

English Composition or English Competency?

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With the new push towards literacy in the university, UPEI, always at the forefront of intellectual progress, has decided to make a giant step forward to ensure that her graduates will be able to express themselves coherently in English. No longer will caveman grunts, translated onto paper, be sufficient to nail down that coveted B.A. Non sequiturs will henceforth be banished from the examination room (what examination?) How will this prosodical miracle be achieved? Simply by putting all students—yes, the whole crop—through a 3-months processing machine called an English composition

course. This machine is closely modelled on an earlier version which veterans of the educational system may recall operating in the Dark Ages some decades ago, around grades 7-9. On the well-founded premise that language learning is most effective at a later age, our educational system has decided that, in respect to reading and writing, it is obviously more effective to teach mature university students than to cast pearls before young swine.

While applauding the initiative of the despicable English department in trying to stop the rot in the quality of our graduate, it seems that Senate (hey! wake up you guys) might have offered more support to the endeavours of these overworked profs if only they had looked more carefully (or looked at all) at the consequences of their decision to give every mother's

son (and daughter—sorry!) an undercoating of English comp to protect them in the stormy years ahead of them.

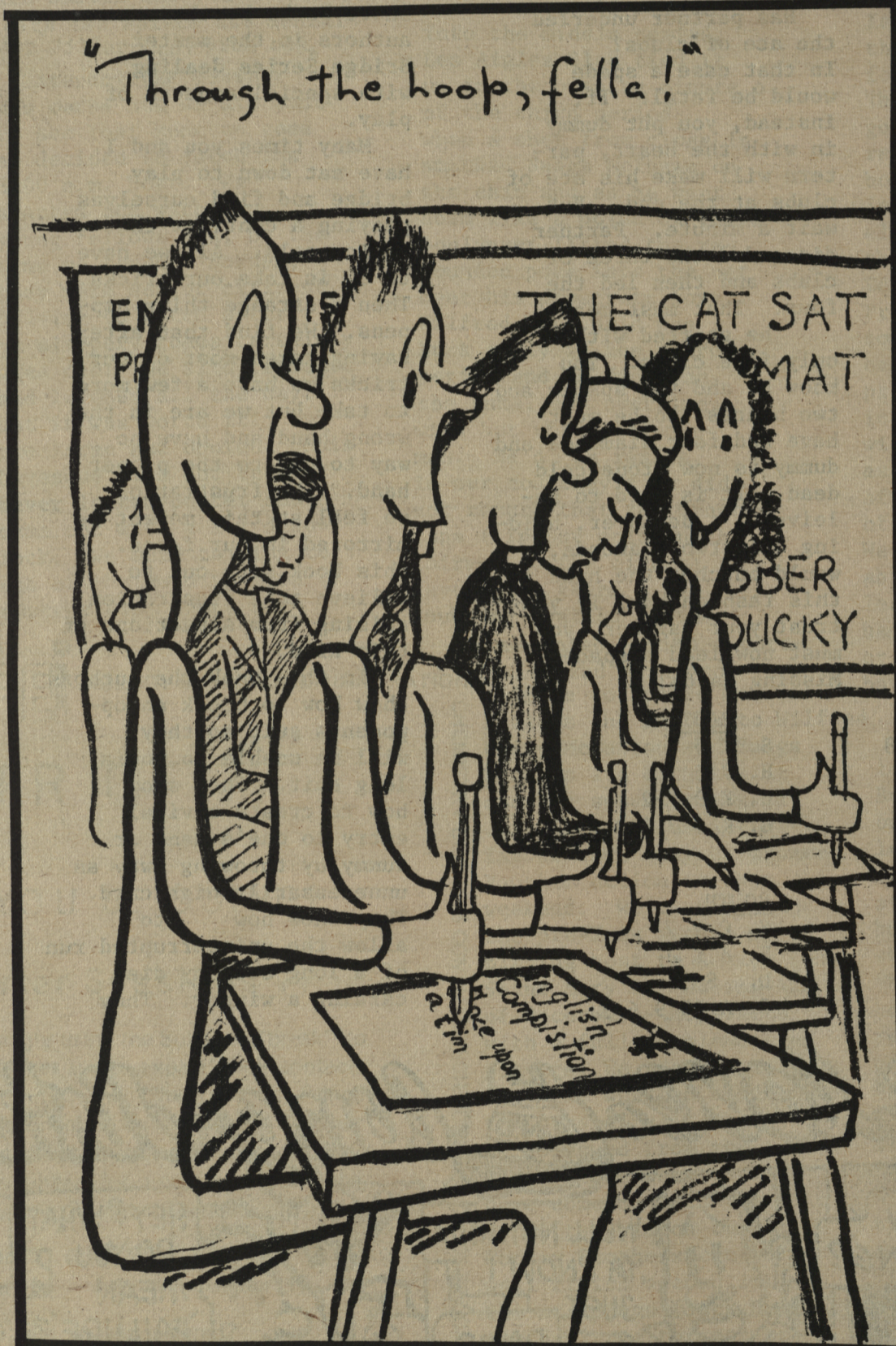
First, it is quite obvious that many students do come through the various school systems with a perfectly adequate ability to express themselves. This must be true, otherwise we have been graduating nothing but illiterate students during the last six years, and one must be charitable

capacity and the profs prime responsibility is to rehabilitate students with a poor grasp of English, how can that prof possibly be teaching at a level sufficient to interest the literate student? And even if it were possible to do so without losing those who are in dire need of help, would it not be so much more sensible for literate students to be in a regular university-level

Second, Senate failed to make any provision for standards (sorry to use such offensive language) in this course. Even the humblest sausage machine has to churn out a product which will pass inspection. But all that is legislated for is that the student will spend three months in an English comp class and, subject to the idiosyncratic evaluation of the individual prof, will be duly pronounced fit to exercise his/her newfound skill in other exciting disciplines. The usual pressure on the individual prof to pass students on normal intellectual subject-matter? By allowing such students in order to avoid appearing like a cad, nay! an oaf who, manifestly, cannot teach, is likely to result in a high pass rate which unfortunately will not betoken remarkable improvement in the next term's papers across all departments in the university. It is imperative that some standardized testing procedure be sued which will show that students across the board have achieved a certain minimum standard. This is the only fair and reasonable way to operate compulsory courses and this plea is tendered entirely in the spirit in which the original legislation was passed. I hardly need to point out to students the hazards, otherwise, of being in Prof. X's class as opposed to Prof. Y who in turn is easier/tougher than Prof. Z.

The ideal, of course would be pre-testing (in Sept.), not only to eliminate students who were already above the standard, but to allow students to observe the progress they had made in a post-test at the end of the term.

In closing, the thought occurs that all problems could of course be solved by making the pre-test a bar for entrance to university, thus releasing all that high-priced help for jobs that they are eminently qualified to do. But apart from our desire to fix our noble eyes on the future without so much as a backward glance to 500 years of university tradition—we need the money!



enough not to believe that. I will even vouch for the fact that I have known some literate students. Why then make them jump through the same hoop as those who are more deserving of loving care and attention? I believe that an argument has been put forward that it will do them no harm. I find this argument totally resistible. If the classes are filled to

English class where they might exercise their essay-writing talents to dispense with the English Comp course, it would not only make them feel that they had made a step up from High School, but it would enable the prof in English Comp. to devote more time to those most in need of instruction by cutting down the enrolment in this course.

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