

December 20, 2024

Below, a group of CASL faculty have annotated Chancellor Grasso's letter to SACUA as a means of offering perspective on decisions about class sizes, course caps, enrollment, and financial challenges.

The original letter is in black. The faculty comments are in red.

Best,  
Rebekah Modrak

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Dear Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA),

Thank you for your inquiry regarding UM-Dearborn's College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters budget situation and winter 2025 semester planning.

Please find below a communication that was shared with President Ono and the Regents in response to Kirsten Herold, head of the Lecturers' Employee Organization on the Dearborn campus, regarding our response to questions and issues raised.

### **Bottom Line Up Front**

- Students' success is always prioritized and they will not be impacted by any decisions next semester or in the future.  
Increasing class sizes and reducing course offerings are likely to negatively impact student success by reducing individualized attention and course flexibility, contrary to this claim. Research and feedback from faculty suggest that such changes compromise the quality of education. As an example, some writing classes went from 15 to 30 students. One went from 22 to 40. Even EMU does not have writing classes above 25 students per section. The CASL Dean's response was, "make the students do less work." Students learn to write by writing. These increases will affect the quality of instruction. Students have already been impacted by such decisions. Some courses that students need to complete their degrees and to graduate on time are being canceled as they likely will not meet the new enrollment thresholds. Faculty have not received guidance or plans for how to handle these issues.
- The current situation in CASL has been years in the making; it is not unique to UM-Dearborn; faculty and staff were communicated with over the years; action is now being taken to protect our liberal arts offerings.  
While declining enrollment in the liberal arts is a national trend, institutional decisions have exacerbated CASL's financial challenges. These include the move to eliminate course banking, reductions in operating funds, and a lack of consistent investment in program

innovation and promotion. Faculty and staff have consistently adapted to structural changes and increased demands, including the transition to a 4-credit model and the prioritization of practice-based learning. However, the continued reliance on faculty to resolve systemic budgetary issues—without addressing the structural inefficiencies of the RCM model or reallocating resources institutionally—places an unfair burden on those responsible for teaching, research, and service.

Competition created by the RCM and Dearborn Discovery Core has had a negative impact on CASL. Other colleges have been allowed/encouraged to create courses and make hires that replicate resources already available in CASL.

- The college remains in the planning/discussion process, final decisions have not been made however changes are needed in advance of the winter semester  
LEO reports that final decisions have been made. Close to 20 lecturers have been laid off.
- This is a CASL issue, the other three colleges are not experiencing financial hardships or “right size” planning.

Re: “financial hardships,” this is exactly the problem with the budget model: one college can experience revenue declines that result in a crisis while other units do just fine. This budget model does not reflect the educational mission of the university, and pits units against each other in competing for student dollars.

While CASL faces unique challenges, the RCM budget model disproportionately affects CASL due to its role in offering general education courses required by all colleges. While CASL may not have majors, it has plenty of students, but the tuition for those students goes to the professional schools. The financial burden of offering these courses without proportional funding exacerbates CASL’s issues.

We note that the data shows that CASL is already “right sized” in comparison with the other Colleges. <https://sites.google.com/view/um-dearborn-aaup/casl-data>

- Re: “right size” planning, This language is used by RPK consulting, the firm hired by the University of West Virginia. RPK used the RCM budget model and eventually laid off faculty. The material from an RPK handbook reads: “Faculty throughput rates are another measure of academic efficiency, which provides information to help right-size colleges’ instructional capacity. This metric illustrates the balance between course enrollments and instructional faculty. Increases in academic efficiency—by optimizing course sections sizes, reducing low enrollment sections and programs, and increasing instructional capacity—mean that colleges can serve more students without increasing compensation expenses. Similarly.....when colleges are able to increase faculty throughput, they can serve more students saving on expenditures because fewer adjunct faculty are needed.” But we have data that contradicts this assertion. Student to faculty ratio is similar in all colleges. The average credit hour per faculty person is just about the same as it was (slightly higher) in 09-10. This after a net loss of almost 100 faculty. <https://sites.google.com/view/um-dearborn-aaup/casl-data>
- Human Resources is working with union representatives to minimize layoffs, all aspects of the contract are being followed.

All aspects of the contract are **not** being followed, which is why the College came to the Union with an MoU – exchanging keeping 6 LIIs fully employed in return for the union not grieving. The College would not have offered an MoU if they did think there was a chance the

Union would prevail in a grievance. While the College wants to take the position that increasing class sizes by 50-100% is not an increase in workload, it is unlikely an arbitrator would agree.

