

Freshman English Policy Committee Meeting

February 22, 1978

Parlin 8B, 11:00-12:00

Members present: Kinneavy, Trimble, Wainwright, Creel, Saldivar,  
Haney, Ruszkiewicz, Henry, Cameron

Guests Present: Martha King

Agenda: (starred items deferred)

- Approval of minutes
- Reports of standing committees
  - Variant courses
- Reports of special committees
  - Grading criteria
- Other business
  - Participation in PERA project
  - \* TAC statement on TA probation
  - \* FEPA procedures motions

1. The minutes of February 15 were approved as corrected.
2. Ramon Saldivar gave a brief report from the variant courses committee. He has talked with Terry Brogan, who has a clear sense of the course he wants to teach, and has asked Brogan for a revised proposal. The committee will bring us a recommendation after they see the revision.
3. The committee briefly discussed the Grading Criteria again. Cameron told the committee that he had revised the sheet for his own class and that he would distribute copies by the next meeting; he has no plans to ask for committee approval of it, however. Henry asked the committee to think about whether we should set up criteria for each course or level of courses.
4. Martha King, who attended a conference in Ann Arbor on February 15 for Susan Wittig, reported to the committee (see attached handout). The Formative Evaluation Research Associates, a group which did a study recently on engineering schools, has been funded by Exxon Corp. to evaluate various writing programs across the country. They have asked our Freshman Office to participate in the project.  
Considerable discussion of the topic developed. Kinneavy questioned the research design on two counts: what are the criteria for sample selection? and what expertise on the part of PERA makes them able to conduct valid research on student writing and on programs that purport to teach writing? On the first count, Kinneavy noted that two of the schools, UT and USC, have quite similar writing programs. In addition, Brown teaches what the director calls "functional writing" and Pella State (Iowa) is a non-English department writing program. There seems to be no standard for either stratification or randomization of the sample selected, and Kinneavy stresses that if the design were faulty, the study would certainly be so. Further, we could hurt our image in the eyes of those who know good statistical design if we participate in a poorly designed study, in addition to getting faulty results. On the second count, Kinneavy questioned the background of those doing

FEPC Meeting, February 22, p. 2.

the research. Granted, they may have expertise in educational research (though the design of the proposed study calls that into question); however, they have no knowledge of theoretical approaches to the teaching of writing. Martha King pointed out that they have a large staff of consultants, one of whom is Dick Young. Kinneavy suggested that we contact Young and others who might have some information on the theoretical basis of the design which we may not be aware of. Kinneavy is to call Winterowd at USC and Trimble is to get in touch with Young. Of special interest to us should be the tests which FERA plans to use to evaluate the programs.

Martha King described the tests which the people at the meeting tentatively agreed upon. These will be Diedrich's test--published by the Educational Testing Service, the National Assessment "Primary Traits Test," and an in-house test which will be designed by each program director to test his/her own program. Though each school will design its own in-house test, the FERA plans to administer it. Kinneavy pointed out that the scoring which they had decided on for use with the Diedrich test places greater emphasis on such items/usage, punctuation, spelling, handwriting, wording, and flavor (60%) than on ideas and organization (40%).

The committee discussed the advantages and disadvantages to our participation. The PR could be useful; we could use the tests to answer (Sledd's) charges that we have not effectively evaluated the writing program here; we could learn a good deal about how well we are doing the job we say we want to do; we could compare our efforts to those of others. On the other hand, if the design is faulty, we would get no useable data; we could be laughed at by the profession for participating in the project; we could gain notoriety. Ruzskiewicz suggested that we get a copy of the engineering report which FERA did recently, as it might give an indication of the kind of work we could expect from them; Martha King agreed to get a copy.

5. The committee held a brief discussion of the TA probation statement, but as time was short, it was decided to discuss this item first at next week's meeting.