

Guidelines for Minimum Class Size Targets

Version: October 4, 2011

1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines regarding the minimum enrollment per section for class offerings in Academic Affairs. These guidelines are motivated by an imperative to efficiently utilize valuable RIT resources; however, the guidelines are also presented within a larger context of RIT's commitment to student success. Therefore, these guidelines must be considered within the context of a variety of other Institute objectives, including offering courses that: (1) allow students to meet degree completion expectations; or (2) may require lower enrollments to meet educational objectives. It is expected that colleges will apply these guidelines when formulating individual course cancellation policies within their colleges.

2 Guidelines

2.1 Minimum Class Sizes

Table 1 identifies guidelines for minimum class enrollment targets for lecture courses. Other course types are addressed in the following section. These guidelines are based primarily on policies observed in other universities, particularly our benchmark schools and other technology-based universities. Data on minimum class sizes for benchmark institutions and Association of Independent Technological Universities (AITU) are included in Appendix A. Data for various other institutions are included in Appendix B. Deans have the authority and accountability to manage course enrollments and therefore can grant exceptions to these guidelines to best meet the needs of students, but these should be exceptions and not the rule. Since each college has a different cost structure, colleges can set guidelines for minimum enrollment that are higher than the ones identified in these guidelines.

Further refinements regarding these guidelines should be motivated by an authentic assessment of the actual cost of teaching a low enrollment section and the opportunity cost of not doing other things with the resources being consumed. Help from RIT Finance and Administration in the analysis of such costs is likely to be highly beneficial in this analysis.

Table 1. Minimum class enrollment targets for lecture courses.

Class Type	Minimum Size
Undergraduate 100-level courses	16
Undergraduate 200- or 300-level courses	12
Undergraduate 400-level and above	8
Graduate courses	6

Note: Course numbers reflect the guidelines that apply under the semester calendar.

2.2 Exceptions

The guidelines in Table 1 apply to lecture courses. However, there are a number of other types of courses that may require smaller class sizes, as shown in Table 2. In addition, other circumstances may place constraints on class sizes (e.g., special sections for NTID students or courses that are affected by accreditation bodies). Colleges should consider these constraints in making class cancellation decisions. In such cases, colleges should determine the appropriate class enrollment targets considering the benefits to the students and whether the course offering imparts significant costs on RIT (e.g., impact on faculty resources, classroom space, or other costs).

Table 2. Example course types that may require small class sizes.

Independent study	Clinical/studio experiences
Seminar courses	Practicum/Apprenticeships
Individual music instruction	Self-Instruction Language Program
Advanced language training	Portfolio development courses
Directed Research/Thesis/Projects	Research seminars
Specialized writing courses	Honors courses

3 Class Cancellation Procedure

The authority to cancel a class rests with the Dean of the affected college. The Dean shall consult with the department chair and/or program head or equivalent in cancellation decisions. Each College may have its own process for identifying and cancelling classes due to low enrollment; however, the impact of the cancellation on a student's progress towards graduation should be considered in this process.

To assist in the process, the Institute will provide data to each college in a timely manner, beginning with an enrollment report by class section that follows the advance registration process for each academic term. A recommended timeline is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Timeline for data delivery to colleges and departments.

Timing	Action
Two weeks after the close of advance registration for a given term	Registrar's Office will provide a preliminary class section status report to the Dean and each unit chair or program head for analysis
Two weeks prior to the first day of class	Registrar's Office will provide the first class section status report to the Dean and each unit chair or program head for analysis.
One week prior to the first day of class	Registrar's Office will provide the final class section status report to the Dean and each unit chair or program head for final consideration.

Unit chairs, program heads and deans should use the preliminary enrollment report to identify class sections that are at risk of falling below the minimum section size so that corrective action can be taken in a timely fashion, to minimize student disruption and optimize the plans of work for affected faculty members. In order to minimize student disruption due to canceled courses, department chairs or program heads are encouraged to meet with the Dean as soon as possible if the *first class section status report* includes classes that do not meet the minimum enrollment guidelines shown in Table 1. A decision to cancel a class can be made after the *first class section status report* is received, or the college may wait for the *final class section status report* to make this decision.

Once a decision to cancel a class has been made, the college should immediately inform the Registrar's Office. In addition, the college should communicate the cancelation decision to students and their respective advisors, as well as to the Department of Access Services if such services were scheduled for the course.¹

4 Other Issues

4.1 Faculty Reassignment

If a full-time faculty member has had a class canceled due to low enrollment, the faculty member's plan of work will be modified to reflect this change in their teaching assignment.

¹ Beginning in fall 2012, the Registrar's Office may have the capability to notify students and advisors automatically through the course management system.

4.2 Consistently Under-Enrolled Classes

The efficacy of a course which fails to meet the minimum class size guidelines after three offerings should be reexamined and compelling evidence presented to the Dean to justify its continued offering.

5 Recommendations on Data Collection

Each dean's office should work with its college's Office of Student Services (or similar) to collect regular quantitative and qualitative data related to enrollment. In the analysis accompanying the development of these guidelines, it was observed that improvements in the course management system used by RIT could assist in course cancellation decision-making. Four important recommendations emerged from this analysis:

1. Recommendation #1. Expand the course type elements in the course label data field to include specialized course labels, such as "practicum," "senior project," "self-instruction," "portfolio," etc. Also, allow for identification of courses offered under special circumstances, such as courses that have course enrollment maxima driven by accreditation or special circumstances (e.g., NTID sections).
2. Recommendation #2. Integrate a way to easily identify cross-listed courses in the database so that total enrollment (among all cross-listed sections) can be identified.
3. Recommendation #3. Integrate a way to identify whether a course is part of a faculty member's regular course load expectations or whether it represents additional course load activities. (This recommendation may have an added benefit of providing a course load accounting system that department chairs and program heads can use for workload management).
4. Recommendation #4. Conduct an analysis at RIT that links class size with student success, retention, and satisfaction. This will provide empirical data that will allow us to more fully discuss issues related to class sizes.