There is much misinformation circulating as we work to address budget concerns in CASL. To be clear, the situation we are working through did not occur overnight. The situation in CASL is not unique to our campus. CASL leadership has been discussing the budget situation and seeking input on the best solutions to keep the college solvent and viable for over a year.

### **The Situation**

Enrollment has been declining in most CASL programs for well over 10 years. In 2013-14, student headcount was 4,756. Headcount has declined steadily each year dropping to 2,446 students in 2023-24, a 49% decline in 10 years. The largest portion of these declines have occurred in the areas of humanities, arts and the social sciences. Other units have not seen this precipitous decline.

“Declining enrollment” is the symptom, not the problem. Factors such as increasing tuition, societal undervaluing of liberal arts, and institutional decisions have contributed. The data shows that "headcount" of first majors is not the right metric. Actual course enrollments (& credit hours generated) show that the declines have stabilized, and that the number of instructors declined in tandem with the enrollments. <https://sites.google.com/view/um-dearborn-aaup/casl-data>

[National trends](#) reflect the situation at UM-Dearborn.

While declining enrollment in the liberal arts is a national trend, UM-Dearborn's implementation of the RCM model may have intensified CASL's financial difficulties by incentivizing competition between colleges and failing to adequately support interdisciplinary and general education courses. The budget model has also introduced inefficiencies at the University level, with the colleges duplicating resources and faculty.

This information has been communicated to college faculty and staff for many years, dating back three deans. A white paper was drafted in 2022 with solutions to address enrollment declines and updated by the college faculty executive committee earlier this year. The information has been shared with faculty and staff. The current dean is ready to act after reflecting on the situation in conversation with faculty for more than a year.

### **The Direction Forward**

The CASL dean held two college-wide faculty meetings this semester where the budget and actions to address it were discussed. In addition to these meetings, a college forum was held the week of November 18.

Faculty have shared that, at these meetings, the budget was addressed in broad terms. The actions to address it were not.

This forum was tense, but the conversation was fruitful. Currently proposed cost savings measures include:

- Increase course enrollment expectations (implementing course enrollment minimums before a course can be taught and/or consolidating sections taught)
  - This action helps address instructional inefficiencies that have become serious in areas of the college where student demand has declined the most resulting inefficiencies that have not been corrected with faculty reductions  
Much of CASL faculty's concerns about these policies has not been exclusively about the decisions themselves, but about their last-minute implementation. We faculty cannot both offer the required courses in our program to get students to graduation while also enforcing these minimums in our current enrollment environment. We need to be able to make curricular changes, but we cannot due to our own college's decisions to pause such changes. We can, and want, to make productive changes, but we cannot do so at the last minute. We need time.
  - This strategy is utilized routinely by other institutions and other colleges at UM-Dearborn, and through the three campuses, that seek to improve financial health and ensure financial stability  
This statement implies that CASL has not done this. In fact, it has been routine in CASL for years now that when classes are very small at **the end** of the registration period, they are cancelled; TT faculty regularly have had small classes cancelled after registration has played out, and those TT faculty have bumped LEO faculty. The difference here is that the current changes were implemented throughout the registration period, cancelling classes that were likely to have high enrollments. Additionally, while larger course sizes and enrollment minimums may be common elsewhere, in CASL they are often associated with diminished educational quality and increased faculty workload, particularly in disciplines requiring discussion-based or experiential learning.
- CASL currently has courses with approximately 10 students or less enrolled, this simply is not sustainable  
The administration has not provided data to show that CASL is different from the other colleges. Actual data analysis of the number of low-enrolled courses across UM-Dearborn could allow us to see whether this is unique to CASL, and what the relative ratios are. (There are plenty of courses with fewer than 10 students in all 4 colleges). Preliminary data analysis shows that CASL is no more likely to have courses with fewer than 10 students than the other three colleges, and no more likely to have instructors with low overall student enrollments.
  - It is important to note that many areas of the college already have course expectations aligned with those proposed; this move will align the arts/humanities with other disciplines  
Data analysis can show whether or not the arts/humanities are out of line with the other areas of CASL and with other Colleges. The administration has yet to show

data about class sizes, by department or by college, so these assertions are currently unfounded and evidence-free.

- Courses can be designed for larger groups of students and faculty have the freedom to adjust pedagogical approaches as needed to prevent negative impact on their workload.

