analysis

Page 12/The Daily Texan/Tuesday, September 10, 1985



At the Crossroads.

By Ellen Williams

One side claims the University will shortchange students if it adopts a proposal to require but not offer freshman English. The other side claims the proposal is the only sane solution for

a problem-plagued, overworked English department. Wednesday, the two sides meet. The decision may prove a turning point for the University.

Joe Kruppa, English department committee chairman, says his department cannot staff

all the courses others want it to teach.

James Kinneavy, who proposed English 346K, says the proposal will not offer many students writing courses in their own fields.



he proposal, from a Department of English faculty committee, would require students to have credit for English 306, a freshmen writing course that 40 percent of students place out of.

The proposal also would require students who didn't place out — there are projected to be 4,000 this year — to get credit for it through UT extension courses, transfer credit or summer school.

Simply, the English department wouldn't offer the course during the regu-

The English department will discuss the proposal in a meeting 3 p.m. Wednesday inside the pale blue walls of Waggener Hall Room 201. The voting deadline on the proposal is 5 p.m. Sept. 18.

If approved, the proposal still needs the approval or amendment of the University Council, and UT administrators.

ames Sledd, recently retired professor of English and long a critic of the shift away from lower-division writing, said the University has tried for years to rid itself of teaching mass lower-division

Basic composition work for ordinary students finally is being given the shaft, Sledd said. Professors are interested only in teaching small classes of select students, he

"They (students) are being washed out by faculty who don't want to teach them and an administration who doesn't want to support them," Sledd said. "It is an abdication of the University's responsibility to the children of Texas citizens.

The University is saying "We aren't going to take the kind of students we're going to get," Sledd said.

"They don't want to do the job the (Texas) Constitution gave them," Sledd said.
"What they want is MCC (Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corp.) and the supercomputer."

The preamble to the legislative act that established the University states it must "place within the reach of our people, whether rich or poor, the opportunity of conferring upon the sons of our state a thorough education."

Darrick Eugene, Steve Biko Committee president, said the proposal would have a significant impact on blacks because it would require many to shoulder the "extra burden" of going to junior college or summer school.

James Kinneavy, professor of English who proposed the controversial E 346K "Writing in Different Disciplines," said although the committee did try to solve some real logistical problems, he objected to the

proposal.
"It finally tells the University community the course is not important enough to teach," he said

"It seems clear they are not interested in teaching the course," Kinneavy said. "They are farming it out to extension. And extension is just not equipped to handle a course of that magnitude."

Extension courses, offered through the UT Department of Continuing Education, would have to take the load of 80 sections of E 306 per semester, Kinneavy said. "That means the English department won't have any control over it," he said. A separate program should be set up if the English de-

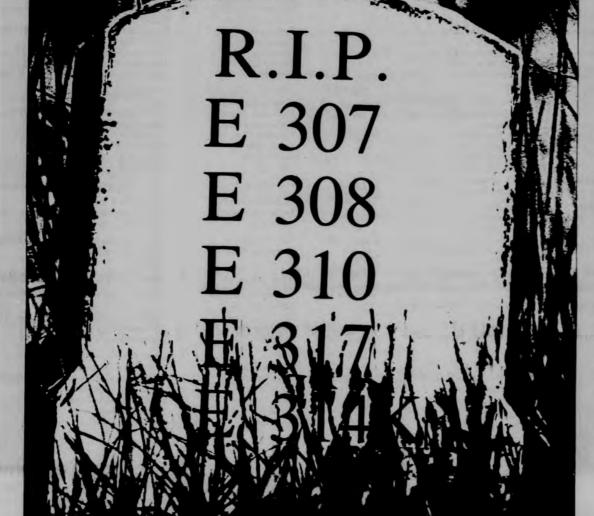
partment does not want to teach it, he said.
Joseph Kruppa, chairman of the committee that drafted the proposal and associate chairman of the department, said the English department would approve the instructors and syllabus for extension courses. Some extension classes begin at 3 p.m., so students would not be inconvenienced, he

hen E 346K was canceled last spring, almost 50 temporary fac-ulty members called lecturers ere fired; 95 percent of them had doctor-

ales. Approximately 85 tenured or tenure-track faculty in the department make it one of the largest in the world.

