To: Members of the English Department

From: The Committee on Admissions and Registration

re: Proposals for consideration in our evaluation of Freshman English

Proposal #1: That April 22 be designated as the cut-off date by which incoming freshman must accept or decline the University's offer of admission.

Explanation—At present, we do not know the size and make-up of an incoming class until July. An early commitment by the incoming students will allow for more adequate staffing preparation. April 22 is one week after the April 15 admissions notification by those private schools which have traditionally made their offers latest. It is unlikely, therefore, that a prospective Texas student would be unable to make his choice by April 22.

Proposal #2: That students seeking admission to the University include the results from the required placement test in English in their application for admission.

Explanation—Since decisions about staffing also involve decisions about cut-off scores and placement, we need to know the character of the incoming class as well as its size for adequate preparation.

Proposal #3: That the present English placement test (ECT) be replaced by the Test for Standard Written English.

Explanation—According to Dr. Kinneavy's study, the results on the ECT test correlate so highly with the scores on the SAT Verbal Exam that the tests, although different, merely duplicate one another. The TSWE, on the other hand, is a written test, not a multiple choice test. Furthermore, it is now an optional part of the SAT examination itself and might easily be taken on the same day. Such convenience for the students would greatly aid in reducing the inconvenience to them and to us during registration. We would be able to avoid the dilemmas of tracking down ECT scores and arranging for the unexamined students to be examined.

Proposal #4: That the present summer school version of 306 & 307 be abolished. In its place, the department will offer a twelve week verson of 306 to be panel graded.

Explanation—Under the present system, the provisional students, who lack even the minimal requirements for admission to UT, are given less, rather than more English. They take six weeks of 306, six weeks of 307, and then move to Sophomore English in the Fall term. These students need <u>at least</u> a full and concentrated semester of 306. But there is another problem with the present situation. The "Provisional" portion of the admission algorithm

was originally intended to accommodate minority or underprivileged students. In recent years, however, this provisional audience has consisted mostly of middle class students from Dallas and Houston. Teachers, as a result, have been confronted with two problems: 1) an audience of poorly prepared and often indifferent students; and 2) the onerous task of evaluating them with the knowledge that a failing grade is very likely to flunk them out of college. By making the course a full length and serious one, and by taking the pressure off the teacher for flunking out the poor students in his own class, we hope to provide a viable approach to dealing with this provisional group.

Proposal #5: That classes in Freshman English be reduced to 17 students.

Explanation--This number is based upon what we believe to be the special grading and conference requirements of a writing course. The committee agrees that detailed grading of papers and individual conferences with students about their papers are among the most important aspects of Freshman English. We regard a fully evaluated paper as one which receives: 1) a correction of its grammar and usage errors (often including sample re-writing by the grader); 2) a statement summarizing its thesis and principle of organization, and where necessary, a re-conceptualization of the organization; and 3) a commentary on the quality of its ideas. We agree that it takes from 30 minutes to an hour to provide each paper with such an evaluation. On the basis of our experience, we estimate that our normal office hours are increased by 2-4 hours per week for each section of Freshman English. This is partly because writing students need such attention, and partly because freshman, who often have heavy course loads, must meet with their professors outside of regular office hours. By dropping the enrollment from 25 to 17, we drop the hours spent grading per two week period from 18 to 12. This drop will not only increase the quality of the grading by reducing its drain upon our energies; it will help offset the increased conference time utilized by the writing students.

Proposal #6: That the department create a remedial program in English, for which a student will receive 3 hrs. course credit, but which will not count toward the fulfillment of the 9 hr. General Requirement in English.

Explanation--Our desire for such a program is not based upon the belief that our incoming freshman are so poorly prepared and possess such little verbal aptitude that they cannot handle a demanding college level literature-writing course. Rather, it is based upon our common experience with the 306 and 307 student audience. We have found that in every class of 25 there are from 2 to 4 students who are distinctly weaker than the rest. Sometimes they lack basic

knowledge of grammar and usage; often they cannot read well enough to find sufficient paper content; most of the time they have both weaknesses. These students are, in our opinion, significantly different from those comprising the average class. Their problems are not primarily those of careless, undisciplined, or untutored approaches to thinking, reading, and writing; their problems are generally the result of low verbal aptitude and poor capacity for concentration during class discussion and paper preparation. We would identify such students in two ways. Those whose SAT Verbal scores fall in the bottom 5% of the class (we're talking about scores in the 300-350 range) would automatically be put into a remedial section. In addition, each teacher would be asked, on the basis of an early writing assignment, to identify those students who clearly are not within the mainstream of the class. These students would then be assigned to a remedial section.

Wayne Lesser
Keith Byerman
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Ann Graybiel
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ERRATUM

The Explanation of Proposal #3: The TSWE Examination is not a written test. XXIX It is a grammar and usage test. Its advantage is that it makes far greater discriminations among those students whose skills are below the national average. Since one-third of our fxx freshman fall into this category, the TSWE will help us better assess the character of our student audience.