

## Professor claims hate letters politically motivated

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Daily Texan Staff

An English professor who received an anonymous hate letter last week said similar letters received by colleagues in the embattled department are politically motivated.

John Velz said he received the typed letter via U.S. mail in his box in the Department of English about a week ago and circulated copies of it throughout the department last Friday. The letter referred to Velz's "physical grossness" and encouraged him to lose 80 pounds.

"Please come to your senses, John, and contain your appetites," the letter stated. "Those who like you cannot easily admire

you. Rather, most people regard you as somewhere on a continuum from repulsive to contemptible."

Although the letter was unsigned, the writer said she is "a woman who has cared about you for years," and ended the letter saying "eventually I will make myself known."

Velz said the letter was politically motivated and was sent in response to his letter to *The Daily Texan* approving acting Liberal Arts Dean Robert King's reinstatement of the budget council as the department's mode of governance.

"Since the one present and one former colleague who have both received similar crank mail are men who have advocated a set of policies for the department analogous to those I advocate, I infer that the personal

vilification in this letter is politically motivated," he said.

Velz added, "I have several times acted on my constitutional and academic right to speak out about issues, including a letter to the *Firing Line* just a month ago. This may well be a response to such politically incorrect views."

Velz said although there was a "crude attempt to make this letter seem to be the work of a student," he believes it came from within the department.

"It comes at the wrong time for a student. Students write hate letters at the end of the semester," he said.

"It is addressed to the mail room in Parlin Hall. A student would address it to the English Department. Above all, it is a prose too sophisticated for a student who can't

spell 'Parlin,'" Velz added, referring to the incorrect spelling of the building name in the correspondence.

But Alan Friedman, a professor of English, said he did not think the letter was politically motivated and was probably from a student.

"I think it's done by a student. No colleague I know of would do such a thing. I don't know who wrote it or why," he said.

Velz said he had not heard of anyone getting such letters until former UT English professor Alan Gribben started receiving them during the 1990 debates over revising the English 306 curriculum to include multiculturalism.

"Until I heard some time ago that Alan Gribben had received several anonymous, insulting letters, I had not thought about

poison pen letters since I was in junior high school. It makes the English Department look embarrassingly bad and that is what angers me, as I care about the department," he said.

Gribben, who now teaches at Auburn University in Montgomery, Ala., said the hate mail and anonymous phone calls he received were a factor in his deciding to leave the University.

"One likes to believe you could have the mettle to withstand such harassment, but I found it particularly abhorrent," he said. "During the English 306 debate I got 12 to 15 calls a day and a lot of night time calls. I felt I was getting the message I had to go."

One other English professor, who asked not to be identified, said he has received hate mail in the past.