

December 12, 2024

Dear Provost Scarlatta, Dean Budikova, and Dr. Davis,

As officers of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the world's largest professional organization for research and teaching composition, we write to express our deep concern about the decision at the University of Michigan-Dearborn to increase course capacities for composition classes from 24 to 30, and for honors composition courses from 15 to 30. We understand that the raising of these course caps have resulted in lecturers being laid off. Moreover, we are alarmed that faculty are being told that this action will not lead to more work for them, but rather that they should simply “assign less.”

According to our Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing, “Sound writing instruction is flexible [and] attends to material conditions (of both learners and instructors, including appropriate class size, offices, and compensation).” More specifically, we state that “No more than 20 students should be permitted in any writing class. Ideally, classes should be limited to 15.” In addition, “No English faculty members should teach more than 60 writing students a term. Any more than this, and teachers are spread too thin to effectively engage with students on their writing.” This position is affirmed by the Modern Language Association (MLA)’s ADE Guidelines for Class Size and Workload for College and University Instructors of English.

To be clear, the decision to increase writing class sizes to 30 is at odds with best practice based on disciplinary expertise in rhetoric and composition studies. Quality writing instruction requires time for student writing practice and individualized attention to students’ writing processes including tailored feedback on their writing. Large writing classes inevitably lead to less attention paid to students and their work, which can foster disengagement among both students and instructors. These concerns about disengagement are all the more troubling at a time when generative AI products such as ChatGPT are already distracting many student writers.

Students today need more support than ever to navigate a rapidly-changing digital landscape, and large writing courses will put them at a disadvantage as they move on to write in other contexts, including in their other courses and, later, on the job. These conditions are particularly salient at UM-Dearborn, given its role as a regional state university with a large population of first-generation college students.

Moreover, we understand that teacher working conditions are student learning conditions, and CCCC stands for fair treatment and equitable working conditions for faculty, graduate instructors, and staff. Large writing courses lead to faculty burnout, which will affect the ability of institutions to retain experienced writing instructors, especially when the university is an outlier among local institutions in the region. In the case of UM-Dearborn, a 30-student course cap for writing classes is anomalous among local Michigan postsecondary institutions including Eastern Michigan University, Wayne State University, and Oakland University.

Given our mission to support “the agency, power, and potential of diverse communicators inside and outside of postsecondary classrooms”; “diverse language practices”; and “ethical

scholarship and communication,” we find it imperative to advocate against measures that undermine the core values pivotal to promoting equity-oriented education and scholarly engagement. CCCC urges that the UM-Dearborn leadership recommit to the university’s stated mission of being “a caring, inclusive, student-focused institution...committed to excellence in teaching, learning, research and scholarship, as well as access, affordability, and community impact” by walking back the decision to increase class sizes.

Sincerely,

The Officers of the Conference on College Composition and Communication

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