

Geoff Henley
Editor

Kevin Williamson
Associate Editor

William LaCalle
Associate Editor

Viewpoint opinions expressed in *The Daily Texan* are those of the editorial board. They are not necessarily those of the University administration, the Board of Regents or the Texas Student Publications Board of Operating Trustees. Opinions expressed in staff or guest columns are those of the writer.

Letters submitted to **Firing Line** should be fewer than 250 words and guest columns should be no more than 750 words. Bring submissions to the Texan basement offices at 25th Street and Whitis Avenue, or mail them to *The Daily Texan*, P.O. Box D, Austin, TX 78713. Letters may be edited for grammar, length, libel and Texan style.

The Daily Texan editorial board will meet with students, faculty, administrators and members of the public by appointment to discuss matters of public interest, political endorsements and Texan policies. To schedule a meeting, call The Texan offices at 471-4591.

University Council mustn't hold up rhetoric division

The University Council has a chance today to endorse one of the few worthy administrative initiatives to come before it in some time: the Division of Rhetoric and Composition. This division, which will concentrate more resources to enhance writing skills on campus, will aid undergraduates.

The University will have more latitude to raise standards in composition within the division as well as to set Universitywide standards for writing-component courses. Most important, though, the division will be specialized enough to focus on lower-division writing. Such banal and pedestrian assignments usually take the back seat in the Department of English; most faculty simply would rather teach more self-indulgent courses. Also the Department of English, which has many different subsections, is just too large and unwieldy

to accomplish such an ambitious goal.

Critics, however, have attacked the division and questioned its origins. They even question its legitimacy, arguing that faculty have "ultimate responsibility" over curricular decisions. This new division — which admittedly would affect pedagogy and curricula — is an administrative entity with rightful origins. As has been pointed out, similar divisions in the College of Natural Science have been created without the fuss. Such creations are just as appropriate as having faculty subdivide their courses.

Others have asked "Why is the division coming now?" They fear the division is designed solely to punish the leaders in Parlin Hall for botching English 306 two years ago. No doubt there are political concerns — it would stretch the limits of naiveté to argue otherwise. But support for a writing division antedated the

E306 war. In fact, some of the divisions' current skeptics, like James Kinneavy, professor of English, have backed the division in the past.

The question that remains is why these faculty members oppose the division. If they had a sincere interest to improve writing instruction for undergraduates, one would like to know just how many of these critics teach composition. If they think the division will hurt undergraduates, they have the burden of showing they have taught composition instruction.

But if it isn't heady altruism that drives the opposition, what is it? One hopes it is not some provincial concerns like guarding the department's budget. One would also hope the English Department would not oppose the division because it might lose a few faculty appointments. In short, if critics' opposition to the division is not out of genuine concern for

undergraduate education, observers might rightly conclude the faculty members concerned are just protecting their political turf.

The University Council must therefore attend to objections people raise about implementation of the division. Members should not place too much stock in hollow queries about the origins of the division and the suddenness of the proposal. And students and faculty should resist the temptation to pigeonhole the idea in some committee for "further study."

The concept of the division has been examined since the mid-1980s. Right now the division enjoys support from student leaders, the administration and many faculty outside the English Department. Absent any new, genuine arguments concerning undergraduate education, the division's progress should not be checked.

EDITORIALS