

University of Utah Guidelines for Cancellation of Undergraduate Courses Due to Low Enrollment¹

Purpose and Context

The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that course cancellations due to low enrollment are handled in a manner that minimizes disruption to students and faculty, maintains the financial sustainability of the institution, supports equitable teaching loads among faculty, and shifts the U's culture of maximum capacity to one of engaging the true instructional capacity of the institution.² Small class sizes can be beneficial, but they must be balanced with financial realities and institutional priorities.

Locus of control for decisions on class cancellations due to low enrollment are at the department/College/School level. Department heads in consultation with their Associate Dean and Dean should make decisions about whether a course meets one (or more) of the exceptions outlined below. The Office of the Registrar does not cancel course sections unless requested to do so by the Department Head (or designee).

Minimum Enrollment Requirements

Courses that do not meet the minimum enrollment thresholds should be canceled unless they fall under specific exceptions. The minimum enrollment requirements are as follows:

- Lower-division undergraduate (1000 and 2000-level) classes: 20 students
- Upper-division undergraduate (3000 and 5000-level) classes: 15 students

Exceptions to Minimum Enrollment

Exceptions to the minimum enrollment policy may be made in the following cases:

- 1. Degree Progress:** When cancellation would delay or impede students' progress toward their degree and no alternative classes are available.
- 2. Capstone and Honors Courses:** Courses offering unique, intensive experiences, limited in number, and approved by the dean.
- 3. Lab Sections:** In general, labs that link to a lecture should follow the enrollment minimums based on the number of students enrolled for the lecture section, rather than individual lab offerings. Departments should consider merging low enrollment lab sections based on factors such as physical space and appropriate lab safety. Stand-alone lab sections may run at lower capacities when pedagogically appropriate as determined by the department.
- 4. Core Educational Classes:** Classes with low maximum enrollments for pedagogical reasons, such as composition or introductory language courses, may be canceled if below 2/3 of the class maximum.
- 5. Independent Study Courses:** Courses such as directed study or thesis/dissertation work are exempt from these guidelines.
- 6. Private 1:1 Instruction:** Courses that require 1:1 instruction (e.g. independent study, directed reading, voice instruction, etc.) are exempt from these guidelines.

¹ These guidelines are based on review of guidelines at the following institutions: [U. Georgia](#), [U. Illinois-Chicago](#), and [U. Oregon](#).

² <https://eab.com/resources/blog/unknown/7-behaviors-that-guarantee-inaccurate-course-capacities/>

7. New courses: Courses that are new to the curriculum are exempt from these guidelines for three years.

8. Combined Undergraduate/Graduate Courses: Graduate courses are not under the purview of these guidelines, thus any undergraduate courses that are combined with a graduate course are exempt.

9. Cross-listed and/or Meets with Courses: If individual course sections that are cross-listed and/or meets with fall below the minimums, they are exempt as long as the total enrollment meets the threshold. Courses that meet with an Honors course are exempt.

Course Cancellation Procedures

1. Timing: Classes not meeting minimum enrollment should be canceled *at least one week before the start of the term*.

2. Responsibility: The department head is responsible for cancellations, communication with students, and reassigning faculty duties. This task may be delegated as appropriate.

3. Communication: Students and academic advising staff must be notified immediately upon cancellation. Efforts should be made to help affected students find alternative courses.

4. Faculty Adjustments: Instructors of canceled courses should be reassigned to other teaching duties or given alternative professional assignments in accordance with institutional policies.

Guidelines for Affected Students

1. Alternative Courses: Increase seats in alternative courses (e.g., Fall 2 or Spring 2) and ensure they are scheduled at compatible times for affected students.

2. Graduation Requirements: Ensure that course cancellations do not hinder students' timely progression to graduation. If necessary, approve alternative courses as substitutes.

3. Prerequisite Courses: Work with other departments to find acceptable alternatives for canceled prerequisite courses.

4. Special Considerations: Pay special attention to seniors, international students, students on financial aid, students requiring disability accommodations, any student on a waiting list, and those needing full-time enrollment.

Faculty and Instructor Considerations

1. Reassignments: Strategies may include reassignment to high-demand courses, opening new sections, expanding enrollments, or assigning administrative or research duties.

2. Adjuncts and Instructors: Provide reasonable notice of potential cancellations and explore reassignment options where possible.

3. Teaching Assistants: Strategies may include scheduling additional discussion sections, opening new sections, or using TAs as graders for larger classes.

Planning and Coordination

1. Enrollment Histories: Examine past enrollment data to anticipate and address potential low-enrollment courses proactively.

2. Strategic Scheduling: Use enrollment benchmarks to inform class scheduling and curriculum changes to avoid future cancellations.

3. Collaboration: Work with relevant departments and administrative offices to ensure effective communication and minimize disruption.

For further questions or clarifications, please contact Office of the Registrar; for guidance regarding the guidelines in relation to Policy 6-100, please reach out to the Vice Provost for Student Success.