

University of Illinois at Chicago Plans to Reorganize and Reduce School of Literatures, Cultural Studies, and Linguistics

Possible cuts to courses and faculty has provoked student concern

By Gray Wo

On February 17, 2025, the Chicago Tribune broke the news of University of Illinois at Chicago's (UIC) plans to restructure its school of Literatures, Cultural Studies and Linguistics (LCSL) with the eye-catching headline: "UIC proposes plan to close School of Literatures, Cultural Studies and Linguistics amid \$22M deficit." The article gives some bare bones information regarding the proposed plan and the general reaction from faculty members at UIC. However, as more information regarding the restructuring has come to light, students have been left wondering exactly how, when, and where this will affect them.

The administration has proposed a complete overhaul of the majors and minors offered in the LCSL school, merging five of the culture and language-based majors offered at UIC into one, unnamed umbrella major, and eliminating two separate majors and four minors entirely. The majors to be consolidated are Central and Eastern European Studies (CEES), Classical and Mediterranean Studies, French and Francophone Studies, Germanic Studies, and Spanish. The majors proposed for elimination are Teaching of French and Teaching of German; and the minors proposed for elimination are CEES, Italian Studies, International Studies, and Religious Studies.

This consolidation and pruning of the majors and minors offered in LCSL would facilitate the administration's plans to cut the number of non-tenure track (NTT) faculty on payroll and, when they are let go at the end of their contract, free over one million dollars based on the current NTT salaries. When LCSL students heard that classes would be cut and professors would potentially be losing their jobs under this proposed plan, many were quick to voice their concerns.

"I might not have teachers that I would have had and that I know a lot of people like," said Kim Stanton, a second year student majoring in Classics at UIC, "And there are so many classes that I have not taken that I potentially would not be able to." Stanton voiced her anger and sadness over the potential detriment this plan would have not only to her own education, but the education of others. She hadn't planned on focusing her studies on Classics, but instead fell into it, and worries that future students won't have the same ability to discover where their passions lie.

"It'll remove the opportunity from so many people that haven't realized that, 'Oh, this is an educational path that I want to go down'," said Stanton. "Why are they so adamant that this has to be the solution?"

While there might have been other ways to reduce the deficit, some aspects of the original plan were simply non-negotiable according to the administration. When it came to the consolidation of majors, for instance, the decision was already set in stone.

“They said that they were open to working with us, but whatever kind of plan that you come up with has to sort of hit these major parts that we have already proposed,” said Dr. Laura Dingeldein, a clinical assistant professor for the Religious Studies program at UIC.

Under the proposed plan for the restructuring of the LCSL, the Religious Studies minor would be eliminated. Without the minor, Dr. Dingeldein wondered whether or not her program would have a home at UIC in the coming years, and, consequently, if *she* would have a home at UIC in the coming years. As one of the many NTT faculty members in the LCSL school, Dr. Dingeldein relayed her concern and disappointment over her job security potentially being on the line.

“I’m frustrated, and I’m tired,” said Dr. Dingeldein. “I’m a good employee. I’m a good professor. I’ve met all the requirements of my job. What in other professions might be viewed as extreme competence and might be met with a raise is instead, in this case, being met with, ‘we’re probably going to cut the minor in your program and, you know, potentially you and your program’.”

The reduction of the school has led to questions of how this could affect other liberal arts and humanities programs at UIC as an increasingly higher emphasis has been placed on STEM programs with each passing year. Professors and students alike raised concerns on the restructuring of LCSL creating a model for how possible department financial deficits may be handled in the future.

“It sets up a precedent of sorts for the college to come in and say, ‘hey, here’s what you’re going to do, here’s how we’re going to reorganize you’.” said Dr. Dingeldein.

Stanton remarked, “I think, as a decision, to do this currently, it’ll just spiral.”

LCSL students and professors alike expressed just how beneficial their classes were and are to expanding their views in an increasingly globalized and diversified world.

“I’ve definitely learned a lot about the way that the world works,” said Natalie Carroll, an English and French double major. “I’ve taken classes on French culture in the Caribbean, French culture in Algeria, French culture in Canada, and French culture in Africa. And it’s been so beautiful, and I adore that aspect of the French major. It’s my favorite.”

Dr. Dingeldein discussed how her classes created a framework for navigating other sectors of the world.

“Something, like, 86% of the world identifies as religious,” began Dr. Dingeldein, “So if you want to understand what’s happening around you, you need to understand religion.”

As the federal government continues to push back against DEI policies being featured and taught at institutions (educational or otherwise) across the country, the restructuring of the LCSL school at UIC has

sparked sour feelings among the student body. The question of how much merit UIC really places on its values was raised time and time again.

“I think it makes me lose some respect for UIC. Because I feel like UIC markets itself as this diverse campus with a diverse student population from all over. Everywhere. And then they go and they cut the most diversity celebrating program they have,” said Carroll.

Though UIC has stated that no decisions have been made regarding what will actually happen with the LCSL school, even revised solutions offered by faculty will not change the fact that things are changing, for better or for worse.