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Effort to include bias in UT class aborted

By **TODD ACKERMAN**
Houston Chronicle

A University of Texas course that became a symbol of national concern about liberal bias in higher education was aborted Monday when the committee behind it resigned.

Joseph Kruppa, chairman of the UT-Austin English department, said the seven-member committee thought the administration was

unwilling to carry through with its plan to focus composition classes on sexism and racism and was finding ways to impede the committee's progress.

"They thought opposition to the class doomed it," said Kruppa, a vocal proponent of the class. "I'm afraid the course's proposed changes are never going to be realized. We're going to have to rethink it."

The course, required of freshmen, has caused an uproar since

the committee announced last May that it was changing its focus to the social implications of differences in gender, sexual preference, age, ethnic background, race and religion.

The course, if changed as proposed by the now-defunct committee, would have called for a reading list including selections from a sociology textbook and landmark affirmative action and civil rights cases.

Some professors argued that the

proposed change amounted to a "massive attempt at indoctrination." By July, 56 faculty members had signed a "statement of academic concern" printed in the student newspaper.

The class also was being frequently mentioned in newspaper and magazine articles about "politically correct" thinking on college campuses. The term refers to a liberal orthodoxy that tolerates no dissent.

By late July, opposition con-

vinced liberal arts Dean Standish Meacham Jr. to postpone the proposed changes a year. But as late as September, the course changes were approved by the English department 46-11 and most people thought it had survived the controversy.

On Monday, Kruppa would only say that "recent roadblocks" persuaded committee members their

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Class

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work was futile.

"I hope this development signifies UT students are going to get a composition class free of any possibility of political indoctrination," said Alan Gribben, an English professor who led the opposition to the class.

Gribben, a specialist in Mark Twain, added that there was "growing resistance to the course from every sector on campus."

Kruppa said he would appoint a new committee at a future department meeting. He said he didn't want to "prejudge" whether a compromise still could be reached between the opponents and proponents of change.

The composition and rhetoric class is taken by 2,500 to 3,000 freshmen. About 40 percent of UT students are exempt because they scored high enough on their achievement exams and another 12 percent satisfy the requirement by taking composition classes at community colleges.

The class has historically focused on a wide variety of writings, some chosen for their literary value and some for their subject matter. Kruppa's committee recommended making all the writings focus on racism and sexism during a time of lingering racial tensions at the school.

Meacham said he understood the committee's feeling of dissatisfaction and discouragement, but was sorry they felt they had to resign.