

DIGEST OF THE REGULAR MEETING

December 7, 1970

CONVENED: 4:12 p.m.

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT TRABANT: A review of the Board of Trustees meeting on the budget.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS: Announcements and adoption of the agenda.

REPORTS: Interim report by Mr. Tingey on the Ad Hoc Committee on Retirement. (No written report.)

BILLS REPORTED:

S. Res. 35 (Rules Committee), to invite the Librarian by letter to attend Senate meetings. Approved voice vote.

S. 33 (Committee), to approve proposed revision in the freshman English course. Passed 30 ayes, 11 nays. (Motion to table this matter was defeated 13 ayes, 33 nays.)

ADJOURNED: Time not recorded.

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

November 20, 1970

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the University of Delaware Faculty

FROM: John C. Wriston, Jr.
Vice President, University Senate

SUBJECT: University Faculty Senate Meeting

There will be a regular meeting of the University Faculty Senate on Monday, December 7, at 4:00 p.m. in Room 110 Memorial Hall. The agenda appears below.

- I. Announcements; remarks from President Trabant
- II. Adoption of the Agenda
- III. Unfinished Business
 - (1) Report from Mr. Anapol, Rules Committee, on the Salsbury resolution.
- IV. New Business
 - (1) A proposed revision in the Freshman English course, approved by the English Department, the College of Curriculum Committee and the University Curriculum Committee (see attachment No. 1)
 - (2) A report from the Faculty Personnel Policy Committee on Criteria and Procedures for Contract Renewal, Promotion and Granting of Tenure (see attachment No. 2)

It is not likely that we will get very far on the FPPC report at this meeting, and, therefore, we are tentatively scheduling special Senate meetings for December 14 and 21 to complete dealing with this.

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MEMORANDUM FROM CHARLES H. BOHNER, CHAIRMAN ENGLISH
TO COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

This memorandum is intended to explain the context and rationale of the requests herewith submitted for changes in English composition courses.

Traditionally, the English Department has offered at the freshman level two courses (6 credits) which have been required in all baccalaureate curricula of the University. For a number of years a placement procedure has exempted the top 20% to 30% of entering students from the first and more elementary of these courses, reducing the requirement in these cases to 3 credits. We now propose a reduction of the requirement to one course across the board, with exemption for superior students meaning permission to elect a substitute course in English at the 200 level.

The proposal is in line with a nationally significant trend recognizing a pattern of diminishing returns in the improvement of student writing through formal instruction at the immediate post-high school level. The average freshman is unimpressed by further technical drill or rhetorical theory, and likely to express himself with the minimum degree of competence demanded of him by his total academic environment, irrespective of the methods and standards inculcated in his English classes. A disproportionate share of the University's resources, therefore, are spent in the repetition of pedagogical procedures which lack the necessary reinforcement in the student's other work to make for genuine learning. In our view, a single required course to establish principles, methods, and standards of college reading and writing is educationally and economically indicated. (The Writing Center, as at present, will be expected to render tutorial assistance at all levels to students who need it.)

The English Department takes internal responsibility for providing in the proposed E 110 the kind of instruction that will most benefit the average freshman. Operating in conjunction with that central course will be the following, addressed to the needs indicated:

(1) A course in fundamentals, preparatory to E 110 and as yet in the planning stage, to be offered in summer only, for those College Try and other qualifying students adjudged unlikely to pass E 110. It is understood that this course, whether taken for credit or not, will be added to and not substituted for the regular required course. Particulars of this course will be submitted for formal approval at a later date. We request that it be approved in principle here as an integral part of the overall program in freshman English.

(2) E 301 (See accompanying course description), intended to supply the additional semester of writing practice now available in the second freshman course, but (a) on an elective basis, (b) at an advanced level in the student's personal and pre-professional maturation, and (c) oriented toward his personal and pre-professional interests. The change in timing and emphasis presents great potential advantages with minimal adjustments in the technical curricula.

(3) A graduate seminar already in the curriculum (E 874) for the training and supervision of beginning Teaching Assistants in the E 110 program.

A copy of a somewhat fuller statement on the proposed program as delivered to the department's Community Design hearing is attached for the information of the committee.

At the conclusion of the committee's deliberations on these requests, we ask that this memorandum be endorsed for transmission to the University Courses and Curricula Committee.

COURSE DESCRIPTION FOR E-110

Practice in expository and argumentative composition through analysis of selected literary works. Required of all freshmen; students who meet proficiency standards set by the department are permitted to substitute a sophomore elective in English or comparative literature. Enrollment by departmental assignment in fall or spring.

