

English memo angers students

Kevin Williamson
Daily Texan Staff

A memo from a UT faculty member drew complaints over an alleged grade ceiling in provisional freshman composition classes and an investigation into grading criteria for the course, administrators said Friday.

In a memo addressed to English 306 instructors, Wayne Lesser, professor of English, wrote, "The overwhelming number of first essays are receiving grades ranging from C to F, with a majority of those below C. If more than a handful of your papers appear to be significantly better than those we've seen (especially if you haven't had a chance to join our deliberations), please bring a few by to me so we can make sure you're part of our conversation."

Robert King, acting dean of the College of Liberal Arts, said Lesser's memo led some provisional students to believe that they would automatically receive low grades on work done for English 306.

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dents, King assigned Larry Carver, associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts, to head a three-member committee to study grading criteria in E306.

The results of the Carver committee's study will be made public Monday.

"What the English Department is rightly doing is helping [associate instructors] learn how to teach," Carver said. "Grading essays is not an exact science. They're looking to see whether the essay has a point of view, whether it has coherence, and then things like punctuation, spelling and usage."

James Kinneavy, director of the English Department's lower division office, said he does not expect the committee to find any inconsistencies in E306 grading.

"The committee is trying to assure that the same criteria are being used across the board," Kinneavy said. "The committee

has not issued a formal report yet, but I have received an informal reaction, and they generally seem to have approved of the criteria."

According to one E306 associate instructor who requested anonymity, the memo in question left many students believing that it was impossible to achieve a grade higher than a low C in the course.

"Basically, the memo said only three papers deserved a grade higher than a C minus," the instructor said. "There was some confusion as to whether that meant [Lesser] was saying that everyone would get low grades period, or whether he was just criticizing the quality of the work he had seen."

According to Kinneavy, E306 has been significantly restructured this summer.

Previously, E306 had been taught as a five-week class, lasting only one summer session, while this summer E306 is being taught as a ten-week class.

In addition, the work is being graded by a three-member panel rather than by single instructors.

King said the misunderstanding may be a result of current efforts to address "grade inflation" in the English Department.

"Grade inflation has been a concern in [the College of Liberal Arts] and in the English Department for years," King said.

