

At the Conference on Acceleration last week, I was asked many times about the decision to raise our class size at CCBC for the small developmental class from eight to ten, so I thought I'd take a minute to explain that decision here.

First, a little discussion of why we originally set the class size at eight. In fall of 2006, as we were forming our plans for ALP, we had no idea how successful it would be, but we knew that our goal was to make a dramatic improvement in the success rates of our students. We also knew that small class size was one of the features we thought would make a major contribution to success. So, to maximize our chances of succeeding, we proposed the smallest class size we thought was feasible: eight.

In order to keep the class size at eight, we had to agree that faculty would receive just two hours of load even though the class met three hours a week, since that was the point at which the college would break even on costs.

Over the years, as we scaled up the program (in 2011-12, we ran 120 sections), we had to depend more and more on our hard working adjunct faculty. For adjuncts, working hard to bring in enough income to support themselves and their families, receiving just two hours of credit for three hours of work was particularly onerous. It became more and more difficult to hire enough faculty to teach all the sections of ALP.

At the same time, as we come to our fifth year of ALP, we are thinking that our original decision to propose a class size of eight was perhaps overly conservative. So we have proposed, and our administration has approved, raising the class size in our small developmental ALP class from eight to ten and raising the compensation for faculty from two credits to three.

We will pilot a handful of sections with class size of ten this fall to make sure it doesn't have a dire effect on success rates. If it does not, we will begin offering all developmental ALP sections with a class size of ten in spring of 2013.

We do think small class size is one of the features of ALP that contributes to its dramatic success. Sometimes, we are asked how large the sections could be before we would lose the effect on success rates. Of course, we don't know for sure. Our guess is twelve is about the limit, but some schools are offering ALP with significantly larger sections. We look forward to hearing about their results to see whether we have been too conservative.

We do continue to think that another limit is the size of the first-year composition course. We do think, to insure the integrity of that course, that developmental students should not make up more than half of that class.