

Online Course Cap

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The SBCC CAC recommends the following target class size for online courses:

- Online classes shall have the same enrollment caps as analogous face-to-face offerings with class caps <50 students. (“Analogous” here refers to face-to-face and online courses with the same course number, course content, and/or similar COR).
- No online class shall exceed a class cap of 50 students.

Justification

Being in line with the Guided Pathways model and approach to education, online courses need to maintain the same rigor and student contact hours as a face to face course. To meet the Student Learning Outcomes outlined for a course, students need to be engaged and challenged in regards to course assignments, and to ensure this engagement, critical analysis of curriculum requires faculty interaction and faculty working with each student by providing meaningful, individualized feedback to each student enrolled in the course. In the effort to increase retention, each student needs to be individually recognized and heard by the instructor. Therefore, the quality of a course and its instruction requires a course cap that is the same as the face to face course or lower than the face to face course cap, if a department can justify the need to lower the course cap due to modality of instruction.

Studies on student success and performance in online instruction has deduced that the two crucial and related variables across disciplines are: 1. Students feeling a sense of belonging in the course (i.e. taking ownership in their own success); 2. Constant, meaningful feedback from both professors and peers. These can only be achieved in a class size of no more than 50, but ideally these studies found the target class size to be between 15 and 30. Taking on 50 is actually a huge compromise for faculty.

Notes Below From Articles

If universities are truly striving for “no significant difference” between traditional courses and online courses, they must cap courses at fewer than 50 students.

Remotely accessible support structures (tutors, resources, office hours)

Institutions need to and support faculty in the digital learning community...giving faculty a voice in key decisions

Investment in training...digital platforms...online infrastructure

Faculty members are often hesitant to try online teaching, but the study found that successful institutions engage senior professors early, take a collaborative approach to decision making,

support strong professional-development programs, and offer incentives like additional pay or course release to help smooth that path.

Table 1 (continued on next page): A survey of prominent studies that address average, optimal, and/or maximum online class sizes in higher education.

Class sizes reported: Average (a), Optimal (o), or max (m)	Class type	Institution studied/ Publication type	Reference	Notes
17-23 (a)	All classes in catalog	University of Phoenix	University of Phoenix (2019)	
<u>Objectionist pedagogy:</u> “no upper limit”, but >30 is “large”. <u>Constructionist pedagogy:</u> ≤20-30 (o)	Various and diverse (college level)	Review paper (i.e., reviews previous reports and peer-reviewe d studies) of courses offered worldwide, from many institutions	Taft et al. 2011	Authors note that Research to date offers “no consensus” on ideal class size

<p>12-21 (a, o)</p>	<p>Various and diverse (college level)</p>	<p>Review paper (i.e., reviews previous reports and peer-reviewed studies) of courses offered worldwide, from many institutions</p>	<p>Arzt (2011)</p>	<p>Author notes that class size is one success factor, and others are important. (see Bettinger and Loeb 2017 for caution regarding traditionally unprepared students in online courses). Complex issue with no clear answer for class size optima.</p>
<p>31 (a), and experimental classes (i.e., treatment groups) of 31(a) plus 10%</p> <p>Research question appears to be: “what is the effect of increasing class sizes by 10%”. Focused on classes of ~31 students</p>	<p>111 different courses (grad and undergrad)</p>	<p>DeVry University (Experiment conducted here included over 100,000 students in 4,000 classes in 111 courses.)</p>	<p>Bettinger et al. 2014</p>	<p>Increasing class size by 10%, from a mean of 31, show “little evidence of effects...for a range of course types”</p>

<u>Online class sizes (a) used by IDEA Center:</u> Small (10-14) Medium (15-34) Large (35-49) Very Large (50+)	US public and private universities	US public and private universities	IDEA Center, as referenced in Benton and Pallett (2013)	
Same as IDEA Center categories above	US public and private universities	US public and private universities	Benton and Pallett (2013)	Research on effect of class size is “equivocal”. Class size can matter, but other factors are also important (student status, motivation for taking class online, etc)

Literature cited

Arzt, J (2011). Online Courses and Optimal Class Size: A Complex Formula. Saint Joseph College. Accessed online 10/30/2019: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED529663.pdf>

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Taft, SH, Perkowski, T, and Martin LS (2011). A Framework for Evaluating Class Size in Online Education. The Quarterly Review of Distance Education 12 (3), 181-197. Accessed online 10/30/2019: <https://digitalcommons.kent.edu/nurspubs/1>

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