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## DOC 2024-04 Undergraduate Course Enrollment Thresholds

University of Dayton. Student Academic Policies Committee

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**PROPOSAL TO THE ACADEMIC SENATE**

TITLE: Undergraduate Course Enrollment Thresholds

SUBMITTED BY: Student Academic Policies Committee

DATE: April 2024

ACTION: Legislative Authority

I. BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

In November 2023, the provost's office brought a draft policy to ECAS on Undergraduate Course Enrollment Thresholds. That draft policy was based on recent practice and revised policy in the School of Business Administration. After discussion, ECAS charged SAPC with developing a university-wide policy on undergraduate course enrollment thresholds, following consultation with key constituents across campus. Throughout that consultation, SAPC heard repeatedly that responsible use of financial resources is very important. SAPC further heard that as we steward those resources with a policy such as this one, we should be attentive to: 1) the larger picture of department and faculty load with respect to the number of students taught in a given semester and over a four-semester span; 2) the need for smaller classes when pedagogically designed or programmatically promised; 3) the need for greater predictive tools available to chairs in course planning.

As a Catholic and Marianist university, the University of Dayton is committed "to educating students within a vibrant learning community; to strong programs in both liberal arts and sciences and the professional disciplines; and to collaboration across disciplinary and organizational boundaries." This policy keeps at the center a profound determination to stay committed to that mission. Key to carrying on that mission is a variety of course offerings, each designed for excellent student learning. In some cases, that learning happens well in large lectures, in others

smaller laboratories, seminars, or studios. In all of those cases, course enrollment should be aligned with pedagogical design. Our mission necessitates that those courses which, for reasons of pedagogy and classroom space, can be taught with higher enrollments are indeed offered with robust enrollments, so that those courses which require smaller numbers to achieve their student learning outcomes can flourish at a level of enrollment suitable to them. In no case, is it desirable for course enrollments to create inequities in faculty workload. Both for reasons of student learning and to steward our financial resources well, this policy aims to reduce the number of under-enrolled courses offered during each academic term. Generally speaking, undergraduate courses should target an enrollment of at least twenty-five (25) students or room capacity.

The fiscal responsibility this policy urges in course offerings aims to strengthen the viability of academic programs across the university. This policy provides a structure and support for a shared understanding of when and why an under-enrolled course may need to be canceled or approved. Implementing this policy will, over time, enable department chairs, program directors, and deans to perceive enrollment patterns more clearly and, therefore, plan course offerings and curriculum accordingly. In support of this work, department chairs, program directors, and deans' offices need accurate data on enrollment patterns and student demand. The policy aims to provide flexibility, while emphasizing a commitment to fiscal stewardship.

## II. PROCEDURE

### **A. Fall and Spring Terms**

1. Within one week after the end of the standard registration period, each department chair or program director shall review course enrollments for the following term(s). A "course" is defined as the total of all sections meeting at the same time and taught by the same instructor.
2. As a general practice, undergraduate courses with fewer than ten (10) students should be canceled. The policy defines this minimum number of enrolled students as a "threshold."
3. Within three weeks after the end of standard registration, each department chair or program director will submit to their dean's office a plan to cancel

courses below the threshold, along with justification for any courses the department or program would like to offer under the threshold.

4. The dean's office will respond to these requests within two weeks.
5. Any deviation from this procedure must be approved by the dean.

## **B. Summer Terms**

1. Department chairs and program directors shall utilize the spreadsheet provided by their unit's budget manager to calculate expected revenue alongside expected salary (and benefit) costs of offering each course in their department or program.
2. At least three weeks before the beginning of the first summer session, each department chair or program director shall submit to their dean's office a plan to cancel courses for which the expected costs exceed the expected revenues, along with justification for any of those courses the department or program would like to offer.
3. The dean's office will respond to these requests within one week.
4. Any deviation from this procedure must be approved by the dean.

## **III. IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES**

### **A. Pursuant to This Policy, Department Chairs and Program Directors Have the Following Responsibilities**

1. In the context of UD's Catholic and Marianist mission, facilitate conversations with department or program faculty about appropriate course caps for pedagogical design, available space, and fiscal responsibility.
2. Schedule sections intentionally to minimize the likelihood of unnecessary under-enrolled courses.
3. Coordinate course schedules with relevant other departments and programs, as possible.
4. Track enrollment of courses during the registration period to identify courses in danger of low enrollment early and potentially make changes in a timely manner during the enrollment period.
5. Take steps equitably to distribute courses among faculty, with a view toward the total number of student credit hours taught by each faculty member in a four-semester span.

6. Determine when to request an exception, according to the procedure outlined above, from the general practice of canceling under-enrolled courses. Letter D, below, provides guidance.
7. Notify other departments and programs directly affected by any course cancellation.

**B. Pursuant to This Policy, Deans' Offices Have the Following Responsibilities**

1. Collaborate with department chairs and program directors to develop scheduling strategies to minimize potential for under-enrolled courses.
2. Provide the best data available to department chairs and program directors to support course planning, including across departments and units.
3. Provide support for department chairs in making difficult decisions about course cancellations and faculty assignments.
4. Support equity efforts in the unit and exercise prudent transparency about how departments and programs meet the expectations of this policy.

**C. The Following are Standing Exceptions to Course Thresholds**

1. Courses for a major, and for which no suitable alternative is available, required for timely degree completion.
2. A course that is in addition to the faculty member's standard workload and for which they are not additionally compensated (e.g. independent study courses).
3. A senior capstone course, in the event only one section is offered.
4. A course constrained by laboratory, studio, or classroom space.

**D. The Following Are Some of the Reasons a Department Chair or Program Director Might Seek an Exception to Course Thresholds**

1. A course is one of a very few in a department whose courses are otherwise enrolled above the target of twenty-five (25) or room capacity.
2. A course is a new offering that will advance the curriculum and is likely to increase enrollment in subsequent terms.
3. A course accommodates and sets up for success a pre-tenure or new faculty member.
4. A course aligns with strategic university partnerships.

5. A course aligns with significant and substantial student research and/or experiential learning.

**E. The Following Are Courses Whose Structure and Pedagogy Require Additional Consideration**

1. Courses whose topics or methods require specialized instruction, with lower student-instructor ratio (e.g., music instruction or art studio courses)
2. Courses which do not follow the typical credit-load pattern (e.g., first-year Core)
3. Courses with extensive writing instruction (e.g., first and second-year writing courses)
4. Courses with a substantial conversational component (e.g., foreign language courses).
5. Courses in the University Honors Program

IV. POLICY REVIEW

In the spring term of 2026, Academic Senate will review this policy to understand its effects on fiscal responsibility, course offerings, and the overall ability of the university to deliver on its Catholic and Marianist educational mission. If amendments are required in light of that review, the Academic Senate should make them according to its policies and procedures.