

Academic Senate Discussion Item, September 24th, 2019 on Class Cancellation Guidelines

Question:

Should we establish a working group to develop clear guidelines regarding minimum class size?

10+1

1. Curriculum, including establishing prerequisites and placing courses within disciplines
2. Educational program development
3. District and college governance structures, as related to faculty roles
4. Processes for institutional planning and budget development

Possible objectives:

- a. To amend Board policy
- b. To clarify Board policy
- c. To provide guidelines for Deans and Vice President of Instruction
- d. To create consistency across campus and in District

Board Policy

1. The District's Colleges will organize classes in as efficient a manner as possible consistent with good instructional practices and the needs of students
2. Classes with fewer than twenty (20) students will normally be cancelled or merged with another section.
3. Certain classes with enrollments of twenty (20) or fewer, for example required sequential courses, single sessions required for a major, and classes in facilities which will not accommodate twenty (20) students, will be carefully reviewed in consultation with discipline faculty and, if offered, will be balanced against large classes.

Issues when classes are canceled due to low-enrollment:

- Low-enrolled classes may often be canceled too early
- Faculty preparation uncompensated
- Students "pathways" less predictable
- New programs not given opportunity to grow
- A history of canceled classes becomes a factor that decreases enrollment
- Students whose classes are canceled often cannot complete major requirements
- Curriculum may be dictated by the enforcement of minimum class size without sufficient faculty input
- Canceling a classes can drive students to other colleges or other choices

What is the real rationale behind the magic number of 20?

It isn't pedagogical. Some classes serve students far better with lower enrollments. Instead, this number seems to be an artifact of budget crises dating back to the passage of Prop 13 and more recently in 2007-8, when, in survival mode, the administration made cutbacks so severe they fundamentally changed the nature of our institution, eliminating, for example, humanities and all foreign languages but Spanish and Chinese.