

GENERAL COMMENT: Can/should we standardize in this policy uses of the terms “course sections” and “class” and “course”? Or should we define them?

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Executive Policy Chapter 5. Academic Affairs  
Executive Policy EP 5.XXX, Small Undergraduate and Graduate Course Sections  
Effective Date: XXX 2020  
Prior Dates Amended: April 1985; June 1987, **abolished 2014**  
Responsible Office: Office of the Vice President for Academic Planning and Policy  
Governing Board of Regents Policy:  
• RP5.201, Instructional Programs  
• RP5.213, General Education

Review Date: XXXXX

I. Purpose

This executive policy seeks to balance the legitimate educational objectives served by small course sections with the importance of ensuring that instructional resources are used effectively by monitoring class size each semester. Units shall demonstrate to the administration and Board of Regents that a sound rationale exists for any continued delivery of small classes. The Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs or equivalent at each campus is responsible for campus reporting to the Vice President of Academic Policy and Planning, who may provide periodic updates to the Board of Regents. The objectives of this policy are:

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A. To establish common definitions of small course sections.

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B. To establish common policy guidelines for the review of class size.

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C. To establish required procedures for monitoring and reporting of class size decisions.

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II. Definitions

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Small undergraduate course sections: those that enroll fewer than ten students in a single section and that are supported by state General Funds or tuition. A single course is a course section under this policy.

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Small graduate course sections: those that enroll fewer than five students in a single section and that are supported by state General Funds or tuition. A single course is a course section under this policy.

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Chief Academic Officer (CAO): the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs or equivalent.

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Instructional Unit Chair: A department or division chair or equivalent.

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III. Executive Policy

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A. General Guidelines

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1. This policy applies to small course sections as defined in this policy. Departments may establish higher enrollment limits if they choose.

2. Course sections that are identified in the student information system as being individualized instruction, such as directed readings, practica, practice teaching, cooperative education, research, or one-on-one music instruction do not fall under this policy. The Office of the Vice President for Academic Planning and Policy shall maintain a list of class schedule types that are excluded from this policy. Such course sections should be reviewed as part of a campus' overall resource use assessment.

3. Concurrent, cross-listed, and dual-listed course sections are reviewed on the basis of combined enrollment.

4. Course sections that are targeted to a specific population and supported by federal, other state agency, or private funds or are paid for by special fees do not fall under this policy. Examples of such course sections include ROTC and early college classes that are taught on the high school campus.

5. Consistent with this policy, departments may not schedule a course section with an enrollment limit that would result in it being a small course section by design.

6. It is expected that any small undergraduate course sections that result from low enrollment would be at the upper division and graduate level due to the increasingly specialized nature of such instruction. Non-required course sections that have experienced low enrollment should be offered less often to achieve appropriate enrollment levels. At the upper division, continued offering of small required course sections will trigger a curricular review of degree programs for which those course sections are required since low enrollment is one indication of limited student interest.

## B. Process

1. All campuses will monitor small course sections during registration periods for Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters.

2. Each campus shall establish a deadline, to be no later than ten days prior to the start of the semester, by which initial assessments will be made of course sections with enrollment below the thresholds in this policy. During this period of no less than ten days, the Instructional Unit Chair may submit to the Dean (or CAO) any requests to retain course sections below the small course section limit and provide a justification for doing so. Final decisions on which small course sections to cancel must be made by the Friday before the beginning of classes for the semester.

3. Small course sections cancelled under this policy must be cancelled in time for faculty to be reassigned to other sections.

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4. Course sections that met the limit up to the first day of classes, but fell below the limit after the first day of classes may continue to be taught if it would be too disruptive to students to cancel them. However, the Instructional Unit Chair (or equivalent) shall provide the Dean (or CAO) with a report of all small course sections that were offered each semester with an explanation of what happened and justification if they are to be offered in the future with steps to be taken to assure the course sections will meet enrollment targets in the future.
5. The Dean (CAO) will provide a summary of the small course sections allowed to continue in the semester to the CAO by the 10th week of each semester. In the case of a campus where Divisions report directly to the CAO, the CAO will prepare the summary. The summary will explain why small course sections were permitted and steps to be taken to assure such course sections will meet enrollment targets in the future.
6. If, after two semesters, the steps that had been provided to increase enrollment have not been successful, the following may be considered.
  - a. Course taught in small sections without an exception shall be scheduled less frequently in order to achieve adequate enrollment
  - b. Unless exceptions described in this policy have been approved, if a candidate for contract renewal cannot demonstrate sufficient enrollment in all of their assigned course sections, or has course sections that are consistently under-enrolled, the lack of enrollment must be addressed in the faculty members' application for tenure or promotion.
  - c. If course sections across the Department's offerings are consistently low and the issue is not remedied, departments may have new hire requests denied and additional resources delayed until the situation is mitigated.
7. Decisions regarding exceptions will be made by the Dean or the equivalent.
8. The Dean or CAO may ask the program to address the small course section issue in the next program review by specifically discussing the following in the context of the curriculum.
  - a. Number of course sections offered.
  - b. Number of course sections that only serve as electives.
  - c. Number of concentrations or degree tracks.
  - d. Number of instructional staff needed to offer the required course sections.
  - e. At the upper division, continued offering of small required course sections since low enrollment is one indication of limited student interest.

C. Possible justifications for continuing to offer small course sections:

1. In multiple-section courses, the average section enrollment is greater than the minimum and the added sections address overflow or other scheduling issues.

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2. If faculty are volunteering to teach a small course section in addition to fulfilling their full workload assignment.

3. New or experimental classes (for two semesters only).

4. Course sections that are small due to equipment limitations or programmatic accreditation requirements as formally acknowledged by the Dean or CAO to have continuing constraints.

5. Small course sections identified as major requirements remain subject to review. If low enrollments persist over several semesters, the campus is asked to:

- a. reassess the importance of the course section to the major or graduation requirements and, if the course section is judged crucial,
- b. to offer the course section in alternate years or less often if possible.

#### IV. Delegation of Authority

The President delegates to the Vice President for Academic Planning and Policy and to the Chancellors/Provost who have responsibility for implementing this policy and fostering practices that facilitate informed small course review for each campus.

#### V. Contact Information

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D. NEW PARAGRAPH? Curricular review triggered by offering of low enrollment courses.¶

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Low enrollment in required courses may be an indication that curricular review and redesign may be needed in light of limited student interest. Too narrow a degree, degree no longer relevant to students, too many concentrations, etc. Does this link to program review somehow?

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