Pedagogy is developed by faculty members not administrators. Adjusting workload to accommodate an increase in a course cap (designed for budgetary reasons) ignores the fact that learning outcomes are met by scaffolded assignments that involve evaluation and assessment. It ignores that learning is developmental, collaborative, and not one-size-fits-all. It furthermore ignores how relationships, trust and community-building are foundational to learning. These can be eroded in large classes designed for "budgets." Some courses "can be designed for larger groups," but not math, not languages, not writing. Small classes provide mental health support. Faculty knowing students' names and having the resources to track down a student who has been missing class and provide support to get them back on track can aid retention.

Further, this assertion implies that CASL faculty do not teach large classes, which is not true. But it is not simple to double the course cap or shift to a different modality. Faculty do not have—at the ready—different syllabi for different modalities for all courses in their repertoire. The CASL Dean is mistaken in believing that, if *Name of Course 101* suddenly has twice as many students or is online, faculty can easily materialize the appropriate syllabus for that modality or scenario. The expectation that faculty can "adjust pedagogical approaches" without additional support or resources underestimates the time and effort required to redesign courses for larger class sizes. Faculty have already adjusted to numerous recent structural changes, such as the move to a 4-credit model, demonstrating a significant cumulative workload increase. As a result of the Dean's unfamiliarity with course development, she did not think she was asking much of the faculty and was, thus, surprised by the faculty's reaction.

This is again a standard practice in other areas of the college, across other UM-Dearborn colleges and at other institutions around the country.

This assertion implies that CASL is out of line with other colleges or institutions but, again, no data or evidence has been shown to support this claim.

Professional development opportunities exist for faculty to learn how courses can be redesigned for larger groups in ways that continue to honor UM-Dearborn's commitment to individualized student attention and engagement. The dean is working closely with department leadership to ensure that course minimum changes remain reasonable and economical.

- This action is expected to reduce the number of faculty and will impact CASL lecturers (primarily Lecturer I and II); the college is going "case by case" (i.e., faculty member by faculty member and course by course) to minimize negative impact to lecturers, protect high-quality educational experiences for students, and most importantly maintain their ability to graduate students in a timely manner.

How do you provide a high quality experience when you increase a writing course from 15 to 30?

The evidence does not indicate that CASL faculty ratios are out of line with the other Colleges at UM-Dearborn.

The reduction of lecturer positions disproportionately impacts CASL's ability to deliver general education and interdisciplinary courses, which are critical to UM-Dearborn's mission and enrollment across colleges.

We are concerned about the ambiguity of the word "primarily." Is the idea to reduce faculty? It appears that the cuts are being made to the most vulnerable faculty and that the administration has not defined an endpoint or provided a budget projection that explains long term programmatic goals.

- The LEO contract calls for notice to be given by December 20 for any course changes or cancellations. The university will follow all bargained for agreements and processes. This is inaccurate. The contract says this: 1) Notice of changes in workload for the upcoming academic year need to be made by March 1; 2) Layoffs for LIIs, IIIs, IVs have to be made by April 30; 3) Layoff notices / notices of class assignments for all lecs have to be made by December 5, and; 4) After December 20, LIs and Intermittents are due late cancellation fees for layoffs.
- The college is committed to working with all impacted lecturers as we plan not only for winter 2025 but for next year's fall semester; to some degree winter is a test for next fall and semesters beyond.

There has been no communication with many lecturers. For 2025-26, workload changes have to be announced by March 1.

- It is important to note – we remain in the planning and exploration process; final decisions, and the impact of any decisions, have not been made. 20 people who have received layoff letters. There have been no clear communications to faculty about broader goals, benchmarks, and plans. There has been no communication directly to faculty (other than this response, which the administration did not share with faculty) that this is still the "planning and exploration process". Final decisions were made about the Winter 2025 schedule; thus there were "impacts."

## Impact on students

- Proposed changes should pose no impact on instructional quality and student progression through their degree programs. The college is working very closely with discipline chairs and academic advising through this process and is ready to pivot approach as needed. This isn't factual. Reducing course offerings and increasing class sizes often lead to delayed graduation and reduced student satisfaction, which directly impact student progression and retention. There is well-established research about how personal attention from instructors increases retention, especially for first-gen and marginalized students. The 2022 CASL Budget Task Force White Paper, in particular, calls out the impact poor retention has on our enrollment, so this change will not only impact retention, but will harm retention among our most vulnerable students in particular. Around December 11, all Deans and the Provost sent a letter to the students of all colleges assuring them that "some decisions are being made regarding class sizes and availability,"

but only 16% of winter classes are going to be impacted and that impacted classes will “remain small,” increasing by “only 5 to 10 students.” There’s too much ambiguity here: 16% sections of the same course? All UM-Dearborn courses offered? Are 16% of courses being cut? Are 16% having their caps changed? All COMP 105 and 106 sections are impacted, which was more than 16% of what COMP is offering in W 25.

