

Class Size Task Force Report

Summary: Our committee evaluated whether guidelines about minimum class size enrollment could lead to financial savings through the reduction of part-time faculty salary costs. In Section 1, we provide an overview of our committee's charge and process. Section 2 consists of class size recommendations for departmental units to consider. In Section 3, we include hypothetical examples to illustrate potential pathways to savings. Finally, Section 4 displays relevant 2014-2016 NDSU class size data.

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Section 1: Overview

Background: North Dakota State University (NDSU) is facing significant budget cuts. It is our understanding that most of the current projected budget cut could be managed through a hiring freeze and the voluntary separation incentive program. However, the ability to hire new faculty members is important to the optimal functioning of the university. The purpose of our task force was to examine possible ways to save money by meeting more teaching needs through full-time faculty and by reducing the approximately 1.6 million dollars per year (based on 2014-2015 expenditures) that are spent paying part-time faculty costs. The goal is not to overburden full-time faculty by increasing teaching loads. Rather, the aim is to achieve savings through rearranging courses, primarily through the reduction or elimination of low-enrollment courses. As a hypothetical example, if we reduced the amount of money spent on part-time faculty teaching by 50%, we could potentially reallocate it to opening up hires in approximately 8 faculty lines.

Accordingly, we have drafted recommendations for the Provost to consider sharing with departmental units in this process. These are recommendations and are not meant to reflect new policy. Therefore, departments will be responsible for applying recommendations in a way that best fits unit needs. The central administration has not indicated any plans for strict enforcement of these suggestions as policy. Our recommendation to the Provost is to find ways for NDSU to incentivize department units' development of minimum class size policies as a future goal for the university. This strategy has the potential for cost savings that would address current and future budget concerns.

Charge: As a public institution, NDSU has an obligation to meet the educational needs of its students effectively and efficiently. Evidence from other institutions and analyses by NDUS indicate that NDSU might be able to offer its curriculum more efficiently by reducing unnecessary sections of courses, requiring minimum class sizes, and offering additional sections of courses as student demand warrants. This committee provided recommendations for policies concerning class enrollment.

Process: Through weekly meetings, we worked with the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis to understand class enrollment at NDSU. We examined the distribution of class enrollment by department and college and the average seat fill by department and college. The

College of Science and Mathematics Dean shared with our committee a proposed class size policy that he had created with chairs in his college. Through discussion and consideration of needs within various departments and colleges, we developed recommendations designed to assist departments in examining their curricula and identifying areas to improve their curricula offerings with respect to class fill. This process included using the College of Science and Math policy as a model for identifying exceptions and exemptions for class size minimum recommendations.

Section 2: Recommendations

Instructional resources, i.e., faculty, are precious and limited – particularly in light of significant budget cuts that may occur within the near future at the university. It is incumbent on all to be good stewards of these resources and deploy them as efficiently and effectively as possible. Good stewardship ensures that courses are offered to a reasonable number of students. However, it is also recognized that higher education is not about producing widgets and that factors beyond economic efficiency also deserve due consideration. The following recommendations with regard to minimum course enrollments represent a balance among economic, pedagogical, programmatic, safety, and other concerns. The primary goal of the recommendations is not to eliminate courses indiscriminately or force closure of programs. The primary goal is to encourage departments and colleges to make strategic changes in their programs such that courses offered have reasonable enrollments while still achieving desired learning objectives and program outcomes. The suggestion is that departments use this as an opportunity to review their entire curriculum and determine ways to improve it.

Guiding Principles:

- 1) Recommendations are not one-size-fits-all. The recommendations must be flexible within different departments and colleges, as the needs are variable.
- 2) It is the responsibility of the departmental units to meet budgetary goals that fit within their particular frameworks and needs.
- 3) Graduate classes are recognized differently than undergraduate classes in terms of target class size enrollment.
- 4) Exceptions and exemptions should be allowed, but it is recommended that an approval process is established, such that they are used as infrequently as necessary.

Recommendations:

- 1) With the exception of the cases noted, it is recommended that courses be taught only if they meet a minimum enrollment of 15 students for lower-division undergraduate (100-, 200-level), 10 for upper-division undergraduate (300-, 400-level), and 5 for graduate (500-, 600-, 700-, 800-) courses. These guidelines may need adjustment for some departments.
- 2) Concurrently taught upper-division undergraduate (400-level) and graduate courses (600-level) should be deemed to have satisfied minimum enrollment if either the combined enrollment of undergraduate plus graduate students is at least 10 or the enrollment of graduate students alone is at least 5.

