

Joe Kiskis  
Chair, Undergraduate Council

Dear Joe:

The Executive Committee of the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences reviewed the proposal for an undergraduate writing center, and concluded that we do not have enough information to provide a firm recommendation. On one hand, the model appears sensible and straightforward to implement, and we believe that it would provide a good mechanism to provide needed instruction in writing skills for our students. For that reason, we certainly would not oppose the establishment of a writing center of the nature described in the proposal.

At the same time, we do not think a case has been made that the lack of writing skills is more severe or important among our entering students than a comparable lack of quantitative reasoning skills, physical science underpinnings of how the world works, or other things high schools should teach and often don't. For example, should we fund an algebra-and-graphs center, a physics-and-mechanics center, or a libraries and databases center, before spending new money on writing services?

The proposal and website are unclear on the level of resources being requested, and where they would come from. (In particular, we were not clear on whether our college is being asked to contribute resources.) We note that many of these services were previously provided by non-Senate teaching staff in English, and that our impression is that those services were generally effective and well-received by students. In a time of declining resources, is it appropriate for a program whose main budget is derived from its teaching program to enlarge its faculty then drop much of its teaching that serves other departments and colleges? This is obviously not our college's decision, but it troubled members of our committee.

The committee also was concerned that implicit in the proposal was a suggestion that undergraduate writing requirements might be changing, and we were not ready to endorse changed requirements without consulting with the advisors for our majors. I understand from subsequent conversations that no curriculum changes are planned at present, so this concern may be moot.

In short, the CA&ES Executive Committee does not oppose the establishment and staffing of an undergraduate writing center, but does not take a position on whether it is the most effective use of new teaching funds or whether it would be preferable to have the English Department retain primary responsibility for teaching introductory writing classes.