TO COMMUNITY DESIGN COMMISSION, SEPTEMBER 29, 1970

Freshman English is a traditional and almost universal fixture in the American college curriculum. Yet it defies definition as a discipline, resists any reliable measure of its effectiveness, and is maintained as often as not simply because it is there. Certainly, the problem to which it is vaguely addressed is always there: namely, that most students do not express themselves as well as we think they should. The easiest way to deal with this stubborn fact is to require another English course, in the expectation that it will somehow dispel the mental and verbal ineptitudes that still cling to the average freshman after 18 years of life and 12 years of school.

The vanity of such an expectation has long been recognized by students of the problem. In the words of a Carnegie-sponsored analysis of FE in 1963:

There can be no real short cut to writing skill. That is, there can be no quick and painless way to develop a well-stocked mind, a disciplined intelligence, and a discriminating taste in language and fluency in its use. None of these can be acquired without hard work over a period of years, and it is preposterous to claim or to expect that any single course in either school or college, no matter how well taught or how intensively studied, can assure them. They are to a considerable extent the result of increasing maturity and of the total educational process acting on an intelligent mind. [Kitzhaber, p. 17]

In a more general survey of College & University Curriculum (so titled) in 1968 Paul Dressel confirms these observations:

Concern and responsibility for writing should be shared by the entire faculty rather than arbitrarily imposed on the English department. . . . The only solution to the problem of freshman English is the drastic one of eliminating the requirement. Responsibility for spelling, punctuation, and elementary grammar should be returned to the elementary and secondary schools. The importance of writing itself should be emphasized in all the disciplines the student studies. He must write on some topic, and he will probably prefer to write about what he is studying than about the artificial issues posed in freshman composition classes. Writing, as a method of organizing and expressing one's ideas, is a mode of learning as much as a skill. The importance of writing, both as a means of communication and as a means of learning, must be impressed upon the student by the concerted effort of the entire faculty. [p. 103/]

Confronted by mounting pressures and diminishing returns, faculties have been responding in predictable ways. A few have indeed resorted to radical surgery and jettisoned FE altogether, with what effect it is too early to tell. According to the latest ACE report on undergraduate curriculum trends in 1969, 9 out of 10 colleges and universities still have an English requirement of some sort, but whereas a decade ago 60% required a full year course, today less than half do. The most favored solution, and the one which our department proposes for this university, is to consolidate essential instruction in college level reading and writing in a single introductory course, with provision for additional help where and when needed and for acceleration where superior ability dictates.

Although a single course will not produce prodigies of improvement where two have failed to do so, there is good reason to retain the one if only as a reference point from which the student can take his standards of excellence and the university can assess the linguistic ability or disability of the student. If FE cannot cure illiteracy, it nevertheless can teach the freshman something about literature and the theory of composition; and it can, in the context of some compelling interest, lead him to stretch, often measurably, whatever native capacity for self-expression he may bring to it.

Our proposed reform of FE, therefore, postulates as a core a one-semester, 3-credit course in critical reading and writing, subject to certain administrative modifications to adapt the program of instruction to the kinds of student needs that can be anticipated. For example:

1. The training of College Try and other freshman qualifiers in the summer sessions is not always most effective in the framework of credit requirements which cannot readily be bent to their most pressing needs. We propose to supplement the introductory course in the summer curriculum, not

only with tutorial assistance through the Writing Center, but with a preparatory course to which students in need of more basic instruction can be directed with some hope of success.

2. Since chronic weaknesses in English cannot be expected to vanish in a season or a course, we propose a standing procedure whereby weak students in the regular course in any term will be directed, as part of the course, to enroll for specifically tailored tutorial assistance in the Writing Center. The basic mechanism of the plan is already in use.

3. At the other end of the ability scale, experience suggests that the top 20% of the entering class can confidently be turned loose among the 12 sophomore electives in English and comparative literature. We propose to refine placement procedures whereby these students can be most accurately identified and freed to fulfill the 3-credit requirement under conditions of appropriate level and optimum personal choice.

4. As an important contribution to flexibility and comprehensiveness in the new program, we propose to introduce a new writing course at the 300 level as an upper division elective for non-majors. Long in demand, both on campus and in Extension, such a course will meet the needs of mature, highly motivated, professionally oriented students who need practical assistance at the most relevant point in their educational career. We would like to serve the 64% of young engineering graduates who are reported to wish they had had more English in college, but we do not believe that their need becomes felt or our assistance effective at the freshman level.

Many features and advantages of the program envisaged here must be passed over in this brief sketch. Among those which should at least be mentioned are:

- smaller classes, making possible a larger volume and higher quality of written work.
- fuller participation by senior staff in freshman instruction,
- more beneficial utilization of graduate teaching assistants,
- generally increased flexibility in providing every student the kind of help he needs when he will most profit by it.

Henry B. Tingey
Statistics and Computer
Science