- 3) If taught as separate lecture sections, minimum enrollment limits apply to individual sections of the same course. However, if individual sections reflect only individual laboratory, tutorial, or sessions sharing a single common lecture, then the section enrollments may be added together.
- 4) Courses such as Study Abroad, Undergraduate Research, Field Experience, Practicum/Internship, Master's Thesis, and Doctoral Dissertation are automatically exempt. Courses that require attendance at departmental seminars/colloquia and are a degree requirement are also exempt.
- 5) Courses required for accreditation/certification are exempt.
- 6) Possible exemptions include a first-time test offering that may develop into a new course or a course specifically designed for an individual student. In any case, such courses may only count towards an individual faculty member's normal teaching load if given prior approval by the Department Head.
- 7) If a course is cancelled because of lack of required enrollment, the faculty member teaching that class should be reassigned to teach an equivalent course or to take on special service/outreach/research tasks with specific deliverable outcomes beyond what would have been expected if the original course was taught. The teaching reassignment option is preferred. Alternatively, if an appropriate new teaching assignment is not feasible in the semester in question, the faculty member can be assigned an extra course the following fall or spring semester.
- 8) Departments should consider eliminating or reducing the offering frequency of low enrollment classes that are not essential to the curriculum.
- 9) Departments should carefully determine, from a budget perspective, where costs could be reduced by full-time faculty teaching classes rather than part-time academics.
- 10) Programs offering similar courses across departments should consider teaching combined, cross-listed courses with students from multiple programs.
- 11) Departments should investigate additional ways to increase enrollment in their classes (e.g., optimizing the scheduled times that classes occur, asking academic advisors to guide students by discussing benefits of taking some of the lower enrollment classes).

Acknowledgement: Many components of the report were informed by and directly adopted from the College of Science and Mathematics' drafted policy on class size. The committee is extremely grateful for this model and resource.

Section 3: Hypothetical Examples of Minimum Class Sizes and Budget Impact

Using recent NDSU class enrollment figures, classes are frequently offered that do not meet minimum recommended enrollments. Let us consider several examples how enforcing minimum class enrollment can lead to potential savings. Per recommendation of the Provost, priority is placed on reducing the cost of part-time academic instruction rather than eliminating tenure-line positions. All examples are hypothetical and use a part-time academic salary cost of \$5000/course.

Case 1: Full Savings

A department intends to offer 10 classes: 6 taught by (F)aculty and 4 taught by (P)art-time academics. Following registration, 3 courses do not meet minimum enrollment while the remaining 7 courses meet minimum enrollment with instructor assignments as follows:

Does Not Meet Minimum Enrollment	Meets Minimum Enrollment
F, P, P	F, F, F, F, F, P, P

By enforcing minimum enrollment guidelines, the 3 low-enrollment courses are canceled, the affected faculty member is reassigned to 1 of the remaining part-time academic-instructed courses, and 3 part-time academic positions are eliminated, producing a salary savings of \$15,000.

Does Not Meet Minimum Enrollment	Meets Minimum Enrollment
	F, F, F, F, F, F, P

Case 2: Limited Savings

A department intends to offer 10 classes: 9 taught by (F)aculty and 1 taught by a by (P)art-time academic. Following registration, 3 courses do not meet minimum enrollment while the remaining 7 courses meet minimum enrollment with instructor assignments as follows:

Does Not Meet Minimum Enrollment	Meets Minimum Enrollment
F, F, P	F, F, F, F, F, F, F

By enforcing minimum enrollment guidelines, the 3 low-enrollment courses are canceled, the 1 part-time academic position is eliminated, but reassignment of the two faculty is not possible, resulting in limited savings of \$5,000. Freed faculty time may be directed to alternate activities, such as research.

Does Not Meet Minimum Enrollment	Meets Minimum Enrollment
	F, F, F, F, F, F, F

Case 3: No Savings

A department intends to offer 10 classes: 9 taught by (F)aculty and 1 taught by a (P)art-time academics. Following registration, 3 courses do not meet minimum enrollment while the remaining 7 courses meet minimum enrollment with instructor assignments as follows:

