

### **Informal meetings**

On October 12, Jim Kinneavy, Lester Faigley, John Slatin, Linda Ferreira-Buckley, and John Ruszkiewicz held the first of what became a weekly series of informal meetings to discuss issues pertaining to the Division of Rhetoric and Composition, establishment of which had been announced on September 1. The atmosphere was strained. There have been serious differences about writing instruction among us in the all-too-recent past. Moreover, four of us had told the Dean, publicly or privately or both, of our opposition to the proposed Division. All five of us were convinced, however, that the Division would become a reality on June 1, and felt strongly that we should begin discussing the many complex issues that need to be resolved if the Division is to work at all and if the English Department's interests are to be in any way served. A further rationale lay in our desire to bring a coherent, focused set of ideas and questions to what we believed would be eventual meetings with the interim Dean. Finally, we wished to address an old problem. The English Department has been criticized for a lack of commitment to undergraduate writing instruction, yet much of the blame attaches to the University administration for its failure to appropriate the funds to support programs developed by members of the Department and approved by the administration. We saw these meetings, therefore, as an opportunity to lay out for public consideration what we believe to be the components of a responsible, effective undergraduate writing program, to leave no room for misunderstanding about what it will cost the University to endow what Frank Bean, Chair of the Committee on the Undergraduate Experience, has called a "symbolic gesture" with real substance.

## **Collegiality**

~~We began with the "vision thing."~~ Our first meeting revolved around discussion of the way we wanted to work together then and in future. All members expressed a strong desire for creative, highly collegial relationships, and we agreed that such collegiality would require sometimes difficult acts of faith in one another, that the only way to avoid a repetition of the terrible internecine warfare of the 1990 debate over 306 would be to take the risk of trust and candor. ~~By the same token, we would have to feel free to offer ideas and suggestions in a spirit of experimentation and inquiry, and so we agreed to keep the substance of our discussions private, to create a space in which people could feel free to try out ideas and positions and to change their minds.~~ And ~~we have done so~~; our meetings have not been easy by any means: we have made a point of identifying areas of disagreement among ourselves, and we have debated those disagreements vigorously and openly. Indeed, the quality of the discussion has been a key element in persuading us that the Division might be workable despite its deplorable beginnings.

## **Governance and decision-making**

We agreed immediately that the structure outlined in the September 1 document, giving full authority to a single Director appointed by the Dean, was unacceptable. We wanted our decision-making processes (both in these meetings and in the Division) to be democratically organized, with full participation by all members (the Dean has since agreed in principle, asserting at both the November 5 and November 19 meetings of the advisory committee that he had intended all along that Division faculty should determine their own governance). We agreed, also, that close cooperation

with the English Department was an absolute necessity, both for the Division and for the Department. We have been discussing how best to insure both that English Department concerns are well and formally represented within the Division and, conversely, that the Division is similarly represented within the Department. We are aware, of course, that some members of the Department do not regard the possibility of a mutually beneficial relationship between the English Department and the Division of Rhetoric and Composition as a serious one. Nonetheless, we feel very strongly that we should seek to construct such a mutually beneficial understanding and to craft procedures and administrative structures that implement those understandings in ways that do not depend upon the personalities presently involved.

### **Courses**

We have agreed to retain the current syllabus for E 306, worked out by a duly authorized committee of the English Department and *unanimously* endorsed by the full Department. We have reached general agreement on establishing a coherent sequence of undergraduate writing courses beginning with E 306 and continuing through E 379C (Topics in Composition).

*provide to assume stability  
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destructured.*

Besides strengthening our current upper-division offerings, we will pay special attention to re-shaping E 309, so that distinctions among the three variants will be clearer and more meaningful both to AI's teaching the course and to undergraduates enrolling in it. We will also clarify the relationship among E 306, E 309, and E 325M (Advanced Expository Writing). We have agreed that current policies and practices concerning placement into or out of E 306 are seriously deficient, and that we should supplement or replace the current assessment instrument-- which tests only grammar and mechanics--

*→ To  
Kester's  
document*

with a test that requires a writing sample. We have further discussed the possibility of changing the pre-requisites for E 309 so that students who need or want a lower-division writing course after 306 but before 316K (currently a prerequisite for 309) would have a place to go. We have also discussed designating certain sections of E 309 for students who place out of E 306 but who should nonetheless take a writing course in their first semester (this would be analogous to the old E 307 special).

### **Establishment of a Writing Center**

We have agreed (again the Dean has agreed in principle) that it is vital to establish a Writing Center, with a professional director and a properly trained staff, to assist students throughout the College who want or need help with their writing. We have been discussing the Substantial Writing Component courses as well. While there is general agreement that the Rhetoric Division may constitute the last, best hope of making those courses live up to their name, we have not as yet formulated a plan to accomplish this goal. Such a plan would, however, involve helping TA's, AI's, and faculty from across the campus to integrate writing instruction into their curricula, and training them to address student writing in a meaningful way. (The Dean has asked advisory committee members to bring ideas on this subject to the next, as yet unscheduled meeting.)

### **Computer classrooms**

We have also discussed the role of advanced technology. The Computer Research Lab will continue to serve as a bridge between those whose primary interest is in literature and those whose primary interest is in writing, and will continue to innovate in both areas. We have proposed to construct a number of new computer classrooms over the next five years,

and the CRL expects to play an important part in supporting the Writing Center and, eventually, the Substantial Writing Component courses as well.

### **Recruitment**

Much of our discussion has concerned recruitment. We agree that we should keep the number of lecturers and other temporary faculty in the Division to a minimum. We expect the bulk of lower-division courses to be taught, as they are now, by AI's from English, with upper-division courses taught by regular, tenured and tenure-track faculty fully qualified to teach in and to strengthen the graduate program in English. We are convinced that we must hire this year at both junior and senior levels, as the Dean has indicated we may. But we have not wanted to hire at the expense of the English Department, nor have we wanted in any way to usurp-- or to appear to usurp-- the Department's prerogative. All five of us feel a strong allegiance to and identification with the English Department, and a desire to advance the Department's interests. Our concerns about recruitment, with respect both to UT's national reputation and to our desire to establish the strongest possible cooperative relationship between the Division and the Department, have led us to two strong steps: we have requested this meeting with the Department's Executive Committee, and we have informed the Dean of our unanimous decision to nominate Lester Faigley as the first Director of the Division of Rhetoric and Composition.