

Guidelines for Cancellation of Classes due to Low Enrollment

Courses once offered and having enrollees should not be cancelled unless as a last resort. If minimum course enrollment policies for classes with less than a prescribed minimum number of students enrolled are established, this memo presents guidelines to help ensure that the needs of students, faculty, adjuncts, instructors, and teaching assistants are protected. The goal of these guidelines is to encourage better course planning so that low-enrollment courses -- and the practice of cancelling courses -- are rare. Having fixed minimum enrollment requirements is very often detrimental to student learning and progression toward a degree. During the academic year full-time faculty salaries are a fixed cost and cancelling a class may not lead to financial benefits for the institution.

In implementing low-enrollment cancellation policies, colleges, departments, and programs must ensure that these policies do not hinder students' timely progression to graduation nor interferes with students' expectation for full-time enrollment. Colleges, departments, and programs must also ensure that these policies do not threaten the reputation of UA Little Rock as a desired work place for faculty, instructors, adjuncts, and teaching assistants. Careful planning, informed by enrollment histories, is necessary. Examine enrollment histories and anticipate courses likely to be affected. When the potential for low enrollment is identified, increase seats in acceptable alternative courses and hold enough seats to accommodate the students who might register for those potential low-enrollment courses. Take into consideration the times and days that the alternative courses are offered, because many students arrange their work and/or internship schedules around the courses for which they registered, and so these students will have difficulty switching on short notice to alternative courses scheduled at very different times than the cancelled course.

Use a reasonable time frame to determine when to cancel a class and then only when all of the following have been successfully provided.

1. Notify affected students and college/department academic advising staff as soon as the action is taken.
2. Work with the affected students to ensure that they find acceptable alternatives.
3. If cancelled courses are required for graduation and the affected students are nearing graduation but not in their last semester before graduation, ensure that the students can be accommodated in the class the following semester.
4. If cancelled courses are required for graduation and the affected students are in their last semester before graduation, or the students are nearing graduation and cannot be accommodated in the class the following semester without disrupting their path to degree completion, either run the course without regard to minimum enrollment policies or accept alternative courses that fit the affected students' schedule.
5. If cancelled courses are prerequisites for other required courses, either run the class regardless of minimum requirements or accept alternative courses as the prerequisite. If the courses are prerequisite to courses in other departments, notify the other departments as soon as the action is taken and work collaboratively with the other department to the extent possible to identify acceptable alternatives.

All affected students should be accommodated, but colleges and departments must pay special attention to seniors preparing to graduate, international students, students on financial aid, students who need special accommodations for disabilities and might have chosen a class on this basis, and students who require full-time enrollment or who have specific minimum credit hour requirements (e.g., Homeland Security laws require international students to be enrolled full time).

Note that there will inevitably be exceptions to cancelling classes with low enrollment, such as independent studies and practica, and colleges should work with departments to identify policies for such situations.

Colleges and departments must also take into account the effect of low-enrollment cancellations on faculty, instructors, and teaching assistants. Especially for new or specialized elective courses, or courses that have historically had low enrollment, departments should have back-up plans for changing assignments, and such plans should be made known in advance to instructors, faculty, and teaching assistants who might be affected.

For full-time faculty members, accommodations in cases of cancelled courses may include strategies such as:

- Reassignment to a required course that is in high demand
- Opening another section of existing courses
- Expansion of enrollment in another course that the instructor is teaching
- An uncompensated overload in a subsequent semester
- Assignment to administrative, research, or other duties that are normally compensated with course release in the unit

For adjuncts who are hired on a semester or yearly basis, accommodations in cases of cancelled courses may include the same as those for full-time faculty. This will be especially true for those whose performance has been superior. In other cases, when the services of some adjuncts are not needed for any such alternatives, they must be made aware of the enrollment minimum policy and receive reasonable notice if any of their courses are to be canceled. Careful planning of courses is necessary to ensure that such cancellations are kept to a minimum.

For teaching assistants, accommodations in cases of cancelled courses may include strategies such as:

- Scheduling more than one discussion section at the same time so that enrollment can be spread between them.
- Opening new discussion sections of popular courses.
- Expanding the size of a lecture class and using the TA as a grader.

There may be instances in which cancelling a class because of insufficient enrollment is the most sensible course of action, but only after all alternatives have been investigated.