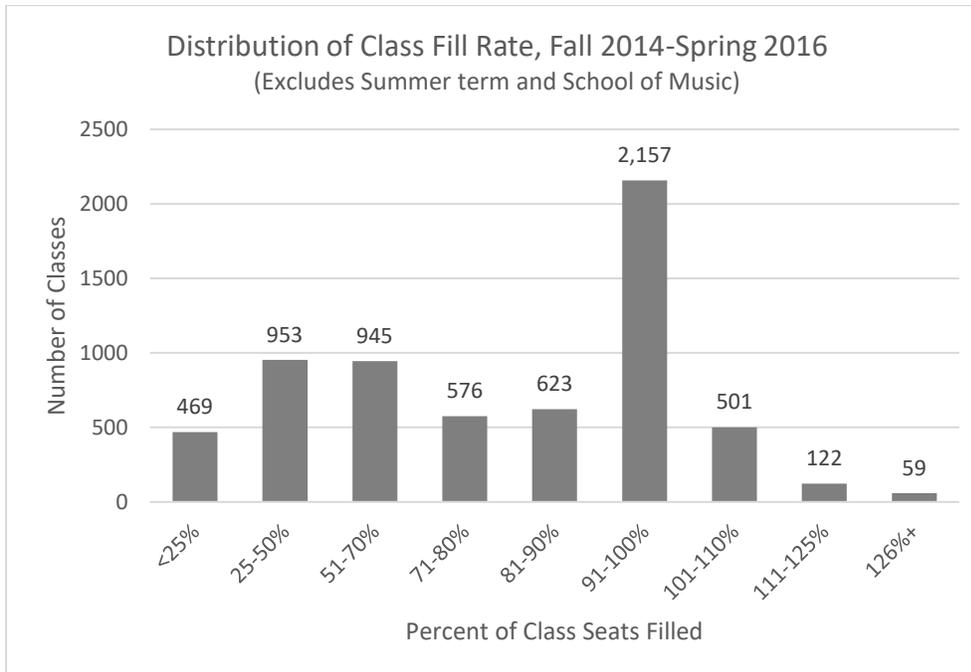
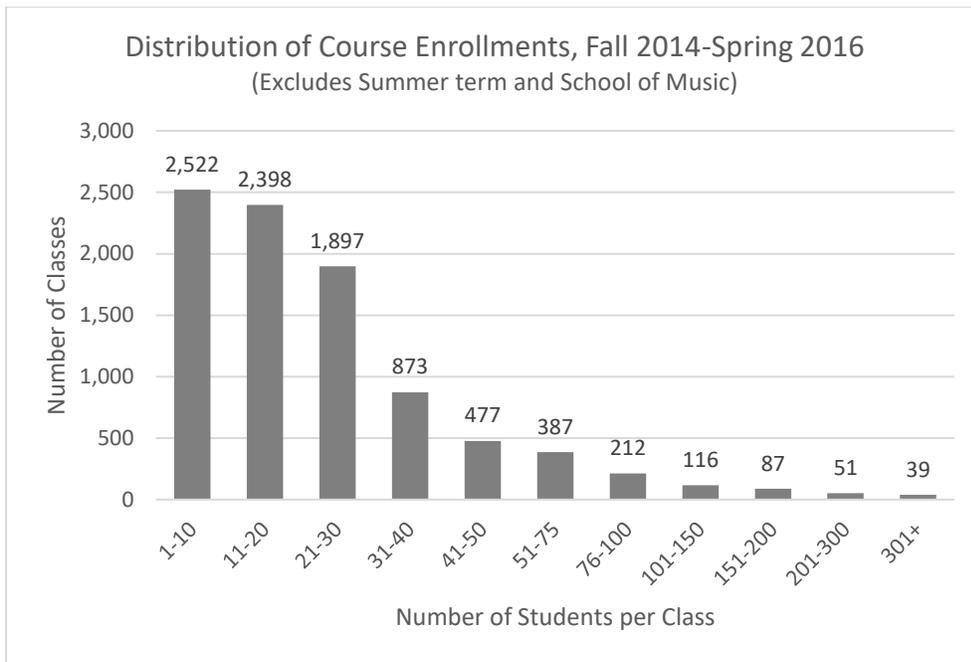
Does Not Meet Minimum Enrollment	Meets Minimum Enrollment
F, F, F	F, F, F, F, F, F, P

By enforcing minimum enrollment guidelines, the 3 low-enrollment courses are canceled, but none of the department faculty is qualified to teach the part-time academic's course.

Reassignment is not possible and no salary savings are realized. Freed faculty time may be directed to other activities, such as research.

Does Not Meet Minimum Enrollment	Meets Minimum Enrollment
	F, F, F, F, F, F, A

Section 4: 2014-2016 NDSU Class Size Data



**Table 1. Number of Classes Below the Proposed Minimum
Fall 2015 and Spring 2016**

Level	Lower UGRD	Upper UGRD	Dual-listed	Graduate	Total
<i>Proposed Minimum</i>	15	10	10	5	
AFSNR	12	21	18	13	64
AHSSC	109	82	5	21	217
BUSAD	2	4	2	3	11
ENGR	18	14	9	12	53
HDVED	23	23	11	66	123
HLTHPF	3	1	1	2	7
SCMTH	13	13	20	11	57
UNSTD	5	3	0	0	8
Total Courses	185	161	66	128	540
Total Adjuncts	16	5	1	2	24
Total Instr. Staff	31	17	2		50
Total Faculty	33	64	47	53	197