- Some courses may be offered less frequently but over the course of four years, all necessary courses will be offered to allow for a four-year graduation plan. Increased graduation rates is our top priority.
- Current juniors and seniors will have arrangements made to allow for on-time graduation. This statement does not address the potential negative impact on underclassmen, transfer students, or those who rely on specific scheduling needs. Over time, these changes could create bottlenecks in course availability. Moreover, this statement does not acknowledge the increased expectations that are being quietly added to faculty workloads: with the canceling of these classes, faculty will be expected to create accommodations by adding independent studies and revamping courses to ensure that students meet graduation requirements.

#### **Cost saving measures over the years (not an inclusive list)**

- Eliminated staff positions supporting college-wide programs/shifted work to other staff members  
When there is little to no administrative help, disinvestment leads to faculty burnout. We had an overflow of honors students this fall, which required significant coordination with the honors Comp and making sure students are in both the honors seminar and the Comp classes. An admin staff used to do this kind of work. Faculty don't have the capacity to make phone calls or see student lists, etc., so it's not practical for us to do this work. The repercussions are that students don't register for the right classes or don't register at all. Our former admin staff (who was cut) would personally reach out to students if a class was canceled or needed to be added.
- Eliminated a vacant Dean's Office staff position focused on recruitment and retention and shifted work to other staff and associate deans
- Merged two departments into one (Department of Language, Culture, and Communications and Department of Literature, Philosophy, and Art)
- Eliminated course banking, reducing long-term financial liability
- Reduced temp/student assistant funding
- Re-structured program director roles (held by TT faculty) from a course release(s) model to one where effort counts towards TT faculty service and potentially a small stipend to reflect year-round effort of roles
- Delayed larger equipment replacement expenses and activity seeking donor funding in place of general funds.
- This year, CASL eliminated ALL operating funds through annual budgetary reductions. As of today, CASL has no base-budgeted operating funds. All of its base-budgeted funds are being used to pay personnel.  
The levels used in the RCM were set by central admin and underfunded CASL every year



since this budget model started. This extreme reduction of operating funds jeopardizes CASL's ability to innovate, invest in faculty development, or support initiatives like interdisciplinary programs that attract students.

Since the college forum, positive discussions have begun. Departments have started to discuss curriculum changes, department-wide conversations are occurring, and department chairs are more engaged with their faculty. All discussions that should have taken place years ago. In fact, faculty have expressed significant concerns about the lack of transparency and shared governance in these discussions, undermining the purported positivity. Additionally, there is great concern that these last minute changes are not part of a larger plan.

On a personal note, I would like to address a few comments that were outlined in Kirsten's letter that were not included in the SACUA letter, but should be noted.

I have been a champion for the liberal arts throughout my career. I have written extensively about the importance and need for the liberal arts in all academic degrees and in life. Increasing class sizes is not deemphasizing the liberal arts, it is working to ensure we are protecting our course offerings and putting CASL on a more secure financial future.

The campus's Responsibility Center Management (RCM) budget model has not contributed to the current budget situation in the college. In fact, if we followed the budget as designed, more drastic budget decisions would have been made much earlier. Central funds have been moved to the college over the years, it is now time to find other solutions to keep CASL financially healthy.

Another non-factual statement. Saying that the budget model is requiring drastic budget decisions suggests that the budget model as designed does not work and, in fact, harms units like CASL. This claim conflicts with evidence suggesting that RCM disproportionately disadvantages CASL by allocating only 75% of tuition revenue for courses taken by non-CASL majors, despite CASL providing the bulk of general education and interdisciplinary courses. External examples (e.g., Rutgers, Indiana University) have shown how RCM can destabilize liberal arts colleges.

The data shows steady credit-hour generation since 2020. Whatever the impacts of RCM, the 3-4 credit hour transition (and 2-2 loads which, very unfairly, have not been realized in all programs) have not impacted credit generation. The budget model predates the transition. The % CASL gets simply doesn't account for the cost of providing courses to other colleges.

Finally, in response to a specific comment regarding my time at the University of Delaware. I was both surprised and disappointed by the attempt to impugn my professional character and motives without conducting any due diligence. The letter contains inaccuracies that misrepresent the situation.

