

Members quit UT cultural diversity panel

By Kirby Moss

American-Statesman Staff

All seven members of a University of Texas committee helping to design a controversial freshmen English course to teach about social and cultural differences have resigned from the group.

Joseph Kruppa, chairman of the UT English department, said Tuesday that the committee members were frustrated that the course idea had stalled and felt it wasn't being backed by university officials.

The course proposal, made in May, would have revised a traditional freshman English course called English 306 so that students would study and write about social and cultural diversity and civil rights issues. But the idea slammed into a wall of opposition from some English professors and students.

Liberal Arts Dean Standish Meacham decided in July, after several departmental meetings and student demonstrations, to postpone the revisions for at least a year.

"I understand the feelings of the committee, but I'm very sorry they felt they had to resign," said Meacham, who supported the course idea.

Meacham said Tuesday that he will continue to help Kruppa put together a class that will best benefit all UT students.

"I share the committee's frustration about how the English 306 syllabus was misrepresented and

'I'm very sorry' they felt they had to resign.'

— Standish Meacham, Liberal Arts dean

misunderstood," said Kruppa, who from the onset has supported the committee's idea. "I think we have to re-examine the whole problem from scratch and figure out what we're going to do."

If a similar course idea ever comes to life again, he said, it more than likely will come from an entirely new committee, unless university officials suddenly decide to support the course.

Linda Brodkey, chairman of the Lower Division English Policy committee, said the vote by members to disband came after they were unable to discuss postponement of the course revisions with UT President William Cunningham.

"As a policy committee, we simply don't have the authority to implement policy," she said. "We can make policy, but not implement it."

Cunningham said in a statement Tuesday that postponing revisions to the course will allow the "entire university community" time to review any changes made to E306.

As the committee put together details of the proposed revisions last spring, the issue began to di-

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vide the committee and others on campus.

Two professors, John Ruszkiewicz and James Duban, quit the committee because they felt Brodkey and others supportive of the course secretly were trying to push it through without outside input.

After they were replaced, more than 50 professors from several departments on campus signed a *Daily Texan* advertisement saying they opposed the class because it would indoctrinate young minds with feckless liberal viewpoints, and because the teaching of basic writing skills — which is what the course was designed for years ago — would be lost.

"If this means that the course will be discarded, then UT students are about to receive an early Valentine's Day gift," said Alan Gribben, who led faculty opposition to the course. He said the course idea was designed poorly and would not help students learn composition and solid writing.

The committee that resigned had been trying to get a revised course structure ready for the fall 1991 semester. In September, the faculty of the 92-member English department had voted 46-11 in favor of the course changes.

Each year, about 3,000 students enroll in more than 100 sections of E306.

Other members of the committee who resigned with Brodkey are professors John Slatin, Susan Heinzelman, Stuart Moulthrop, Sara Kimball, Lester Faigley and Elizabeth Fernea, along with a couple of graduate students who served as advisors.

Student leaders were quick to react to the news.

Brian Willats, editor of the conservative *University Review*, said the revision was doomed because the new syllabus represented a very narrow political view.

Politics had nothing to do with the course idea, said Dave Winter, co-director of the Martin Luther King Statue Foundation at UT and the editor, last semester, of *The Daily Texan* magazine, *Images*.

"I support any changes to make the curriculum more multicultural," Winter said. "It is a way to make our education more accurate, not more political."