**Table 2. Average Part-Time Academic Staff Cost per Course (Minimum not applied)
Fall 2015 and Spring 2016**

College	Lower UGRD	Upper UGRD	Dual-listed	Graduate	Overall Average
AFSNR	\$ 7,572	\$ 3,858	\$ 4,806		\$ 6,056
AHSSC	\$ 4,016	\$ 4,132	\$ 10,000		\$ 4,104
BUSAD	\$ 6,250	\$ 4,250	\$ 5,000	\$ 3,333	\$ 4,786
ENGR	\$ 4,250	\$ 5,682	\$ 6,025		\$ 5,401
HDVED	\$ 2,678	\$ 4,557	\$ 6,760	\$ 4,833	\$ 3,951
HLTHPF				\$ 16,133	\$ 16,133
SCMTH	\$ 5,088				\$ 5,088
UNSTD	\$ 3,400				\$ 3,400
Median	\$ 4,250	\$ 4,250	\$ 6,025	\$ 4,833	\$ 4,937

Lower Level Undergraduate (100/200 level)

Table 3. Number of Instructors and Courses Taught (Enrollment < 15)

College	Adjunct		Instructional Staff		Faculty		Total Courses
	Courses Taught	Instructors	Courses Taught	Instructors	Courses Taught	Instructors	
AFSNR			6	2	4	4	10
AHSSC	18	11	45	19	33	16	96
BUSAD			2	1			2
ENGR							0
HDVED	7	5	5	4	4	4	16
HLTHPF			1	1	2	2	3
SCMTH			2	1	10	7	12
UNSTD			5	3			5
TOTAL	25	16	66	31	53	33	144

If up to half of these 144 courses can be eliminated or combined with other courses, and instructor funding becomes unnecessary, the cost savings may range from \$0-\$306,000 (72*\$4250)

\$4250 was the median per-course salary of adjuncts teaching lower level undergraduate courses in 2015-16

Upper Level Undergraduate (300/400 level)

Table 4. Number of Instructors and Courses Taught (Enrollment < 10)

College	Adjunct		Instructional Staff		Faculty		Total Courses
	Courses Taught	Instructors	Courses Taught	Instructors	Courses Taught	Instructors	
AFSNR			9	4	9	6	18
AHSSC	6	2	17	7	58	31	81
BUSAD	1	1	1	1	1	1	3
ENGR	4	2			3	3	7
HDVED			9	4	14	11	23
HLTHPF					1	1	1
SCMTH			1	1	11	10	12
UNSTD					2	1	2
TOTAL	11	5	37	17	99	64	147

If up to half of these 147 courses can be eliminated or combined with other courses, and instructor funding becomes unnecessary, the cost savings may range from \$0-\$310,250 (73*\$4250)

\$4250 was the median per-course salary of adjuncts teaching upper level undergraduate courses in 2015-16

Dual-Listed (400/600 level)

Table 5. Number of Instructors and Courses Taught (Enrollment < 10)

Dual Listed College	Adjunct		Instructional Staff		Faculty		Total Courses
	Courses Taught	Instructors	Courses Taught	Instructors	Courses Taught	Instructors	
AFSNR			1	1	17	14	18
AHSSC					4	4	4
BUSAD					2	2	2
ENGR					9	9	9
HDVED	2	1			7	4	9
HLTHPF					1	1	1
SCMTH			2	1	18	13	20
TOTAL	2	1	3	2	58	47	63

If up to half of these 63 courses can be eliminated or combined with other courses, and instructor funding becomes unnecessary, the cost savings may range from \$0-\$201,500 (31*\$6500)

\$6500 was the median per-course salary of adjuncts teaching dual-listed courses in 2015-16

Graduate (600/700/800 level)

Table 6. Number of Instructors and Courses Taught (Enrollment < 5)

College	Adjunct		Instructional Staff		Faculty		Total Courses
	Courses Taught	Instructors	Courses Taught	Instructors	Courses Taught	Instructors	
AFSNR			1	1	11	9	12
AHSSC					13	9	13
BUSAD	1	1					1
ENGR					12	10	12
HDVED	1	1	1	1	20	14	22
HLTHPF					2	2	2
SCMTH					11	9	11
TOTAL	2	2	2	2	69	53	73

If up to half of these 73 courses can be eliminated or combined with other courses, and instructor funding becomes unnecessary, the cost savings may range from \$0-\$173,988 (36*\$4833)

\$4833 was the median per-course salary of adjuncts teaching graduate courses in 2015-16