

ENGLISH RULE

Budget council would aid department

Just like Communist Russia, the University's Department of English has been in desperate need of glasnost and perestroika for years. Nothing less than the English 306 fiasco manifests the need for such change. For the past six years the department has been in turmoil. In 1985, squabbles were heard from the halls of Parlin over whether or not to even have freshman English. And as readers learned last year, the debate became *how* to teach the composition class.

During the conflict, we learned that professors siding with a particular faction were given to secrecy and rebellion. After the controversial E306 packet received public attention, one faculty member, according to departmental minutes, said they should "repackage" the course content to make it look like the old E306. Rejecting the Machiavellian approach, another faculty member opted for open opposition, saying they "should go to the wall." But such machinations were not the schemes of just a handful of faculty. The problem was that throughout the whole debate the names of about 20 different professors and graduate students kept cropping up. In rallies, *Firing Line* letters, guest columns, collective statements, talk shows and, in at least one case, a newsletter for the American Association of University Professors, we kept seeing some now familiar names. The E306 mystery just had too many culprits to assume that the faculty was suffering from a few personalities.

But the new dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Robert King, has found a cure for this 7 percent psychosis: a change of governance. It's elementary that a department dominated by a cadre who control hiring and promotions should press its advantage too far. Now, to put such faculty back in check, other voices in the department should be heard. Therefore, the department should change its rule from an executive committee of 10 members to a budget council where all full professors are members.

English faculty are not enamored with the prospect. Some have much to lose. Lower-ranking professors and graduate students involved in the E306 fight will no longer determine who gets hired, raises and tenure. But to oversimplify this new brew as just malcontent leftists protecting their power would be to overlook more valid claims by other professors, like Wayne Lesser. Lesser voted against the resolution to keep the executive committee not because he favored a budget council, but because of how the executive committee was defended.

Chairman Joe Kruppa performed the rare act of a sending letter to all faculty sounding the alarm that their departmental sovereignty was at stake. So, though some faculty may feel that an executive committee would provide more efficiency, they along with others have grown apprehensive to the "unilateral" actions of the department's leaders.

Such single-minded acts by the Chair, along with the numerous campaigns waged by the faculty cabal, reveal an urgent need for a representative system that would bring the designs of the faction within view of the rest of their peers. As Madison so shrewdly wrote, factionalism is best fought by creating a large powerful body where everyone can fight it out openly. The plots of the few would remain behind closed doors no longer. The faculty would only stand to gain if, openly, deconstructionists checked conservatives, rhetoricians countered critical theorists, feminists limited traditionalists.

Such debate would have to take place. With the critical conclusions the political correctness movement has drawn, such faculty would have to come out in the open and fight. Or they could adopt a complete new system of thought, replete with its own vocabulary, as certain isms have now become off limits, because they provoke immediate ridicule. Perhaps faculty might recant their views, but given the dogmatic posture they have taken throughout the 306 debate, any such action would be unlikely. Heated and open debate would ensue.

But efficiency would be enhanced. No longer would the department waste its energies on writing press releases rather than syllabi, and appearing on television instead of in committee meetings. The faculty could again resume its proper role of concentrating on instruction. Moreover, they would only have to argue within earshot of themselves.

—Geoff Henley

Cries of factionalism in English Dept. come from sore losers

The headline on a story in Wednesday's paper reports that the interim dean of liberal arts is unilaterally "inclined" to impose a form of governance upon the English Department that the department has overwhelmingly and collectively rejected, once 23 years ago and most recently just this month. Professor James Duban is also quoted as saying that the English Department has been bedeviled by "factionalism" over the past several years, thus making actions like those the acting dean is contemplating necessary.

Long-time readers of *The Daily Texan* will recognize in Duban's charge of "factionalism" the stench of a dead metaphor. Thirteen years ago, having just arrived at the University, I remember hearing, for the first time, that the Department of English, then a decent regional faculty, was "factionalized." Then as now, this charge was leveled by a lone col-

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GUEST COLUMNIST

league at everyone else because the department had done something he didn't like: It outvoted him. But the Department of English at the University has come a long way since then. It is now one of the major English faculties in North America, and both it and *Texan* readers deserve a better, or at least a less banal, rhetoric.

Obviously, a large department like English, which has more faculty than many schools and colleges at the University, will always have some individuals dissenting from the group's consensus.

But something odd has happened over the last several years, the same period of time in which, according to Duban's foreshortened sense of history, "factionalism" has appeared. Faculty members who lose votes, after a long

and deliberative debate within the rules and procedures of the academic bureaucracy, suddenly have begun to declare themselves silenced or disempowered, a rhetoric they borrow from cultural critiques of how real social groups are marginalized, and then they charge *the rest of their colleagues* with factionalism.

In other words, they lose votes by margins of 3- or 10- or 40-to-1, and then characterize *everybody but themselves* as factionalized. If we remember that a faction usually means a small group or clique that is self-serving, contentious and reckless of the common good, then Duban's self-congratulatory rhetoric becomes even more ironic. In short, the rhetorical act of alleging factionalism becomes an excellent example of how factionalism is created.

Let me cite two examples. Alan Gribben has charged that he was run out of his tenured position in English because he voted against a

proposal to create an M.A. concentration in Third World Studies. He charges that that vote queered his career at the University and irrevocably damaged his standing in the profession. The vote was 41-to-1.

It is important to remember, however, that this vote occurred at a meeting of the Graduate Studies Committee chaired by none other than Prof. Gribben himself. Although legally Gribben did not have a right to vote at that meeting, no one objected to his having his say or registering his lone dissent. Gribben's response to this collegiality was to accuse his colleagues of being "politicized," another code word for "factionalism."

We now face a governance crisis. It is important to remember that this crisis did not exist before acting Dean King's memo of June 23 in which he asserted that he did not like the English Department's executive committee and

wanted us to have a budget council instead. King's memo *created* the crisis.

Over the past year there was extensive discussion within the department about governance because the Handbook of Operating Procedures requires a review every third year. This was conducted through formally legislated and democratic procedures and resulted in a vote in February to extend the executive committee. The vote was one short of unanimous. No one at that time suggested switching to a budget council. No one has *ever*, in the past 13 years, suggested such a thing.

Now, however, Duban cites factionalism in praising an interim dean for threatening to accomplish what he was unable to persuade his colleagues to do by means of open discussion. Indeed, Duban was apparently so cowed by the factionalism of his 70 or so peers that he did not even present the idea of a budget coun-

cil publicly to them when it would have been appropriate to do so. Now he would have this community see him as a solitary and heroic figure sledding through the multicultural wilderness, decrying factionalism.

Of course, I probably will be characterized as "factional" for responding to Duban's claim. That's the beauty of making a completely fabricated and unsubstantiated claim like Duban's: the very act of refuting it ironically lends it the only reality it has. In taking my hat off to Duban's consummate persiflage, however, I also want to warn readers that factionalism is precisely what the acting dean's precipitous inclinations generate, not what they remedy. Rhetoric like Duban's is intemperate; it fuels the very thing he seems to be protesting. No one should be fooled.

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