

2/26/13

F3 mtg .

John Kerbs (Criminal Justice). I will keep my comments short, but I want to applaud the WAC Committee for proposing 25-student caps for all WI courses at ECU. Here are my reasons.

First, the use of a 25-student cap helps to promote an adequate amount of quality contact time between instructors and students. This is a well-documented fact that is also noted on page 5 of the WAC Committee's own Handbook (originally published in the 2009 academic year) for WI courses (http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/writing/wac/upload/wac_handbook_2009.pdf). If we care about quality contact and writing instruction, then we must cap WI courses at 25 students per section, as per the WAC Committee's proposal that is under discussion today.

Second, limiting enrollment of WI courses to 25 students per section puts an upper-ceiling on the number of pages that must be (a) reviewed, (b) marked, (c) graded, and (d) entered into the Blackboard system. While a regular Model 4 WI course (for example) with 25 students generates about 45 to 50 pages per student (about 1,250 pages per section), each additional 10 students above the 25-student cap adds around 500 extra pages of grading - - basically the equivalent of a ream of paper. Given that many WI instructors are saddled with duplicative sections, two over-enrolled courses with 10 extra students in each section results in the review, marking, and grading of an additional 1,000 pages of type-written work. In my unit, we had one of our faculty members instructing duplicative WI sections with 45 students per section in the fall of 2011. Such additional burdens can easily compromise the grading process, resulting in lower-quality feedback regarding the organization of papers, the mechanics of writing, and grammatical feedback in general. I can personally attest the vagaries of duplicative over-enrolled sections as I was recently assigned duplicative sections with 35-student caps. If we want students to receive quality feedback on written work, we must require adherence to 25-student caps to create working conditions for faculty that support an adequate amount of time for reviewing, marking, grading papers, and entering grades.

Third, beyond the capacity of over-enrolled courses to impede student outcomes, over-enrollment also jeopardizes the research productivity of professors. While the requirements for promotion and tenure at ECU are more and more demanding each year, the time constraints created by over-enrolled WI courses can become debilitating to research productivity. For example, imagine that you had three classes to instruct with two over-enrolled WI courses that contained 45 students per section. Such assignments actually occurred in many units during the 2011-2012 academic year. Would you really have adequate time for research with such an assignment or would you look up and ask why ECU assigned the equivalent of 2 extra sections of students on top of your regular 3-course assignment? Such cap violations are simply unfair to faculty.

For these and other reasons, I applaud the WAC Committee's proposal to end over-enrolled WI courses and limit seating to 25 students per section. In sum, 25-student caps will help to advance both student-based learning objectives and research productivity at ECU. Thus, I would request that all senators support the WAC Committee's call for WI caps. Thank you!