

General Education Course Cap Guidelines and Policies

A “Course Cap” refers to a course’s capacity—the minimum or maximum number of seats available in a given course section. A Course Cap policy is designed to 1) provide adequate seat access for students, 2) provide equitable workloads for instructors, and 3) reflect appropriate pedagogical approaches. At PLU, classroom size often dictates the maximum number of students for a particular course, but we also prioritize smaller class sizes as a foundation to our belief that relationships are central to learning. Further, professional organizations often recommend particular class sizes in relation to best practices in a particular field. Wherever possible, we try to adhere to these professional standards.

Importantly, we must strike the right balance between pedagogical approach and seat needs across the university. We know the teaching practices that best promote student learning: purposeful faculty interaction with students, opportunity for active and engaged learning, meaningful assignments with clear expectations, and regular occasion for discussion and reflection. Additionally, research is demonstrating the centrality of inclusive teaching practices. All of these standards can be met in small and large teaching contexts.

General education course caps are set by the Provost’s Office in consultation with college deans.

The Provost’s Office will close courses that do not meet the minimum enrollment threshold to “run.” No regular gen ed course with fewer than 6 students will be allowed to run (rare exceptions may be granted by the Provost’s Office). Gen ed courses with 6 to 10 students enrolled will be evaluated in consultation with the college dean and department chair.

General Education Course Caps

Our common standard for courses carrying general education elements is as follows:

100 and 200 level general education courses = *minimum* 30 students

300 and 400 level general education courses = *minimum* 25 students

Common exceptions to this policy include:

FYEP/WRIT 101 and IHON 111/112 = *minimum* 16 students

FYEP 190 = *minimum* 22 students

IHON 200 and 300-level courses = *minimum* 18 students

Writing, Performance, and Studio courses (all levels) = *minimum* 15 students for a 4 credit course

100 and 200-level world language courses = *minimum* 20 students

100 and 200-level mathematics courses = *minimum* 28 students

Lab courses, or courses with accompanying labs = variable based on limitations related to lab space and/or fieldwork requirements

Activity Courses (FTWL) = *minimum* 30 students; limited exceptions based on the nature and location of the activity

Music Ensembles and Choirs = variable based on the nature of the program

Capstone courses = *minimum* 15 students for a 4 credit course

Study away courses are excluded from this policy. Course caps will be set by the course instructor(s), department chair, and the Wang Center for Global and Community Engaged Education.

On Writing or Performance and Studio courses

In Performance and Studio courses that count for AR, “making” art will be at the center of the curriculum. These are courses about learning how to draw, paint, sing, play an instrument, create media, etc. In these courses, students learn a creative process under the guidance of the instructor, often in collaboration and dialogue with peers. Elements of performance and/or artistic creation are central to the learning outcomes of the course.

In writing courses that count for WR, writing is the subject of the course. In a writing course, emphasis is placed on strategies for effective communication and the mastery of writing conventions. Students undertake a slow, recursive, and revision-focused writing process.

Importantly, a writing course is different from a writing-intensive course, where students may do a great deal of writing, but this writing is mobilized toward the learning of course content. The difference can be understood as a difference between a course focused on “learning to write” as opposed to a course focused on “writing to learn.” In a writing course (“learning to write”), writing process and convention are central to the learning outcomes of the class. In a “writing to learn” course, learning goals can typically be achieved via alternative assignments.

Exceptions to the general education course cap standards

Requests for exceptions to course caps should come through the dean and/or chair of a department (not through individual faculty members) directly to the Office of the Provost. Adjustments to caps for courses carrying general education elements should be approved by the director of the core curriculum.

Requests should be supported by a concrete rationale for one of the exceptions described above (or some other exception based on unique circumstances). Exception requests must include a clear and specific explanation for how the combination of content *and* pedagogical approach necessitate that the particular course is different from other similar courses and should have fewer students.

Exception requests must be received and approved by the time the schedule is released to departments for final review (i.e., when the scheduler returns the completed schedule to departments for final review).