

Online Class Size (Course Cap) Recommendation

(Based on Class Size Recommendation Approved by DE Committee April 2008)

Rationale:

Title 5, WASC, ACCJC, and independent research confirm that establishing an online learning community through substantive group/collaborative learning, discussions, and individual learning facilitated via instructor-student interaction is key to student motivation, involvement, and attaining positive learning outcomes in distance education courses.

Ensuring regular effective instructor-student contact guarantees students receive the benefit of the faculty's presence in the online learning environment both as a provider of instructional information and as a facilitator of student learning.

Title 5 Section 55204: "All approved courses offered as distance education shall include *regular effective contact* between instructor and students, through group/collaborative learning, group/individual discussions, or other activities." WASC and ASCCC endorse Title 5 Section 55204.

Title 5 Section 55208: Number of Students - Procedures used for determining the number of students assigned to a course section offered by distance education may include a review by the Curriculum Committee (Walton, James-Hanz, P., et al, 2008).

WASC Red Flag:

[If the] curriculum plan indicates that a large number of students are expected to enroll in each section of an online course this [policy] could compromise the effectiveness of interaction between the students and faculty unless additional provision is made to accommodate large numbers (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Drago and Peltier (2004) concur that one factor recognized to be "significantly and negatively impacted by class size is instructor-student interaction (31)."

Fully online and hybrid courses which do not incorporate WASC and Title 5 regular effective contact through group/collaborative learning, substantive discussion, and individual learning facilitated via substantive instructor-student interaction curriculum components are not accreditation exemplars of PCC.

Online and Hybrid Recommendations:

1. In response to Title 5 regulations and WASC guidelines regarding instructor-student interaction, the pedagogical rationale for capping class size is to make allowances for continuous substantive communication. Therefore, optimally facilitated *fully online courses* require quantity and quality (frequency and mode

of instructor-student contact) with section sizes small enough to promote and meet positive learning outcomes.

Recommendation 1a:

The Distance Education Committee recommends that for the above reasons, a course enrollment cap of 30 for PCC fully online courses be established unless the maximum for a face-to-face equivalent course is less than 30. In these cases, the face-to-face maximum enrollment will be used.

2. *Hybrid courses* are expected to include and ensure regular effective contact based on a mutual effort between faculty and students. Title 5 Subsection (a) underscores:

...[it is] the responsibility of the instructor in a DE course to initiate regular contact with enrolled students to verify their participation and performance status. The use of the term *regular effective contact* in this context suggests that students should have frequent opportunities to ask questions and receive answers from the instructor of record.

Hybrid courses include the combination of scheduled reduced face-to-face instruction with computer-based learning and other instructional technologies. Consequently, frequency and mode of faculty-student continuous substantive communication may vary and individual hybrid course curriculum should be assessed to insure optimal Title 5 regulation compliance and WASC guidelines covering continuous substantive faculty-student communication.

Recommendation 1b:

The Distance Education Committee recommends that maximum enrollment in a hybrid course, ensuring regular effective faculty-student contact, should not exceed the face-to-face maximum and preferably the enrollment should be capped at 30. Larger hybrid course sections should be compensated by additional credit in load assignment in the same manner as face-to-face sections.

Conversely, when regular effective faculty-student contact is not evident in the course design, the hybrid course is exempt from the above recommendation and the course enrollment cap will remain identical to its equivalent PCC face-to-face course.

Resources:

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (August 2008). Distance Learning Manual. Accessed 10/5/09. http://www.accjc.org/pdf/Distance_Learning_Manual_August_2008.pdf

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Drago, W & Peltier, J. (2004). The effects of class size on effectiveness of online courses. Accessed 11/15/09. Retrieved from
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Recommendation Approved by the Distance Education Committee – December 8, 2009
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Recommendation Sent on to the Faculty Association for negotiation – April 6, 2010