

To those who think it presumptuous for a graduate student to intrude his observations concerning the E 346K Committee proposal, I apologize. However, I can claim as warrant for this appeal some peripheral (though officially mute) involvement because I teach E 306. Unlike many of you who are blessed with the vote and, consequently, can decide the fate of the course, I have read and studied the syllabus prepared by the Freshman English Office.

Yesterday's debate was enlightening (and remarkably well-mannered). It made concrete for me what had previously been merely a certain amount of confusion concerning the meaning of "humanism" and its derivatives. The majority of the professors invoking the holy word, spoke of it as if it embraced a finite set of things--ideas, values, texts and methods. A minority maintained that humanism is defined by the actions of humanists and humanist institutions -- a definition that implies the possibility of civic responsibility and civic action. To one group of professors, "humanism" is very nearly a synonym for "scholasticism"; they would divorce humanism from the sciences and business in favor of dialectic for the sake of conversation. They would profess what they love because they love it; not because anyone has a demonstrable need for it. Demonstrable needs are the affair of graduate students and community colleges.

I have to identify with the more activist definition of humanism. According to these lights, the proposal you are considering evades civic responsibility, pleading "necessity" ("ever the tyrant's plea" according to the activist humanist, John Milton).

The passage of the proposal would put an asterisk by E 306; in effect, making it what many already think it is--a remedial course. It would be better and more honest to kill it outright rather than so cripple it.

It would be best to maintain the course. E 306, even if you choose to think of it as a "service" (and I had to come to the University of Texas to learn the myriad unpleasant connotations clustered around this word) course, you would do well to think on those it serves.

E 306, while not remedial, is certainly enabling. If taught as presented in the syllabus, it enables a student to become an active participant in his or her own education. The course also usually serves as the only class in which a freshman can establish a meaningful dialogue with one of his teachers (even if that teacher is only a graduate student). In most other freshman classes, the student must be absent to engage his mentor's attention. Removal of the course to any of the alternative institutions will rob the student-teacher relationship of this value; the teacher no longer enjoys any close identification with the University of Texas.

In this same vein, many professors talked with gleeful anticipation of the higher quality student they would see in their classrooms as a result of the E 346 Committee's proposal. This may well happen. However, good students have little need for teachers. They will learn what they want to learn regardless of the pedagogue or pedagogy. The students who really need the best teaching this institution has to offer will have to get it before they step into Parlin Hall.

I respectfully urge that you reject the proposal of the E 346 Committee as it now stands. I'm sure that with some time, and a wider set of committee members, a solution that does not evade the Department's and the profession's civic responsibilities can be devised.

Thank you.

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