EAB

Academic Performance Solutions

CASE STUDY

How One University Achieved Outsized Results with New Class Size Policy

- **About:** Private institution with an undergraduate enrollment of 3,000 students.
- **Challenge:** Facing enrollment declines in 2016-17, the leadership team believed this trend would continue due to shifts in state policy – which translated into increased pressure to manage costs.
- **Solution:** The planning team leveraged Academic Performance Solutions (APS) reports to identify savings in instructional costs by updating their faculty payroll policies and practices.
- **Impact:** A decision to increase the minimum class size for the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 terms resulted in $900K in savings from reassigning faculty workloads.

Impact Highlights

$900K

Instructional cost savings in AY2017

APS Insights Kickstart Cost-Savings Discussions

Attended 2016 APS National Summit

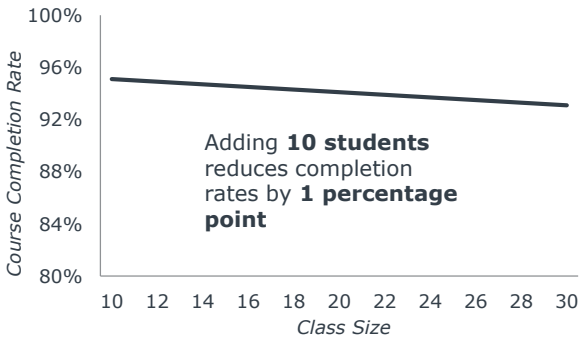
- University leadership attended two-day gathering of APS collaborative
- Included thought-provoking research, apples-to-apples benchmarks, facilitated networking sessions, and real-time engagement with the APS platform

Class Size Insights Sparked Internal Discussions

- Analysis of the average contribution margin across the collaborative showed that classes of 6-10 students are more likely to break even when compared to classes with 2-5 students
- Additional APS insights showed that class size has a minimal effect on student success

Class Size and Course Completion Rate[1,2]

n=78,703 sections



1) The line chart depicts the linear regression results with institution-fixed effects by institution and department in the 2011-2015 academic years across sections with a class size of 11 to 31 students, excluding summer and online sections.
2) $R^2 = .2$

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Redefining Expectations for Low Enrollment Courses

Reexamined Existing Payroll Policy

The University Faculty Payroll Policies and Practices stated, "The University does not provide full compensation to faculty for low enrollment courses (e.g., courses with fewer than five students enrolled) or include them as part of faculty teaching loads."

1

Changed Definition of "Low Enrollment"

Academic Leadership Team approved change of low enrollment from five to six students based on APS benchmarks

2

Updated Payout Protocol

The policy clarifies the new faculty workload calculations and payout for teaching a course with less than six students

3

Reduced Adjunct Hours

The policy states that adjunct faculty are not permitted to teach low enrollment courses

Rolled Out New Policy

- Deans and department chairs were responsible for implementing the change and conveying it to faculty
- They also examined enrollment histories and anticipated courses likely to have low enrollments, proactively increasing seats in alternative courses to accommodate students who might register for the potential low-enrollment courses

Impact Over Two Semesters

Collapsed Small Sections

70

Sections with fewer than six students enrolled one week before term start were collapsed.

Reallocated Faculty Workload

$900K[1]

Instructional cost savings from reassigning faculty workloads away from courses with fewer than six students.

No Adverse Impact to Student and Faculty Satisfaction

Student Accommodations

Allows for flexibility to support timely progression to graduation and asks department chairs to work with impacted students to ensure they find acceptable alternatives.

Faculty Accommodations

Encourages department chairs to consider the effect of low enrollment cancellations on faculty load and compensation, creating back-up plans for changing teaching assignments that are communicated in advance to faculty who might be affected.

Exceptions

Provides guidance for seeking temporary exemption from the policy, such as new courses, as well as a list of permanently exempt courses, such as Music Lessons.

1) Member planning team estimates faculty payroll savings to be $1,000 per credit hours

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