

April 30, 2020

Dear Provost Folks:

The University of Arizona's Foundations Writing Program (WP) is an award-winning program with extraordinary reach. Every year they serve 6,000+ students in their critical first year at UArizona, and their current 19-student course caps [allow for outstanding instruction with innovative educators](#). COVID-19 is a truly unforeseen challenge and as the UA works together to protect students while upholding educational excellence, we encourage you to consider that all incoming students would be negatively impacted by an increase in WP course caps, specifically because:

- **COVID-19 poses unique safety concerns that require physical distance in classrooms.** Lower course caps prioritize student health and safety and demonstrate this to new students, their families, and the entire UArizona community.
- **An increase in course sizes goes against accepted best practices in the composition classroom.** The [Conference on College Composition and Communication](#) (CCCC), the world's largest professional organization for the researching and teaching of composition, established best practices for writing course sizes, urging that "No more than 20 students should be permitted in any writing class. Ideally, classes should be limited to 15." (Principle 11 of [Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing from CCCC](#))
 - The CCCC's award committee commended the Foundations Writing Program specifically for "The first-year class sizes [that] are 19....Indeed, the committee believes that the University of Arizona serves as an exemplary model for peer institutions."
- **An increase in course sizes directly threatens the learning environment for students.** Experienced instructors are able to create student-centered learning environments via lower course caps. As stated in the Writing Program's award letter, "The program has integrated and modified many kinds of 'best' practices in FYW teaching and learning...[including] extending support for less-confident or underprepared students to innovating with placement for all writers (including multilingual writers)." Students need this support and innovation, now more than ever.
- **An increase in course sizes would result in lower retention to the second year.** Lowering Writing Program course caps to 19 in 2017 resulted in increases in student grades, student retention, and student perceptions of an improved learning environment and teaching effectiveness. Reversing this progress decreases students' opportunities for success in all competitive programs where critical thinking skills are prized and would negatively impact future enrollment figures.

The Office of the Provost's mission of educational excellence should support the largest and most vulnerable part of our student body: the incoming first-year class. We urge you to commit resources (from the CARES Act, and/or other funding streams) to preserve the 19-student course caps. Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to engaging in conversation about this critical issue.

Sincerely,
The Undersigned