

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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TO: Kathleen Bower, Chair, CAA
RE: Foreign Language Requirement
DATE: December 2, 2008

Unfortunately, I will be traveling this coming Thursday and Friday (December 4 and 5); hence, I will not be in attendance at the Council on Academic Affairs (CAA) meeting. Ordinarily, I do not worry much when I am forced to miss a meeting. Mary Herrington-Perry is very effective at representing the Provost's Office, and I am sure she will do so again. However, the agenda item regarding the foreign language requirement has generated such interest around campus that not being able to be present is troublesome for me. I thought, therefore, that I might offer a few comments which you may or may not wish to share with the members.

Thoughtful discussions of academic standards and expectations are the dream of every provost, and I appreciate the care with which this issue has been considered by the members of the ad hoc committee and the CAA as a whole. I also applaud Dr. Canfield for bringing this matter forward for discussion and consideration. He has invested a considerable amount of time and energy to this endeavor, and I am most appreciative.

My concerns regarding this proposal are not based on any desire to limit the expectations we have and should have of our students. As articulated in my memorandum to CAA last May, my concerns focused on several practical secondary effects which I felt needed to be carefully considered. Among these are the potential impacts on enrollments at a time when state support is under grave duress making us ever more dependent on tuition revenue. In this same vein, feedback from community college and high school counselors reinforces my concern that making Eastern unique in this way may negatively affect our enrollments. Finally, as noted by the ad hoc committee, the data we have collected regarding the number of foreign language courses our new students complete prior to matriculation suggests a significant challenge in maintaining future enrollment levels.

As Provost, I would have to ponder such possible secondary effects for any change which would make Eastern unique among Illinois public universities. In general, I believe that the deliberations of the ad hoc committee represent a thoughtful and considered evaluation of the original proposal and its possible consequences. Given the diversity of our degree programs, their respective constituencies, and their relative competitive position in the "market" for new degree candidates, a one-size fits all approach gives me serious pause. I am much more willing

to have departments or even a college consider such a change. If implemented on such a more limited basis, we would be able to develop some experience with a new requirement which might serve us well as a predictor of the various ramifications and possible "global" consequences of extending a new requirement more broadly.

Again, please apologize to the CAA members for my absence. I truly wish I could be present to hear the discussion and offer responses if any members desired to hear from me directly.