

November 26, 2024

Dear President Ono and Regents,

SACUA and the LEO Union Counsel write jointly to share concerns impacting Dearborn lecturers and tenure-track faculty. It's come to our attention that Dean Dagmar Budikova of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters has instructed department chairs to cancel Winter classes taught by Lecturers and to increase the course caps for courses taught by tenure-track professors. As one example, in the Department of Language, Culture, and Arts, the Chair has canceled eight Lecturer-instructed classes in Winter term and raised the cap from 24 to 30 for regular classes and 15 to 30 for honors classes. These eight courses are writing classes that typically generate tuition revenue for the school as they're taught by lecturers. The raised course cap of 30 students violates guidelines by the National Teachers of English (NCTE), putting the University in danger of being sanctioned. Honors students, and their parents, chose to enroll in this program because of promotions advertising the small class size. The new cap numbers raise concerns about the decline in quality instruction and student-faculty engagement for all students at an institution where the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) and the UM-Dearborn's own ["facts and figures" website](#) boast a 16:1 student-faculty ratio, noting that the "small class size" is "what sets the U-M Dearborn apart."

We've received the most information from faculty in Language, Culture and Arts but this issue seems to be pervasive in other departments within the school. Reductions in courses and increases in course caps are happening in sociology, psychology, gender studies, history, criminal justice, chemistry and biology. A psychology class was expanded from 40 students to 67 students. Department buildings do not accommodate courses of this size, so classes are being rescheduled in buildings across campus. Some chairs are trying to shift classes to online, which is problematic for international students who must take courses in person. Online course caps are reaching extremes, such as shifting from 30 to 50, or even 90 students for a single instructor without a Teaching Assistant.

When faculty objected to the acute increases in student load, Dean Budikova told them, according to faculty, “We’re not raising your workload. Just assign less work to students.” Obviously, this, as well as the higher student-to-faculty ratio, raises concerns about the quality of education and accreditation issues when there’s a reduction in expectations and work for the same course at the same number of credits.

The process for making these changes—without consulting faculty—has raised significant concerns about shared governance and accountability. According to bylaws and policy guidelines, course caps should be negotiated by departments’ curriculum committees, not as a top-down decision. Further, faculty are being told not to talk with students about the changes. During her meeting with department chairs, Dean Budikova asked chairs not to take notes about the discussion of these cuts and not to communicate with the faculty about the cuts and their impact on teaching. A department chair, when reporting back to the department Executive Committee, told faculty to close their laptops before discussing the issue and prohibited them from taking notes or sharing the news in writing. These expectations of secrecy about significant changes that impact students and instruction are troubling at a public institution with an obligation to be transparent.

Faculty from the University of Delaware, where U-M Dearborn Chancellor Grasso was previously the Provost, have written in support of U-M-Dearborn faculty, reporting that then-Provost Grasso tried to make changes to their equivalent of “lecturers” terms of employment and was unresponsive to faculty voice. They write, “Grasso was not a friend to non-tenure track faculty.” It sounds as though Chancellor Grasso left the University of Delaware at the end of this labor dispute.

The U-M Dearborn students are now [circulating a petition](#) protesting these changes, and the faculty are circulating this [open letter](#).

Letting go of instructors for classes that students have already signed up for undermines trust in the institution particularly among parents of students, many of whom are calling CASL's Advising office to express concerns. There is still an opportunity to stem the damage to recruiting and retention of students by rehiring the lecturers for the previously scheduled classes.

We hope you will consider providing additional financial support to the Dearborn campus for the winter semester so that there are no course reductions, layoffs, or increases to course caps. Please urge Chancellor Grasso to encourage Dean Budikova to pause the austerity measures and to honor Lecturer contracts that state that workload changes must be announced by March 1 for the following year. We ask that you'll encourage department chairs work with faculty committees and governance to develop solutions that ensure an appropriate student-instructor ratio, the high-quality education that U-M students expect, and a workload commensurate with contract expectations.

Sincerely,

The Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA)
Approved by SACUA on November 26, 2024

The LEO Union Counsel