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PHASING OUT FACULTY:
COLLEGE PLANS TO CUT BACK ON INSTRUCTORS

Faculty members in the English and mathematics departments arrived on campus Monday to hear the College of Arts and Sciences announce a plan to eliminate a number of instructors over a period of three years.

The College of Arts and Sciences plans to "shift away from the reliance on instructors" without terminal degrees, which are doctorate and Masters of Fine Arts degrees, beginning in fall 2004.

A faculty memo from Jane Collins, Arts and Sciences Dean, explained the planned cutbacks are part of the college's efforts to keep up with the University's Flagship Agenda and increase research productivity.

"I have asked the Department of Mathematics and the Department of English to prepare to reduce the number of faculty at the rank of instructor and to increase the number of tenure-track faculty, while maintaining instructional quality and capacity," Collins said in the memo.

Collins said several years ago, the University's quick and easy solution to swelling undergraduate numbers was to hire more instructors. She said about 60 percent of the faculty members in the College of Arts and Sciences today are instructors without terminal degrees.

Collins said the cutbacks will allow the college to hire more faculty members who can contribute to the University's research efforts.

Faculty members in the two affected departments were surprised and upset by the news that many of their jobs may be in jeopardy.

Many of the instructors from the English department dressed completely in black to express what several of them called "mourning."

Black paper squares covered the pictures of all the English instructors on bulletin boards on the second floor of Allen Hall, which houses the English department. A sign above the bulletin board read "Who will teach our students?"

Guillermo Ferreyra, chair of the mathematics department, said he had not met with his entire faculty, but those he had spoken with were panicked and worried.

Tania Nyman, an English instructor, said one of her biggest worries is the probability of increasing class sizes. She said if smaller classes are eliminated, students will have fewer opportunities for individual contact with professors and will receive a "de-personalized education."

Ferreya said the lower-level math classes have about 44 students in each class, but the reduction of instructors will cause the class sizes to increase significantly.

Renee Major, an English instructor and associate director of the first-year writing division, said class size is a very big concern.

"The administration seems to believe that increasing class size has no effect on the quality of instruction," Major said. "We don't think that's true."

Major said many students in lower-level classes need direct attention to help them in the learning process.

Collins said she has considered the possibility of moving to larger class sizes, but she does not anticipate any problems.

"While this may result in larger classes, we will offer break-out tutoring courses taught by graduate teaching assistants," Collins said.

The memo to the faculty members also said she is considering plans to move to "online grading and expanded tutoring capabilities."

Majors said in an e-mail to all of the first-year writing instructors that the plans call for a large increase in the numbers of graduate students.

Collins said the college plans to uphold all contractual agreements and will not be eliminating all instructors.

"There is no intention to reach a level of zero instructors, and there are many of our long-term English and mathematics instructors with unique assignments within the departments who will continue to have contracts renewed annually," Collins said in the memo.

Collins said many instructors who have been at the University for a long time and perform administrative duties in their departments are too important to lose. Their positions may be redefined so that current instructors in those positions will no longer be considered instructors.

Major said a Monday afternoon meeting with English Department Chair Malcolm Richardson would be the first opportunity for most of the faculty members to learn more about the college's plans and to offer their own feedback. This meeting was closed to the public.