The English department did not want to be included with more students than it could handle in E 346K this year, which would have been the first time the course would have gone into full effect.

With enrollment at the University expected to top 48,000 this year, the University



Texan Graphics/Mark Greene

ing for qualitative programs."

make it to their junior year.

his ability to write.'

munity college.

The department must teach E 306 to pro-

visional students in summer school. It galls

the department to do it - seeing their ener-

cause many of the students do not make it

E 306 in the regular session. Kruppa said

many students who have to take it never

The idea that students might be better

writing skills early on to help them in other

Kruppa said community and junior col-

leges' classes may be better or worse than

the UT version of E 306. "I think students

can get perfectly satisfactory 306 courses in community colleges," he said. "Our proposal says what 306 does should be done

before students go to college or even com-

Other colleges and departments expect the English department to teach writing.

Kruppa said it was impossible to expect the

department to teach business and technical

Now other colleges - especially the pro-

fessional schools — must teach writing

courses such as technical or report writing

in their own fields if they want them, Kruppa said. "We can staff only so much Eng-lish."

Other colleges can offer courses in their

"Writing has got to be done more across the University," Kruppa said. "We do more

than our share and we want other people to help out. We're saying, 'look, we've

Bringing people with specialties in science and business communication into the

would be difficult to integrate them, Krup-

Kinneavy said it's a "pipe dream" to expect other departments to offer writing courses. "Other departments have trouble meeting their substantial writing components," he said.

The three-hour requirement that would be filled by E 346K or one of the new courses ignores the needs of undergraduate stu-

dents in business, engineering, natural sci-

department would not work because it

own fields to fulfill the three-hour require-

ment where E 346K and the three new

courses are, Kruppa said.

reached a breaking point."

classes is "very naive," Kruppa said. "No

course is going to save a student's soul or

served by taking E 306 to develop their

into the University. The same holds true for

gies in some cases as a wasted effort be-

itself is looking to enrollment management programs. The University has tried to cut enrollment through higher admission standards. Even higher tuition this year apparently has not stopped the growth.

Other departments set a precedent for the proposal. The English committee points to the Department of Mathematics, which announced in November 1981 it would discontinue Math 301 in fall 1982 because of teacher shortages.

Administrators decided students already should have those skills when they come to the University

Similarly, the English proposal indicates freshmen should have E 306 writing skills under their belts before they come to the University. With recent reforms in public school education, more students are expected to place out of E 306.

Kruppa said the proposal would encourage high schools and students to work harder to place out of the course; Sledd said the University wants high schools to do the work for them.

ot teaching E 306 in the regular session would free the graduate students and faculty who normally teach it to teach what Kruppa calls "the more interesting" writing courses

These courses are addressed by another part of the proposal, which gives students a more flexible choice between E 346K and three new lower division writing courses, for three hours of the nine-hour English re-

E 346K, in its pilot phase, proved unwieldly for the department because stu-dents took what fit their schedules rather than taking the section in the discipline

they were supposed to take.

Administrators thought assistant instructors could help teach the course, but between the conception and implementation of the program, a strong policy against graduate students teaching upper-division

courses developed.

And more students took the class than was expected. Originally, transfer students were to have been exempt from taking it if they had taken a similar course. And other departments and colleges were supposed to have offered their own versions, helping out the overworked English department.

