

Balance shifts away from literature

University pushes 'write on' attitude

By ANN PORTAL
Of the Emerald

Editor's note: This is the last of a three-part series examining renewed emphasis on student writing abilities.

"We have long preserved our constitution, let us make some struggles for our language."

Dr. Samuel Johnson spoke out for writing more than two centuries ago, but his attitude toward writing is back in vogue.

English Prof. John Gage explains that writing has a history of going in and out of fashion. The current emphasis on better writing skills didn't happen overnight, he says, but is the apex of a growing concern that began several years ago.

To a large extent, the current attitude toward writing at the University reflects this trend.

Although writing always has been taught at the University, the percentage of writing and literature courses offered by the English department has shifted over the past several years, says Assistant English Professor Kathleen Dubs, who directs the composition program. She says literature no longer dominates the department.

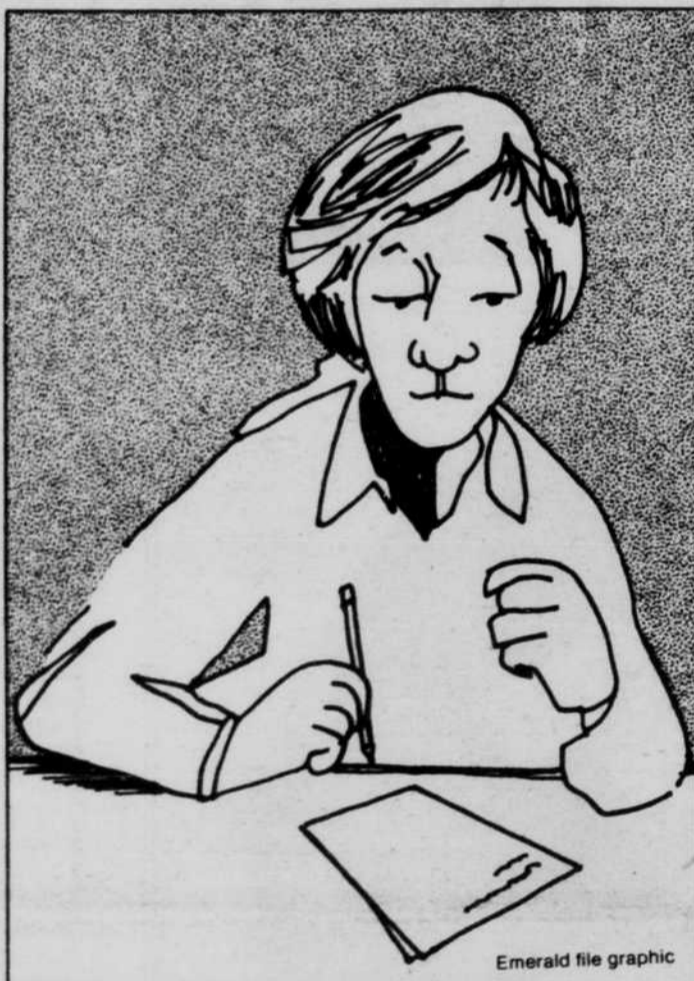
"More and more of our resources have been put into writing," Dubs says.

Even though the English department is offering more writing courses, they always are full — one popular new course, Practical Grammar, has been full every term this year, she says.

The University requires all students to take at least two writing courses — or pass waiver exams — but English Professor Nat Teich says he thinks students themselves are taking the initiative to improve their writing.

"Students now are relatively open and accepting — not hostile to attempting to improve skills," he says.

Teich says more poor writers now try to stick it out in his 100-level course. They may consistently receive Ds, but they keep trying, he says.



Emerald file graphic

Most professors agree that while there is a definite emphasis on writing at the University, still more could be done. Writing involves more than two terms of the fundamentals of composition, they say, and should be monitored and corrected in all University courses.

This approach, called writing-across-the-curriculum, is one stressed by language theorists who say

a biology lab write-up should be just as well written as an expository English paper.

But Teich admits that the number of students in lower-level courses make written comments on each student's paper difficult, if not impossible.

Dubs suggests that part of the problem is that many professors are not competent writers. Writing is a skill they all use in their work, but they can't teach it, she says.

'Students now are relatively open and accepting — not hostile to attempting to improve skills.' — English Prof. Nat Teich

So English departments are hiring writing specialists who can teach writing, and teach it well. More Ph.D.s are graduating with training in rhetoric and writing than ever before, and universities are grabbing them, Dubs says.

"People are being trained to teach writing the same way they used to be taught to teach literature."

Dubs says she believes students who take University writing courses definitely improve their skills. Even the writing on evaluations at the end of the course is better, she says.

However, University writing courses have a reputation for toughness that prompts some students to fulfill their writing requirement at another school during the summer, Dubs says.

"We don't simply pass people through because we want to be kind or popular," she says.

Gage says he is satisfied that writing is taken seriously at the University — there is a concern that it be well taught. But good writing cannot be accomplished by spending 20 weeks in writing courses, he says.

"Writing is everybody's responsibility because learning to write takes so long — in fact is life long."



Photo by Bill Wack

Strike two

Nurses at McKenzie-Willamette Hospital took to the picket line Tuesday afternoon to protest the hospital's latest contract offer. The hospital's second strike in two years mainly is over the proposed second-year pay increase.

City council vote outlaws sexual, racial harassment

By HEIDI SWILLINGER
Of the Emerald

The Eugene City Council received an enthusiastic round of applause Monday night when it voted unanimously to make racial and sexual harassment illegal.

The council amended the city's assault and battery ordinance, redefining assault and battery as intentionally causing physical harm to another person or placing or attempting to place another person in fear of imminent physical harm.

In addition, a new section was added to city law books prohibiting such intimidation of another person, as well as destruction of public or private property "by reason of race, ancestry, religion, color, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, age, national origin or handicap."

Under the new ordinance, violators can be fined as much as \$1,000.

Distribution of racist literature and threats against a black family in Eugene prompted

Human Rights Council President Baruch Fischhoff and Willie Polite, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to urge the council to amend existing harassment laws last April.

The council directed the Human Rights Council, the Human Rights staff, and the city attorney to draft an ordinance addressing the concerns.

At the public hearing, representatives from the gay community, Clergy and Laity Concerned, the Commission on the Rights of Women, and the Eugene Commission on the Rights of Minorities testified in favor of the ordinance.

Adoption of the measure by the council "will show the few mean spirits in this city that it is time to reconsider their views," Fischhoff said.

Polite said the ordinance "does not have the teeth in it the NAACP wanted. I wanted teeth in it that bite. The teeth in this ordinance just gum a little bit."

"But we still want what we can get."

"It's something the community needs," he continued, pointing out that three weeks ago, Eugene resident Martha Green received an anonymous threatening letter, similar to one mailed to her last March.

The March letter stated, "The people do not want blacks to live in our community."

The latest letter, riddled with misspellings, read, "Why are you folks still here? Can't you take a warning! Black folks just aren't going to be accepted on the west side of Eugene, Oregon. . . Best thing I can tell ya is move out while you and yere kids haven't been in no trouble."

The letter was signed, "A concerned person."

"Even though (the ordinance) is not going to stop people from writing letters or making anonymous phone calls, I think it's a statement we have to make," councilor Gretchen Miller said.

The new ordinance is similar to a bill currently under consideration by the state Legislature.