

Office Memorandum

DATE: October 10, 2007

TO: Dr. James Postma, Chair
ASCSU Academic Affairs

FROM: Kevin Baaske, Chair
CSULA Academic Senate

COPIES:

SUBJECT: DWIR

While there was little time to examine the issues in detail, we wished to provide your committee with at least an initial response.

The Executive Committee of the CSULA Academic Senate, after consultation with our Educational Policy Committee, opposes the proposed System policy changes presented in the “proposed Revision of CSU Academic Policies on Course Credits: Incompletes, Withdrawals, and Repeats. Specifically, we oppose the changes to Withdrawals. We do so for the following reasons:

1. The maximum cap on “W” units is arbitrary.

There is no rationale for the selection of this number. In fact, the entire report is lacking in proof that there is a problem or that the problem will be addressed by the changes proposed.

2. The maximum cap unduly punishes those who struggle to attend the CSU.

Many students who attend the CSU must work while attending the CSU. According to the Chancellor’s Office “Facts about the 23 Campuses of the CSU” (May 2007), “four out of five [CSULA students] have jobs, and a quarter work 30 hours or more.” Work schedules can change, even during a term. Making a student choose between continuing in a class or continuing to earn an income unduly punishes those not affluent enough to choose the class. At best it would mean choosing the class now and then postponing their education until they earned enough to return.

3. The maximum cap punishes the unfortunate.

Since a student may have used up to 10 “W” units at a community college, a CSU would have only 8 “W” units available to them. This would tell a student who struggles with a continuing illness, disability or financial challenges that he/she can only withdraw from two three-unit semester courses. Such students may already be at the margins and to limit their opportunity to compete might drive them away entirely.

4. There is no appeal to the maximum cap.

We envision MANY situations where there might be a compelling case for a student to exceed the maximum “W” cap. The proposed policy does not permit such exceptions.

5. The maximum cap is an administrative nightmare.

How would the cap be enforced? Would the Registrar's Office notify students after the fact that the class they thought they had withdrawn from exceeded the cap and therefore the student must rejoin the class? That might take weeks and would lead to many unfortunate situations. Would students be required to get an advisor's permission? This would necessitate an advisor counting the number of "Ws" and telling the student they must rejoin the class. Unfortunately, students often wait to process paperwork and the advisor might be sending them back to a class they haven't attended for weeks.

6. The maximum cap assumes students are irresponsible.

It is only necessary to impose a cap if students are capriciously abusing the "W" process. There is no evidence of this and it assumes that (a) students can afford to "waste" units they have paid for, and (b) that they are unaware of the impression they create with a transcript full of "Ws." That is not our experience.

7. There are other ways to address this issue.

If there is evidence of abuse, there are other ways to limit the number of classes from which students withdraw. Financial Aid already caps the number of units students may take and financial aid includes "Ws" in its counting of units. And effective advising is a MUCH superior route to address this concern because an advisor can explain the rationale for limiting the number of "Ws" on a transcript.

8. The likely costs outweigh potential benefits.

The motives behind the proposed policy may be good, but there is no evidence of a problem and no evidence that the solution would in fact achieve the desired results. We have identified several anticipated adverse consequences. There are probably many more unanticipated consequences that will arise from a logic of forcing out or failing out those students who seek more withdrawals than this policy would permit. The costs, our minds, clearly outweigh any potential benefits.