When I arrived at the University of Delaware as Provost, I encountered a faculty system that was problematic. Specifically, the Continuing Non-Tenure Track (CNTT) faculty—also referred to as "lecturers" on many campuses, including ours—held the same titles as tenure-track and tenured faculty members, such as Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor, without any



distinguishing modifiers, such as "Teaching Professor." This created confusion and a lack of distinction between different categories of faculty. In at least one case, a faculty member who had been denied tenure was simply moved to a CNTT line and continued in the same position, with the same title and salary. This lack of transparency was unfair and misleading to students, families, external funding bodies, rating agencies, and the broader public.

To address this issue, I proposed a change: new CNTT faculty would be given titles that clearly identified them as professors of instruction, while existing CNTT faculty would be allowed to retain their current titles. This was a fair, sensitive, and efficient solution that balanced clarity with respect for faculty members' roles and contributions. To ensure the approach was well-informed and inclusive, I convened a faculty committee to advise me on the matter and implemented their recommendations. Additionally, then UD President Pat Harker, a former Wharton Dean and now President of the Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank, enthusiastically supported these efforts.

Contrary to what has been suggested, I did not leave the University of Delaware as the result of a labor dispute.

The UM-Dearborn administration does not take these decisions lightly and realizes the impact on the livelihoods of our employees. This is why the current situation has been a regular discussion topic, in the college and centrally for many years. Much input and discussion has happened. Action is often the most difficult part of change. If changes do not begin to happen now, the college will continue down a very dangerous path.

In partnership,  
Domenico Grasso  
Chancellor

If the goal is to be "in partnership," here are ideas of what that might look like:

1. Increase CASL's percentage of tuition revenue for courses taken by non-CASL students to reflect its role as the foundation of general education and interdisciplinary collaboration. CASL disproportionately supports other colleges by offering general education and required courses. A higher revenue percentage would more accurately compensate CASL for this contribution.
2. Provide detailed, transparent reporting of how tuition revenue is distributed under the RCM model and how budget allocations are made across colleges. Transparency ensures that faculty and administrators can make informed decisions and identify structural inequities that need to be addressed.
3. Revise student credit hour expectations for departments that disproportionately serve non-CASL students to reflect their broader contribution to the university's mission. CASL often supports other colleges. Holding it to the same Student Credit Hours expectations as disciplines serving primarily

CASL majors ignores its unique role.

4. Provide clear, evidence-based policies to ensure that any changes (e.g., increased class sizes, course consolidation) do not compromise educational quality or faculty workload. Pedagogical integrity and faculty well-being are essential for maintaining UM-Dearborn's reputation and student outcomes.

5. Designate a specific portion of the budget to support general education courses, which are disproportionately housed in CASL, to ensure sustainability and equitable compensation. CASL's role in general education is critical to the entire university, and this should be reflected in budget allocations.

6. Create a formal mechanism for faculty representation in budgetary decisions at both the college and university levels. Faculty are directly impacted by budget decisions, and their input ensures that academic priorities and realities are considered.

7. We need dedicated funding to expand scalable opportunities for undergraduate research, internships, and service learning opportunities. These opportunities can attract and retain students while enhancing CASL's reputation and student outcomes.

8. Conduct a review of administrative salaries and expenditures across colleges to identify potential areas for cost savings without reducing academic resources. Ensures that cuts and efficiencies are equitably distributed and not disproportionately borne by faculty and students.

9. We need a phased implementation of any RCM-related changes to allow for careful evaluation of impacts on CASL and time for curriculum adjustments. Avoids rushed decisions that could negatively impact students and faculty.

10. Consider implementing something like "transfer pricing" at UM-Dearborn. Transfer pricing is a business concept used to determine fair prices for goods or services exchanged between divisions of the same organization. In the context of academic institutions, a transfer pricing mechanism can help redistribute tuition revenue equitably to better reflect the actual cost of teaching general education courses.

- Establish a Transfer Pricing Mechanism for General Education Courses:
  - Negotiate a per-credit-hour fee for non-CASL students enrolled in CASL-taught courses.
  - The fee should reflect the true cost of instruction, including faculty salaries, administrative support, and course materials.
- Align Revenue with Instructional Responsibility:
  - Ensure CASL receives fair compensation for teaching non-CASL majors.
  - Reduce financial strain on CASL, enabling it to maintain robust general education offerings.
- Encourage Collaboration Across Colleges:
  - Foster a cooperative environment where colleges recognize and value each other's contributions.

- Incentivize interdisciplinary and university-wide initiatives.