

NDSU Academic Affairs Procedure - Minimum Section Size Standards

Effective August 2022

NDSU Policy reference, Section 338

1. Rationale

Instructional resources are precious and limited. Consistent with the NDSU Strategic Plan (2021-2026), 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, although factors beyond economic efficiency also warrant consideration. To that end, minimum enrollments in course sections are necessary to balance among economic, pedagogical, programmatic, safety, and other concerns. They also require departments and colleges to strategically and continuously assess their programs to ensure that courses offered have enrollments that are in alignment with university priorities while achieving desired learning objectives and program outcomes.

The goal of monitoring minimum section sizes is to create a culture change at NDSU that emphasizes proactive, data-driven course section planning across all academic units on campus. If units plan proactively, in the long run, no (or few) sections would actually be eliminated due to minimum course enrollments.

2. Taxonomy

- 2.1. Minimum enrollment thresholds apply only to course section offerings during the fall and spring semesters of an academic year. The Office of the Provost has the authority to establish different minimum enrollment thresholds for courses offered during the summer session.
- 2.2. Minimum enrollment thresholds shall vary based on instructional methods and course level. For the purposes of this policy, undergraduate courses shall be categorized as those course offerings at the 400-level or below. Graduate and professional courses are categorized at the 500 level or higher.
- 2.3. Uniform courses are those courses with uniform course numbers, as described in the NDSU Catalog. All other course numbers are considered to be non-uniform courses.
- 2.4. Courses with unique section numbers shall be evaluated as distinct courses. Certain cases shall be evaluated using combined enrollments across multiple course sections.
 - 2.4.1. Course sections taught at the same time and at the same location with other course sections by the same instructor (i.e., visual arts studio courses) shall be evaluated using the combined enrollments across course sections.
 - 2.4.2. Course sections comprised of both lecture and laboratories/recitation sections and where there is one unique section number for both the lecture and the laboratories/recitation sections, shall be evaluated based on enrollment in the lecture component of the course.
 - 2.4.3. Undergraduate courses cross-listed with other undergraduate courses shall be evaluated based on combined enrollment in both cross-listed course sections.
 - 2.4.4. Graduate courses cross-listed with other graduate courses shall be evaluated based on combined enrollment in both cross-listed course sections.
- 2.5. Course sections that are 400/600-level courses, shall be evaluated based on combined enrollment in the 400-level dual-listed course sections as well as enrollment in the 600-level

course sections. Enrollment in the 400-level and 600-level course sections shall be aggregated and assessed consistently with section 4.3.

3. Exemptions

- 3.1. Courses with uniform course numbers (independent studies, etc.) are exempt from this policy, unless they are taught as a part of a faculty's full-time instructional workload.
- 3.2. Courses offered through the Great Plains IDEA program are exempt from this policy.
- 3.3. Courses offered through an ROTC program or the NDSU Military Science program are exempt from this policy.
- 3.4. Courses that are explicitly designed to have a 1:1 instructor-student ratio (i.e., music lessons, practica, recitals, supervision of theses or dissertations) are exempt from this policy.
- 3.5. Individual departments and colleges bear responsibility for monitoring enrollments, ensuring adequate section sizes and justifying additional exceptions within their respective college. Any additional exceptions to this policy must be justified by the Department Head/Chair to the Dean and Provost. In no circumstances shall the exception limit be more than 5% of all course sections in each college in that semester notwithstanding exemptions listed in 3.1 through 3.5.
- 3.6. Course sections uniquely attached to new academic programs are exempt from this policy for a period of no more than three years from the date at which the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) approves the program.

4. Minimum Enrollment Thresholds

All non-exempt courses must meet the following minimum enrollment thresholds:

- 4.1. Undergraduate course sections must have a minimum enrollment of 15 students.
- 4.2. Graduate and professional course sections must have a minimum enrollment of 6 students.
- 4.3. Non-exempt 400/600-course sections should have a combined enrollment of 15 students. Each student enrolled in the 600-level component of the course shall count as 2 undergraduate students towards meeting the minimum enrollment threshold.
- 4.4. Course sections in which accreditation, equipment or other physical or technological constraints preclude enrollment of 15 or more undergraduate students, or 6 or more graduate students, must have enrollment that is at least 50% of the course capacity.

5. Management Options for Courses that Do Not Meet Minimum Enrollment Thresholds

If a non-exempt course does not meet the applicable minimum enrollment threshold, the course shall be:

- 5.1. Cancelled;
- 5.2. Combined with another existing section, where the combined enrollment meets the applicable minimum enrollment threshold; or
- 5.3 Offered as an independent study with a uniform course number, although independent studies should be offered judiciously because of the demands they place on faculty.

6. Management Options for Faculty Reassignment

If a faculty's course is cancelled (5.1) or combined with another existing section (5.2) due to low enrollment, the faculty shall be reassigned to other duties. The decision shall be made by the unit administrator based on the needs of the academic unit, and in consultation with the faculty.

Possible options include, but are not limited to:

- 6.1. Re-assign the faculty to teach a different course (ideally with the same number of credits as the cancelled or combined course) during the same semester; or
- 6.2. Re-assign the portion of the faculty's workload allocated to the course to other teaching, advising, research, or service responsibilities.

7. Monitoring Low Enrollment Course Sections

- 7.1 It is the responsibility of Departments and Colleges to monitor enrollments and identify low enrollment courses each semester including those that consistently fall below minimum thresholds. Departments and Colleges should establish processes to monitor course section enrollments;
- 7.2 Enforce all minimum course section enrollment thresholds, exemptions, and exemption limits specified in this policy;
- 7.3 Inform faculty in a timely way if a course is being cancelled and reassign workload (see section 8).
- 7.4. Monitor curricula and review programs in which the program's courses consistently fail to meet minimum course section enrollment thresholds. If a course continually does not meet minimum enrollment guidelines, curriculum revision to consolidate or eliminate the course may be necessary. If a program has a several courses that do not meet minimum enrollment thresholds, review and possible elimination of the program should be considered.
- 7.5 Communicate with and provide information to the Office of Registration and Records and the Provost's Office as well as other colleges, schools, and departments who might be affected by the changes.

8. Notifying Faculty Who Teach Low Enrollment Course Sections

Any faculty teaching a non-exempt, low enrollment course shall be notified by the faculty's supervisor and/or unit administrator at least 10 business days before the start of the semester should the faculty's course be cancelled (5.1), combined with another existing section (5.2), or whether a possibility exists to offer the course as an independent study (5.3).

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