But it didn't happen that way — the English department was stuck with all of the

program. And to add to the glut, transfer students had to take the course because up-

per-division hours cannot be transferred. Staffing E 346K this year was a big worry to the department, because it was the first year E 346K — required of all students un-der the 1983 catalog — would go into full effect. The department would have had to hire more lecturers to teach it, and the lecturers were already becoming enough of a

Lecturers make up a "shadow department" with no job security, Kruppa said, adding that hiring lecturers divides the English department into a two-tiered sys-

Sledd said the lecturers, who taught mainly lower-division writing courses, were a threat because they could carry the vote on some issues in the department. The lecturers' specialty was composition, while most of the department's hierarchy - and the members of the committee - are interested only in literature, he said.

The split in the department between literature and composition is likely to come up in any conversation with English professors about their department.

Of all the courses to come and go, the three-hour requirement in literature has remained intact. At adds and drops two weeks ago, students herded in a long line for E 316K "Masterworks of Literature,"

which Sledd calls a "farce." Committee members have said the English department is a literature department, and they stress the department must conduct research to be nationally recognized. Having a large number of lecturers in the

departments impedes national recognition.
So the proposal states clearly: lecturers should not be hired. Instead, graduate students - who are not allowed to teach the upper-division E 346K — would move from the E 306 classes to the three new lowerdivision courses.

he English department has external problems as well. It's seen by some as the whipping boy of the University, bowing to the wants of every other department. The result is an overworked

department.
"No university asks as much writing from its students as this one does," Kruppa said. "For too long we've been dictated to by quantitative programs. Now we're askof UT's writing requirement The recent history of the University's writing requirement has seen an overall shift the summer.

The past and future history

of emphasis from lower-division English to an emphasis on upper-division courses. Before the 1983-84 school year, students with credit for

English 306 took E 307 or E 308 as follow-ups to E 306. E 346K, a junior interdisciplinary course, rose from their ashes.

At the same time E 317, a technical writing course required of engineering students, and E 310, a popular expository writing class required for some students,

were canceled. Last spring, administrators suspended E 346K for a year to decide what to do with it. An English department faculty committee evaluated the writing requirements during

The committee proposes to require E 306 without offering it in the regular session, although it would be offered in the summer.

Instead of requiring E 346K, the department would give students a choice among E 311 "Topics in Writing," E 313 "The Writing Process," E 315 "Thinking and Writing" and E 346K for their threehour composition require-

In 1982, E 316K, "Masterworks of Literature," was phased in to replace E 314K, an introductory literature course. The proposal calls for students to take E 316.

ences, architecture, nursing and pharmacy,

Those students make up 62 percent of all undergraduates. Their professional writing concerns will be ignored if they are not of-

fered a writing course in their field, Kinneavy said.

ormer UT President Peter Flawn, who left office Aug. 31, said in a 1981 interview: "The long-term answer to the problem is to create more academic positions in composition. There are (already) many positions in scholarly litera-

But Flawn said Monday that mass lowerdivision hiring is not the answer. "It's pru-dent to build flexibility into teaching," he

"If you hire tenure-track professors to staff very large lower-division courses, you face the danger - and I think that's probably a pretty good word — the flow of stu-dents will diminish, and you're left with a large faculty that can't be justified with a

lower number of students," Flawn said. Perhaps the solution lies in Flawn's earlier suggestion of hiring more tenure-track faculty in composition, even if the University chops enrollment drastically and professors are left with smaller classes. There are legitimate problems — job security and academic freedom — with hiring temporary

Another solution may be a proposal Kinneavy and some other composition-oriented faculty gave Robert King, dean of the College of Liberal Arts, in May. Kinneavy said no action was ever taken on their pro-

posal to have a partial split between the composition and literature faculty.

Faculty interested in teaching composition could teach freshmen and sophomore writing courses, including business and technical communication, Kinneavy said. The alternative proposal would not require hiring many tenure-track faculty, nor would it require hiring lecturers.

Whatever it chooses, the University will decide the direction it wants to take: re-

search, mass education, or a combination. Does the University wish to educate Texas citizens? Or does the University, facing burgeoning enrollment, wish to become the flagship university of the elite?

The University will decide the question

this year.