

University Policy: Minimum Course Enrollment Guidelines at American University for the Academic Year

Policy Category: Academic Policies

Subject: Course Enrollments

Responsible Executive: Provost

Office Responsible for Review of this Policy: Provost

Procedures: Determination of Under-enrolled Classes; Cancellation of Under-enrolled Classes

Related University Policies: Academic Regulations; Classroom Scheduling

I. SCOPE

This Policy applies to all courses and academic units during the fall and spring semesters of each academic year.

II. POLICY STATEMENT

AU's minimum course enrollment guidelines are based on at least 12 students in an undergraduate course and 8 Master's students for a graduate course. Academic units may set a higher minimum in specific courses reflective of their academic needs. Enrollments which are smaller than these are subject to cancellation unless they fall within the exceptions outlined below. Course scheduling and planning is important for frequently offered courses that continually enroll low numbers. Such classes should be scheduled on a periodic multi-year basis and posted so students may predictively plan on their offering yielding larger enrollments.

Several complexities and nuances need to be understood and applied in shaping these guidelines. The following categories of courses are generally exempted from the above minimum enrollment thresholds.

1. 400/600 courses, while they may be listed separately as undergraduate and graduate courses are actually one course meeting at the same time under one faculty with the

combined enrollments (called “global enrollments”). The minimum global enrollment for these courses is 10 students.

2. Courses that are cross-listed across two or more colleges. While their enrollments may appear low, the combined numbers of students taking the course must meet or exceed the minimum numbers.
3. A larger lecture or flipped class where there are break-out sections overseen by TAs – enrollments may be lower in the break-out sections, but all the students are considered enrolled in the one larger course. These classes should not be confused with those that are genuinely under-enrolled.
4. Ph.D. cohort courses where admissions to the program are restricted to less than 8 students per academic year are, by definition, allowed to proceed.
5. Courses in programs with a special financial model, educational purpose, or specialized nature of instruction that include the following:
 - A course taught off-site or on-line by an adjunct where the economics (i.e. an Income to Expense ratio of 2:1 or better) remain favorable despite having a small class.
 - A course required to meet accreditation standards.
 - Internship placements, directed study, and independent study supervision.
 - A new start-up program that is building enrollments or declining as a result of a sunset program.
 - Highly specialized courses that are taught to small groups or individually by design such as music or art instruction, health fitness, advanced language, clinical or professional training involving extensive oversight, or selected capstone classes and first year seminars.
 - Non-degree and non-credit programs that are revenue centered are subject to other financial guidelines.

Key to managing enrollment at the school/college level involves using good judgment and identifying courses that may make financial or academic sense to go forward even with low enrollments.

In the end, on site assessment is required in determining when a course listed with fewer than 12 undergraduate students or fewer than 8 Master’s students should be cancelled or allowed to continue. The dean is responsible for these final decisions and is subject to subsequent justification for courses which appear to have truly low enrollments in the respective unit.

III. Procedures

To implement the above guidelines and exemptions, the following procedures are hereby adopted:

- a. Three (3) weeks prior to the start of the class or term, the Office of University Registrar (OUR) will send a list of under-enrolled classes to academic unit deans.
- b. Truly under-enrolled courses that do not fall within the exemptions above are to be cancelled at least two (2) weeks before the start of the class or term. Cancellation of the courses with the Office of University Registrar (OUR) and notification of the affected faculty and all students enrolled in the class so they can find alternative courses for the same term is the responsibility of the dean or his/her designate. The assigned classroom for the cancelled course will be reassigned to another course in accordance with OUR schedule of classes and relevant space allocation procedures.
- c. After the add/drop period (end of second week of term), the OUR will send a list of under-enrolled classes to academic unit deans.
- d. On or before the end of the fifth week of classes (i.e. Census date) each academic unit dean or designate shall submit to the University Registrar a memorandum listing all courses in their respective unit that did not meet the minimum enrollment thresholds but were allowed to continue and the justification for each course exempted from the guidelines. The University Registrar shall use this information in developing her classroom utilization report for the academic year.

IV. EFFECTIVE DATE AND REVISIONS

This Policy is effective October 10, 2013.