

UT prof goes out a winner?



WILLIAM MURCHISON

Alan Gribben won. And, in winning, lost.

No, that's not right: Clients, supporters, students, alumni of the University of Texas lost. Professor Gribben's nationally publicized victory over the political correctness crowd ends, paradoxically, in his withdrawal from the field of strife.

He has found greener, quieter academic pastures. Maybe he has won after all. It gets confusing.

I have written several times of Professor Gribben and his mettlesome fight against the UT English department's attempt to trick up a homely composition course as a consciousness-raising seminar on racism and sexism. I am delighted to say that journalists across the country picked up on Professor Gribben's lonely and preposterous struggle.

Preposterous? Well, of course it was: this mild-mannered Mark Twain scholar, a political innocent, learns of his colleagues' plan for English 306, a required course for freshmen — and becomes indignant! Then tries to get the plan changed! The UT English department denied all along any intention to propagandize students. All right, then, why racism and sexism as the topic? Why not — oh, the Oxford Movement? And why the heavy-handed and tendentious course syllabus?

Professor Gribben thought writing courses were for the teaching of writing skills, not the subliminal adjustment of political attitudes. He protested the plans for English 306. Others joined in. At last the course fell, or at least was shelved for reworking.

You might expect Professor Gribben to be very full of himself: Listen, my children, and you shall hear how I beat the English department and became a talk show celebrity. He had no inclination, far less time, to beat on his chest; too many blows were raining down from the outside.

In an *apologia pro vita sua*, so sweet and calm and poignant as to bear more quotation than is possible here, Professor Gribben writes of "three years of ostracism" for his views. This, although he was "an early feminist" who married a third-generation Asian-American. "As I have learned to my chagrin, allegations of 'racism' and 'sexism' in the academy have virtually no relationship to one's real-life history and deeds; they derive entirely from the judgments of a select few faculty and students, mostly white far-left liberals who purport to have the inside word about a person's true values as reflected in their campus political positions. . . ."

"I was subjected to a campus-wide rally against my actions, vilified as an 'ultra right-winger' by my chairman, and rebuked repeatedly by the campus newspaper."

Yes, he won. Technically. But "after three-plus years of exclusion from the good opinion of my department, and with only a few sturdy friends left there, I am ready to admit that I must move on. My workplace conditions — nuisance telephone calls and letters, intimidating stares of contempt and hatred in the hallways, dismissal from all departmental committees, refusals of my chairman to communicate with me in any manner — have deteriorated to the point of constituting a campaign to coerce me into departing. . . ."

"I now understand how the German people fell silent and acquiesced in the 1930s. Individually, my departmental colleagues are personable, intelligent, charming people; collectively, however, a large proportion of the group is indifferent to a dissenting colleague's rights. . . ."

"My department has only recommended a 1½ percent increase in salary for me during the past two years combined. . . . Students tell me that they are advised not to enroll in my courses or undertake graduate work under my supervision. Photocopied hate letters about me have been distributed to my colleagues and our graduate students in locked departmental mailrooms. . . . False and malicious stories have been circulated regarding my mental health. . . ."

This is how it is, in the year of our Lord 1991, to stand up for one's convictions against the new McCarthyites. "It is difference of opinion that makes horse races," Alan Gribben's beloved Mark Twain once observed. But as they, probably say in the haunts of the politically correct, who cares?