From: Kathy Gaca, Chair of CASP 2006-2007  
To: John Sloop, Chair of Faculty Council  
Re: CASP Proposal regarding undergraduate research for academic credit or for a wage/salary  
February 27, 2007

Proposed A&S Policy:

Undergraduates in the College of Arts and Science are welcome to engage in research and other work projects for their advancement. Their returns for so doing can be in the form of wage/salary or academic credit, but not both for the same research or project. Students can be reimbursed by the internship or research sponsor for the following expenses regardless of whether the project earns academic credit or a wage/salary: Expenses for housing and transportation locally, as well as for transportation to and from the internship or research site, when the location of the internship or research activity differs from the home institution or permanent home address.

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Rationale:

This CASP proposal is motivated by the following concerns. On the undergraduate level, research for academic credit and research for a wage/salary should be mutually exclusive, because to allow them to be combined puts too much power in the hands of one party (a professor or group thereof), who is most likely both the dispenser of the grade as the undergraduate student's research leader and the provider of the wage/salary for the student, and inhibits undergraduates from venturing research agendas of their own through genuinely independent study. Bright undergraduates are likely to find themselves hired to do 'dependent' study under the rubric of 'independent' study, that is, study dependent on their research leaders' or advisers' own interests, and to be graded and paid more to further their advisers' own work, rather than formulating their own independent, original inquiries. This would especially be a problem for undergraduates paid from a professor's own grant for ostensibly independent study. Undergraduates are not graduate students and should not be treated as such by blurring the border between research of their own for academic credit and for a wage/salary. The proposal above was developed in consultation with several Associate Deans and many Department Chairs.

The above proposal passed by a vote of four to one in the CASP Committee. The one negative vote on the CASP Committee was motivated by the view that undergraduates only stand to gain by being able to do the same research for a grade and for a wage/salary. The dissenter also believes it is overly parental for a college administration to try to protect A & S undergraduates from being treated as the equivalent of graduate students. In some fields, graduate students learn partly by participating in and furthering their advisers’ research, and their graduate student stipends can come in part from the advisers’ grant monies. Undergraduates should not be denied this same opportunity.
The following background information may also be helpful. The above proposal is CASP's response to the following issue that Joel Tellinghuisen raised in Faculty Council in spring 2006. He also presented his concerns to me in an e-mail message:

"Kathy, I had always thought of research for credit and research for pay as mutually exclusive. For example, we often have undergrads in chem working for pay in the summer; alternatively they sometimes take research for credit. The issue of students simultaneously working for pay and academic credit has arisen on occasion during my tenure as coordinator for undergraduate research in our department, and I have done my best to prohibit this, feeling that there are possibilities for conflicts of interest therein. However, when I checked on this Dean Bergquist, she said there are no rules covering this situation.

I really have not thought through all the possibilities for such conflicts. However, the “requirements” for independent study are already interpreted loosely and with a lot of variability from one faculty supervisor to the next, and I can easily imagine how the requirements under one or the other of the two modes could be "bundled" with those under the other, and possibly lead to conflicts. Also, whether or not an actual conflict exists, I can imagine a faculty member using money to "buy" the strongest undergraduate students into his or her lab ... leading to students selecting research areas and projects for arguably wrong (or at least nonacademic) reasons. (In fact, this possibility exists anyway, when students work for pay in one term and for credit in another.)

Joel"