

## Student/Faculty Ratio Best Practices

Northern Arizona University (NAU) began as a teachers college and has a long-standing tradition of pedagogical excellence as a liberal arts institution. Relationships between students and faculty have been central to that tradition of excellence. More broadly, such relationships have been shown to be essential for student success, especially for the marginalized and under-represented populations that NAU is committed to serving.

As it stands, NAU offers courses with a range of student/faculty/TA ratios, enrollment capacities, and enrollment thresholds. Such ratios, capacities, and thresholds have been determined partly on the basis of economical considerations and partly in order to meet pedagogical goals. Here, we affirm the importance of striking the right balance in 1) deferring to the pedagogical expertise of faculty members with respect to ratios, capacities, and thresholds, which is by and large consistent with students achieving success in and after college, and 2) keeping NAU financially solvent.

Student/faculty/TA ratios deeply influence pedagogical methods. Maintaining consistent and appropriate ratios is important for pedagogical effectiveness, student success, and student retention, all of which NAU has renewed its commitment to in the noted Strategic Roadmap objectives.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the pedagogy of *High Contact* courses, those courses with extensive feedback to students and/or extensive one-on-one interactions with students, is particularly impacted by changes upward in enrollment capacities.

As such, and in keeping with the stated Strategic Roadmap objectives:

- 1) In consultation with instructors, units should develop guidelines for student/faculty/TA ratios, enrollment capacities, and enrollment thresholds in relation to specific course types, e.g. junior level writing courses, studio courses, capstone courses.
- 2) Such guidelines should be developed from relevant disciplinary/association recommendations (attach examples?), and sensitive to disciplinary practices.
- 3) Such guidelines should be specific to course circumstances, particularly in determining enrollment thresholds for allowing courses to be offered: one size does not fit all.
- 4) Units should be provided support and resources to develop unit guidelines related to student/faculty/TA ratios and enrollment thresholds.
- 5) Changes in student/faculty ratios and enrollment thresholds should be carefully considered in consultation with the instructor, the chair/director, and any other relevant faculty members.
- 6) If changes to student/faculty/TA ratios are determined to be appropriate and pedagogically viable, instructors should be provided adequate time to adjust course activities and assignments to meet pedagogical goals, normally a full semester.

### GATHERING Info: Student/Faculty Ratio Survey

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<sup>1</sup> **Equitable Student Access, Momentum, Attainment, and Postgraduation Success**

Objective 3:

NAU will improve retention rates with evidence-based approaches that are tailored to student needs, increase the number of high-quality credentials awarded, and reduce attainment gaps across student populations

**Inclusive Academic Excellence**

Objective 3:

NAU students will participate in high-impact learning opportunities that promote academic excellence, build mentorship relationships that sustain their momentum, and prepare them for postgraduate success.

Who will receive the survey: All faculty

Who will it come from: Provost's Office in conjunction with Senate and the Teaching Academy

Purpose:

The purpose of this survey is to gather information about student/faculty ratios across all academic units at NAU, including faculty concerns about student/faculty ratios. A review of the survey results will help the Council on Learning, the Teaching Academy, and the Faculty Senate develop a common language around certain types of courses that have a level of high contact with students. For example, those courses with extensive feedback to students and/or extensive one-on-one interactions with students.

Preliminary Questions: (drop down menus)

Indicate your College

Indicate your Department/School

Indicate your Program

Survey questions:

1) Do you teach courses that you would consider to be high-contact? (Courses with extensive individual feedback, critique and/or extensive one-on-one interactions on course activities and assignments).

- Yes
- No

{ If NOT the the survey says "Thank you for your participation..." , and stops }

2) Please include the course titles and number of students in these courses. We recognize some large enrolled courses require high contact.

3) How would you describe the different kinds of high-contact courses in your discipline?

- Studio
- Capstone
- Practicum
- Writing Intensive
- Lab
- Fieldwork
- Service Learning
- Other (please specify as many as needed): [    field to specify    ]

4) And, what should their course capacities be for achieving the pedagogical outcomes?

- 5) Do you have concerns about student/faculty ratios in these courses?
  - Yes
  - No
- 6) If so, please describe.
  
- 7) Do you have concerns about the trajectory of faculty/student ratios in relation to your pedagogical practices or in your program?
  - Yes
  - No
- 8) If so, please describe.
  
- 9) If you would like to share, please briefly describe your course specific pedagogy.