

To: Department of English Teaching Staff
From: Joseph J. Moldenhauer, Chairman
Subject: Further Work on Freshman Composition

EEB 6 1980

If you were not present at the departmental meeting of 25 January, please read the minutes, distributed last Friday. If you missed the meeting of 1 February, please review the announcement on the long mimeographed sheet, and read the minutes issued this week. By departmental agreement at the end of the 1 February meeting, we are now proceeding to form study groups or teams to generate and research proposals in the various areas where freshman composition logistics can be affected.

Please inform me by a signed note -- or the bottom portion of this memo if more convenient -- of your wishes with respect to team assignment. I will circulate a list of team memberships as soon as sufficient numbers of the teaching staff have expressed their preferences. I hope that each of the several groups will include members who are simply interested in an area of study, as well as members pre-committed to advancing or opposing a potential proposal. Each team will determine its own organization and division of tasks. The working life of the teams will be short -- two or three weeks should suffice to generate proposals and explore their implications at this stage of the enterprise. The teams should freely request pertinent information from present and past chairmen, associate chairmen and composition directors, should use John Trimble's synopsis of past proposals and the primary documents to which it refers, and should receive suggestions, opinions, and position statements from any member of the teaching staff. I will make an effort to meet with each group at least once. When the preliminary work of the teams is completed, the department can meet once to hear resumés of the proposals each group has found most attractive (with brief outline distributed in advance); then a smaller task force will be formed to coordinate proposals and to develop one or more packages of recommendations for orderly departmental consideration, possible modification, and vote. I expect that the final balloting will be by mail.

I'm sure that everyone in the department appreciates the magnitude and severity of the freshman composition problems. I earnestly hope that this knowledge will translate into a willingness by every individual to devote time and good thinking toward the solution of these problems.

Areas for Study and Proposals

1. Admissions and Registration: cut-off dates; limits on numbers admitted; limits on quality of students admitted; credit or non-credit first composition course; status of remedial arrangements
2. Degree Requirements: number of English hours required for Plan I degree; English courses required; alternate or substitute writing courses in other departments (e.g., a "freshman seminar" system like Northwestern's or a "foundation course" system like Middlebury's); exit exam between sophomore and junior year
3. Exemptions: cutting scores for advanced placement; exemption instruments, especially for E 307, E 308; timing of exams; centralized vs. decentralized placement testing
4. Format I: sequence of required composition courses in student's career (including consideration of effect on prerequisites for sophomore and upper-division English); sectionizing by student's major; grading standards; panel graded finals
5. Format II: available class patterns (large sections, size of small sections, combinations of organized and tutorial work); use of graders; writing labs; self-paced instruction; computer instruction; workload for student (number of themes or pages written); fall-spring balance of section numbers
6. Content: educational philosophy and objectives of the freshman comp. courses