

January 30th, 2023

University of Pittsburgh

4200 Fifth Avenue

Pittsburgh, PA 15260

Dear Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor Ann E. Cudd & Bettye J. and Ralph E. Bailey Dean
Kathleen Blee,

We write to you with concern about your recent decision to close the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Pittsburgh.

As an institution that prides itself on [promoting social, intellectual, and economic development, while maintaining diversity, equity, and inclusion](#), the University of Pittsburgh's administration has a responsibility to provide resources and support for all students— including international students and non-native speakers of English.

The ELI plays a vital role in achieving this goal, and its closure will have a detrimental effect on the academic and personal accomplishments of International students on Pitt's campus by not welcoming a diverse community, creating an equitable environment, and providing them with opportunities for enrichment.

As proud members of the Pitt community, we urgently request you to reconsider the closure of the ELI. There are [2,804 International students](#) in the Pitt community, and we need to support them all.

The ELI is essential to Pitt's efforts "[to attract and retain a diverse student body.](#)" Since the Institute provides a pathway for international students the opportunity to succeed at Pitt, the closure of the ELI would imply that the University of Pittsburgh's administration is not committed to providing resources that attract and retain a diverse student body.

Additionally, The ELI's functions help to "[enrich the student experience through engagement with diverse cultures and perspectives.](#)" by offering English classes to non-native speakers in the Pitt community. By being a safe and supportive environment for students to improve their English language skills, students are more easily welcomed and transitioned into the Pitt community, allowing them to fully and equitably participate in our local community. Without a safe and supportive learning environment, diverse cultures and perspectives will be lost and the student experience will not be enriched.

Moreover, the University has a responsibility to [support the mental health and well-being](#) of its international students, who often face challenges such as being away from family and navigating language barriers. The ELI plays a crucial role in addressing these issues by producing a supportive learning environment and providing international students with others experiencing the same hardships. Current resources at the University of Pittsburgh cannot directly provide this open community support without the ELI.

The decision to close the ELI fails to take into account the long-term effects of removing resources for international students. By removing the ELI, the University will also be removing a program that supports and integrates international students into the University community and

the USA. This will likely make it harder for the university to attract international students in the future, thus causing a decline in international student enrollment. Therefore, it's important the University's focus is on ways to increase international student enrollment, rather than cutting resources that are critical for their success.

It's equally important to note that the ELI's role is not limited to academic preparation, it also provides a community of support for international students and non-native speakers of English. The ELI offers opportunities for students to develop language skills, make friends, learn about American culture, find career paths, apply to US schools, and receive visas which are all important for the academic achievement and well-being of these students. The closure of the ELI would be a major loss to the University and its students, and it would be a significant setback for the international students who rely on the program for aid and academic preparation.

We understand that you cited [declining enrollment and declining financial sustenance](#) in your decision to close the ELI.

It is important to note that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for all members of the Pitt community— especially international students.

Due to health concerns, visa and immigration status, and economic hardships, many international students have been forced to make the decision to not return to the U.S.. This combined with difficulties many students face with online learning as a result of varying time zones and poor internet access must be taken into account when closing the ELI due to “declining attendance.”

With that, it is observed that as pandemic social and travel regulations loosen, the ELI currently sees a rise in enrollment. The ELI has increased its enrollment numbers this fall, and deserves a fair chance to continue to accept students and grow to pre-COVID enrollment numbers.

An accurate cost-benefit analysis must take into account factors brought about by COVID-19, when making a decision to close the ELI. Thus, we urge you to account for obstacles our international students have faced since 2020 in your reconsideration.

Continuing, it is important to mention the student concern over an increasing lack of safety on Pitt's campus that has been shared with the University of Pittsburgh's administration.

Recent articles in The Pitt News has highlighted these concerns regarding issues such as [inadequate support and belief of sexual assault survivors](#) and minimal support for marginalized communities, including [women](#), [Iranians](#), [BIPOC](#), [LGBTQ+](#), and [even those who donated their bodies to science](#).

Unfortunately, your decision to close the ELI has further added to our community's concern of neglect as it is a vital resource for many international students, who may feel particularly vulnerable due to language barriers and lack of familiarity with the local area.

Your administration has a responsibility to provide safety, protection, and add to the well-being of all its students, which we encourage you to commit to by reconsidering the closure of the ELI.

It is disheartening to see that the University [announced plans in November to spend \\$240 million on a new athletics complex and sports arena](#). It is even more disheartening to find out that this is not the only new construction project, as Pitt is also planning to construct a new residence hall, a new student center, and a new building for the business school.

This spending demonstrates that the University has and can obtain the financial resources to support its students and programs. However, it chooses to allocate this funding on new construction projects instead of investing in the programs and resources that support the success of marginalized students.

The ELI is an essential resource for the progress and prosperity of international students and non-native speakers of English and its closure would be a significant loss for the University.

I encourage you to invest in the programs and resources that support the success of our international students and non-native speakers of English. We need to remember that athletes are not the only students at Pitt. The rest of us do matter.

We hope that you will consider the long-term benefits of providing resources for international students and non-native speakers of English, as well as the importance of the ELI as a source of revenue, cultural enrichment and as a way of standing in solidarity with Iranian, Ukrainian, and other international students whose home countries are in a state of turmoil.

The ELI is an invaluable asset to the University of Pittsburgh and the surrounding community, and its closure would have enormous negative consequences for the University, its students, and the community as a whole.

Per the [petition](#) created by Haile Proctor, President of PennPIRG and volunteer at the ELI, the ELI is strongly supported and cherished by the Pitt community, and its closure would pose a huge disappointment amid growing student concern for the administration's efforts to promote and ensure our overall success, safety, and well-being.

We respectfully urge you to reconsider our points summarized below in your decision to close the ELI,

1. The ongoing pandemic, COVID-19 has greatly affected restrictions (financial, health, and governmental) in abilities to travel.
2. The ELI's enrollment numbers are beginning to increase.
3. Pitt needs to prioritize their International students, rather than isolate them.
4. Pitt's student body is already uncomfortable with the lack of safety on campus and eradicating a program that keeps students safe will cause an even bigger issue.
5. Proven by the massive construction projects, there is more than enough funding here at Pitt to help the ELI maintain its program.
6. In this hard time, we need to support international students, not harm them.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions. We greatly appreciate your time and consideration as you review our requests.

Sincerely,

Haile Proctor

President of PennPIRG at Pitt

Elyanna Sharbaji

President of MENASA at Pitt

Weeam Boumaza

Mental Health Liason of MENASA at Pitt

Pawarisa Bunsophak

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President of Phi Alpha Delta Pre-Law Fraternity

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