

Humanities at UNC-A, The Controversial Course: A Conversation with Dr. Riggs

For the next few issues, we will be examining the past and in part, suggestions for the future of the Humanities Program at UNC-A. The present set of articles are taken from conversations with those involved in the original set-up of the program as well as those who are proposing changes. This week, we will study a little of the past of the program as seen through the eyes of Dr. Roy A. Riggs, Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

Dr. Riggs was one of the first members of the Humanities Program then as a member of the Department of Literature and discussion group leader and lecturer. He says, "There has been interest in revising the Humanities Program periodically on the part of the faculty and this year is no exception." Dr. Riggs added, "I am one who favors change for several reasons, and in the past eight years, there has been change in the program; books have been changed, tests have been tried and revised and the structure of the course has changed, but if we are going to change the program drastically, we should go back to the original aims and objectives of the course."

The original course was set up for 24 hours to supplant the semesters of General Education courses required at other institutions. For example, Riggs said, at another school, a student might take several semesters of Literature and History, etc. "Here, we decided to take those semesters and make a course which would integrate all the areas of the Humanities and offer it as an introduction to the liberal arts education we offered."

Riggs added, "Particularly, in the cases of Literature and History majors was the course necessary, because majors in those fields were instructed to build on the basis and general acquaintance they had achieved in the Humanities course; they were told to build on the beginning they had received in the Humanities program."

Riggs stated that the basic aims and objectives of the course were to eliminate duplication and overlap in the beginning student's experience, as well as to end the inefficiency and wastefulness involved in other programs which prescribed introductory hours for freshmen.

"We were trying to aim at the best liberal arts experience

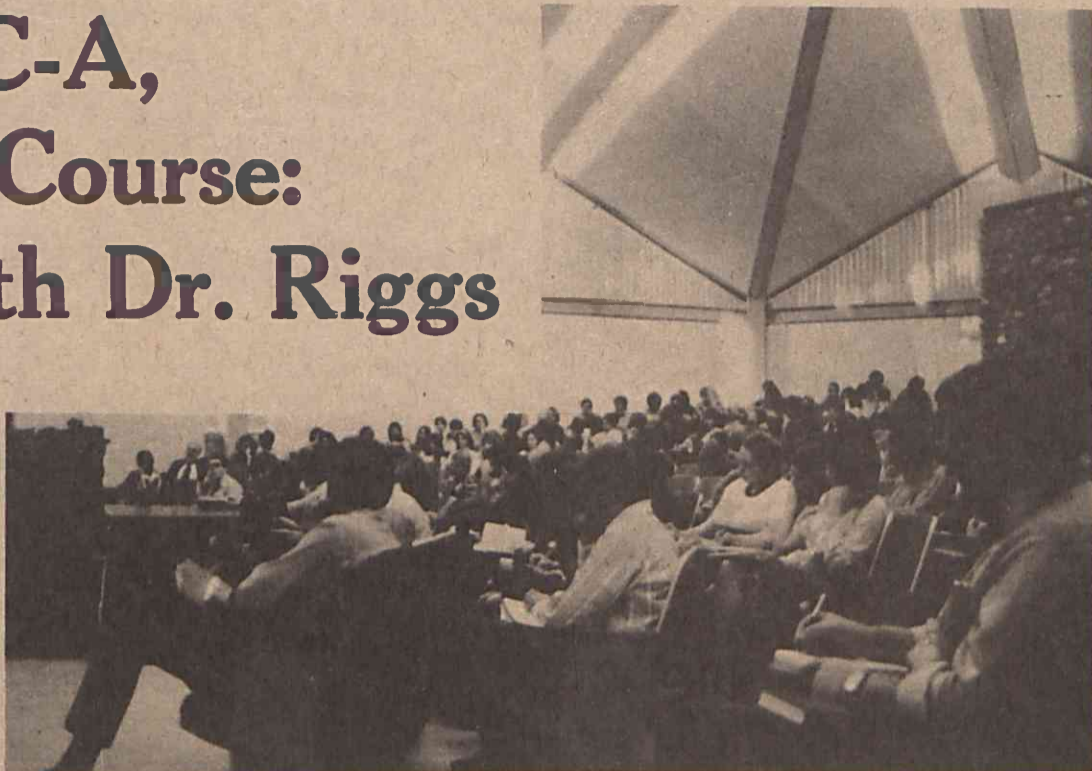
we could contrive, and we must always be asking ourselves 'is this the best we can do?'" Dr. Riggs added.

The position of UNC-A as an experimental school also enters into any background study one wished to do on the Humanities Program. Dr. Riggs maintains that because of the experimental status of the institution, the course was designed with innovation and constant revision as one of its characteristics. "We want to try different approaches, different methods." Riggs reemphasized the constant change involved in the program so far and the commitment to keep changing as times require as very ele-

mentary parts of the Humanities Program.

There are, according to Dr. Riggs, two salient objections to change in the program. The first are those faculty who see the program as an "enriched Modern Civilization Program" with the chronological matrix and the historical methodology that such a program stipulates. The other objection is the sheer administrative complexity of breaking up the present structure. "As it stands, the program provided order and administrative simplicity, added Dr. Riggs. He went on to explain that any revision in the program must take into account the administrative work required in the process.

"It's time we made some changes; they'll do us some good," Dr. Riggs added. (More next week.)



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