

## Staffing difficulties lead to course suspension

English 346K, "Writing in Different Disciplines," is a good idea gone awry. UT educators wanted a writing course connected to a student's program of study. Majors in physics, they thought, should learn to write for others in their discipline in clear, precise prose. The idea was that every graduate from an institution of higher learning should possess fundamental communications skills. E346K was developed to fulfill that need.

But snags soon developed. First there was a misunderstanding about who would be required to take the course. According to Dr. Charles Rossman, associate professor of English, most English faculty members believed that upper-division transfer students would be exempt. After adoption, though, the course was interpreted as "a requisite for graduation of all students, no matter when they entered the University, and no matter what sorts of courses or experiences they had had elsewhere." Rossman said in a June letter to *Austin Writer*.

The decision to require the course for all students, along with huge increases in student enrollment, led to a staffing nightmare. The English faculty, already burdened with the need to staff 443 graduate and undergraduate sections, suddenly faced the prospect of having to add 150 more sections to their teaching load. That meant relying heavily on temporary lecturers—PhD graduates with one-year teaching appointments.

The practice of hiring temporary instructors has caused widespread problems. Since any faculty member teaching full time has voting rights within a department, the large number of lecturers soon began to make their political presence felt. In 1984, for instance, they voted down a faculty-led resolution to curtail their influence—to place the majority of lecturers on three-quarter appointments, thus depriving them of voting rights.

More fundamentally, however, the University's reliance on lecturers could reduce the quality of undergraduate education, according to professor Maxine Hairston. "When most freshman courses are taught by low-paid, low-status instructors, students quickly get the message that the department cares little about the large and diverse group of students in its lower-division courses. Even students who have planned to major

in English will be discouraged, and few will even consider a career teaching English in high school or college. The system feeds on itself," she said in an article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

In addition, experimental sections of E346K revealed big problems with the course. "There was rampant grade inflation, with 84 percent of the students receiving A's and B's, difficulties in convincing students to register for sections appropriate for their academic majors, and a lack of genuine course content," said associate professor Dr. Alan Gribben.

Feeling threatened by the infusion of so many lecturers and trying to maintain the integrity of their department, tenured and tenure-track faculty took their problem to department chairman W.O.S. Sutherland.

"We'd come to an impasse," Sutherland said. "Regular faculty members felt that their rights were being abrogated. And the lecturers were voting on their jobs."

In February, on Sutherland's request, E346K was suspended as a requirement for a year while under committee review. The committee will submit a report in September.

Sutherland's decision has generated some controversy. Lecturers who have not been rehired feel frustrated. And even some faculty members have bridled at the department's decision to suspend the course. "The writing program at this university is being systematically dismantled," said professor James L. Kinneavy during a Faculty Senate meeting in May.

Most faculty members, however, applaud Sutherland's decision. "The English Department is catching its breath," Gribben said. "Although we are dedicated to instructing composition, we are relieved that the English Department will be able to staff its courses this year without relying on temporary teachers."

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