

UT comp class fuels controversy

By **TODD ACKERMAN**

Houston Chronicle

A University of Texas at Austin freshman composition class will focus on sexism and racism, drawing criticism from some professors who believe it's politicizing an English class.

English department officials call the curriculum change a "side effect" of the need for Americans to understand the social implications of differences in gender, sexual preference, age, ethnic background, race and religion.

They said the class will feature a reading list including selections from a sociology textbook and landmark affirmative action and civil rights cases.

But English professor Alan Gribben said, "A class on good writing has been converted into an instruction course in the correct social and political thinking.

"Failing to convince people in the English department it was utterly inappropriate, I'm turning to the Texas public to see what they think."

Gribben said his phone has been "ringing off the hook" since he wrote letters to the editor of the Austin American-Statesman and The Daily Texan, UT's student newspaper. In the last week, he has spoken against the class on two radio talk shows.

Joseph Kruppa, English department chairman, called Gribben's concerns "nonsense." The class, he said, teaches students the process of writing, not instilling them with any ideology.

"The only person with a political agenda is Gribben," said Kruppa. "The class is about getting students to think about issues and then put their thoughts into effective writing. No one is going to be graded on their position."

The curriculum change comes amid UT racial tensions lingering since April, when two fraternities

See UT on Page 12A.

UT

Continued from Page 9A.

sold T-shirts emblazoned with a "Sambo" caricature and painted racial epithets on a car.

Kruppa said the change is not a result of the incidents, though they did help reinforce the department's decision. An English department committee voted 4-2 in late May to make the change.

The composition and rhetoric class is taken by 2,500 to 3,000 freshmen. About 40 percent of incoming UT students are exempt because they scored high enough on their achievement exams and another 10 percent to 15 percent satisfy the requirement by taking a composition class at a community college.

Although Kruppa said the change has won near-unanimous support, other professors also have taken aim

at it. John Ruskiewicz, an associate professor of English and committee member who voted against it, said opponents include classical liberals who think the topic of "difference" should be broadened.

"More professors have reservations about the change, but they're hesitant to speak out for fear of being called racist or sexist," said Ruskiewicz. "I think the concerns of the class reflect certain people more than all professors."

The most controversial aspect of the class was the sociology textbook, Paula Rothenberg's *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study*, which Kruppa acknowledged could be characterized as "radical." Committee leaders decided this week to drop the book, although they still hope to use some of its selections.

An English department committee will soon consider changing its sophomore-level literature class. Beginning this fall, UT will discuss adding Third World and ethnic literature.