English department himself, that most regular faculty support him, and that the only "inflamed" people in the department are the temporary faculty hired to teach E. 346K, who will now have no jobs, and the theorists who invented the course in the first place.

Evans manages to convey the general impression that the suspension of E. 346K is some sort of default, a failure to give students the education they need. The fact is that the English department was logistically unable to staff the course, even if it were a valuable educational experience. But the more important fact is that the course itself is probably a mistake.

I'm sure that you'll agree that Jennifer Evans has misled your readers about the complexity of these issues and the good will of the university. I'm also sure, of course, that she did not intend to.

Charles Rossman
Associate Professor
Department of English
University of Texas at Austin