

TO: Deans Lieb and King

FROM: Wayne A. Rebhorn

DATE: 9 February 1979

At the meeting with the English Department's GSC on 7 February 1979, I asserted that the English Department played a unique role in the University with regard to instructing students in writing. I said that not only did we bear the entire burden of Freshman composition, but we also taught writing at the sophomore, upper division, and graduate levels, both in courses in the art of composition and in literature. In particular, I claimed that we were practically alone--as a department--in assigning significant amounts of writing to upper division students. Dean Lieb replied that he had heard complaints about the lack of such assignments in English and contended--a contention he admitted was based on hearsay--that many departments in the College of Liberal Arts do in fact assign as much writing to upper division students as we do.

Inspired by this dialogue, I have reviewed the writing assignments in three departments in the College of Liberal Arts and compared them with my own. I chose to examine History, Linguistics, and Philosophy, but I daresay the results would be no different if I had chosen Classics, Government, and Anthropology. I chose the departments I did because they seemed, at least theoretically, reasonably close to English in their concern for writing, and because they included the departments of our two deans. In conducting my survey, I relied on course descriptions written by faculty members for this spring's courses. I took enrollment figures from twelfth-day class rosters. And I read through lists of Graders and TA's to see who was assigned to which faculty member and in which course. Needless to say, I did not count undersubscribed courses, nor those few for which no description was available. I cannot claim absolute accuracy for every detail, but if I missed a course here and there, I doubt that that would really change the picture very much. I summarize the conclusions I have reached below and I have appended a statistical breakdown as well. As you will see, my contentions were absolutely accurate, although I will admit that Philosophy does make a respectable showing, something that cannot be said for either of the other two departments.

Lower Division Writing: None of the other three departments pays significant attention to student writing at this level. Only one professor of history, teaching a mere forty students out of the hundreds enrolled in lower division history, actually assigns a real essay and grades it him/herself. While most Linguistics and Philosophy sections do assign writing, all but four sections of Philosophy assign only one short essay. By contrast, all sections of Freshman and Sophomore writing courses in English assign six to eight three-page essays, and sophomore literature courses assign an average of two short essays apiece. (While more than eighty percent of Freshman and Sophomore writing courses are taught by AI's and Instructors, 22 full-time faculty members do teach those courses. And over half of our sophomore literature courses are taught by regular faculty as well.) What is most important, the faculty in English, unlike that in the other three departments, does its own grading of student work at the lower division level!

Upper Division Writing: Only about half of the History courses at this level assign any writing at all, and in only about forty percent--most of the classes involved are under thirty students--do they require more than a single short essay or book report. Many Linguistics courses require writing, but only one course (of eight) requires more than a single short essay. The Philosophy Department acquits itself better at this level. Almost all of its courses assign writing, and over seventy percent require more than a single short essay (although three of the fifteen courses involved have Graders). By contrast again, we in the English Department require far more writing than does any one of the three other departments, including Philosophy. In over half of our courses we require students to write at least three essays (or more than ten pages), and in over three quarters of our courses, we require at least two essays (or five to ten pages). In other words, although we and Philosophy require student writing in the same percentage of upper division courses, we require considerably more of it from each student taught. These figures thus show conclusively that the English Department as a whole makes a concerted effort to teach writing at every level, whereas sister departments in the College do not really match us in the number of essays or pages of writing assigned each semester.

Let me close with a final observation. Assigning essays to students and teaching writing are not the same thing. As a matter of conscious, professional commitment, we in the English Department assign writing as a teaching device. We not only respond to the ideas expressed in a student's essay, but to its organization and clarity of exposition, to the rhetorical strategy it employs, even to its grammar, diction, and spelling. Nor do we stop at grading, but often require re-writing and conferences with students in excess of normal office hours. I sincerely doubt that teachers in History, Linguistics, and Philosophy--in general--engage in a similar enterprise. Hence, their assignment of essays provides students with little real instruction in writing. But it does save those faculty members the many long hours which we spend in generally unacknowledged and poorly rewarded labor.

Appendix

	Department	# of courses (avg. enrollment)	# of classes requiring essays (avg. enrollment)	Total pages writing per semester	Use of TA's or Graders
F R E S H M A N	English	213 (25)	All (25)	24+	Reg. Faculty-12%
	History	4 (47)	1 (40)	5-9	
	Linguistics	14 (25)	All (25)	3-5	Reg. Faculty-14%
	Philosophy	4 (42)	3 (42)	3-5 (1) 10+ (2)	Grader
S O P H O M O R E	English (lit. only)	67 (31)	47 (31)	3-5 (3) 5-9 (21) 10+ (23)	52% taught by reg. faculty
	History (315K and 315 L)	8 (363)	1 (404)	1-2	TA's do <u>all</u> the grading
	Linguistics	2 (12)	1 (16)	5-9	
	Philosophy (excludes Logic)	8 (54)	2 (39)	10+	Graders
U P P E R  D I V I S I O N	English (excludes creative writing and courses taught by faculty from other departments)	53 (26)	46 (24)	3-5 (4) 5-9 (15) 10+ (27)	
	History	39 (43)	20 (28)	3-5 (5) 5-9 (5) 10+ (10)	Graders (3) Graders (3)
	Linguistics	8 (15)	5 (12)	3-5 (4) 10+ (1)	
	Philosophy	21 (21)	18 (21)	3-5 (3) 5-9 (8) 10+ (7)	Graders (2) Graders (1)

For Upper Division Writing Only

	English	History	Linguistics	Philosophy
% of total courses requiring any writing	87%	51%	63%	86%
% of total requiring less than 5 pages	21%	61%	82%	29%
% of total....5-9 pages	28%	13%	0%	38%
% of total....10+ pages	51%	26%	18%	33%

FALL 1978-79

	Total Sophomore and/or Freshman sections	Total Freshman sections
FULL PROFESSORS	19 5%	6 2%
ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS	27 7%	15 6%
ASSISTANT PROFESSORS	63 18%	38 16%
	<b>Total Number of Professors</b>	<b>Professors who taught Freshmen and/or Sophomores</b>
FULL PROFESSORS	30	17 56%
ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS	30	18 60%
ASSISTANT PROFESSORS	44	29 66%
		<b>Professors who taught Freshmen</b>
		5 16%
		11 36%
		26 89%

117 sections of Sophomore English were offered in the Fall 1978-79.  
 225 sections of Freshman English were offered in the Fall 1978-79.