

## **Gender Balance Problems in Tracked High School English Classes** by Maureen Dolan, High School Representative

My high school has three levels for English classes - honors, "A," and "B." Students enter this tracking system in 9th grade after being homogenously grouped in the middle school. I personally don't like the system and am advocating for just two levels-honors for the gifted, highly motivated students; and A for all the rest. My reasons are the same as others who argue for heterogeneous classes: It affects students' self-n to be placed in a "low" class; if expectations for these students are low, then their achievement will be; and there is less opportunity for students to learn from each other. Since there is a preponderance of boys in B classes, as well as high numbers of girls in the honors classes at my school, gender balance is another compelling reason to do away with the lowest tracked classes,

Last year my 9B class had only twelve students, with nine boys and three girls. Pulling them into groups was a problem as they objected to a mix of boys and girls. I spoke with an equally frustrated 10B teacher this year who has a class with only two girls and 13 boys. These girls (not my former students) were in an English class last year as the only two girls in a roomful of boys.

If we did away with the B classes it wouldn't help us with the problem in the honors classes, as this disparity exists at the honors level as well. One of our 10H sections is composed of 20 girls and 5 boys. The teacher in that class says the discussions become less concrete, and more "touchy-feely," while the boys become alienated.

One theory is that boys are placed in B classes for behavior issues only; their ability is A level or even higher. Another theory is that teachers are more prone to recommend girls for honors classes, and that our teaching style appeals to girls more.

Our department has been brainstorming ways to deal with this problem. If anyone has any suggestions on how to achieve a better gender balance in English classes, please email me at [MDOLAN@wi.com](mailto:MDOLAN@wi.com).