

Assessment Note

Office of Academic Assessment and Institutional Research
Ball State University

AAIR No. MIS-AI-2005

Class Sizes of First-Year Students

Ball State offers a wide variety of courses and learning environments for its first-year students such as Freshman Connections, the Honors College, and the Core Curriculum. We decided to explore the issue of class size using first-time, first-year students at Ball State who completed the Fall 2004 semester (n=3,339). For every first-year student, we calculated the percentage of their credit hours that they spent in courses of different sizes. We focused on courses that were at least two credit hours and determined the total number of students (both first-year students and other students) in each section. Small classes were defined as having 25 students or less, medium classes had between 26 and 69 students, and large classes had 70 students or more. We then examined the class size patterns in students' schedules and the relationship of those patterns to academic outcomes. This note summarizes our findings.

1. First-year students have a variety of experiences with regards to class size.

An overall look at the make up of first-year student schedules with regards to class size found considerable variety. Approximately 37 percent of students had at least 60 percent of their credit hours in large-sized classes (at least 70 students). Because another 17 percent had primarily large and medium-sized courses, it would appear that the majority of first-year students are spending a significant proportion of their class time in large and medium-sized courses. Nine percent of first-year students had at least 60 percent of their credit hours in small classes (25 students or less). Eight percent had schedules that could not be clearly categorized, meaning they had a variety of class sizes.

Table 1 - Class Size

	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Primarily Large Classes	1,264	37.2
Primarily Large and Medium Classes	560	16.8
Primarily Medium Classes	77	2.3
Primarily Medium and Small Classes	864	25.9
Primarily Small Classes	307	9.2
Other	267	8.0

2. Class sizes were related to academic outcomes.

As seen in Table 2, the mean grade point average of students with primarily large classes (those with at least 70 students) was 2.49. Students with primarily medium and small classes had a mean grade point average of 2.85, and students with primarily small classes had a mean grade point average of 3.07.

Retention rates also varied depending on the proportions of different sized classes in students' schedules. Approximately 87 percent of students in primarily large classes and 89 percent of students in primarily large and medium-sized classes were retained to Spring 2005. Yet the retention rates for students in primarily medium and small classes and for those in primarily small classes were 94 percent and 93 percent, respectively.

It should be noted that 30 percent of the students in primarily small classes were students in the Honors College. The Honors students would be expected to perform better academically and to be retained at higher rates.

Table 2 - Outcomes

	<i>Mean Fall04 GPA</i>	<i>% Retained to Spring05</i>
Primarily Large Classes	2.49	86.9
Primarily Large and Medium Classes	2.61	89.1
Primarily Medium Classes	2.72	80.5
Primarily Medium and Small Classes	2.85	93.6
Primarily Small Classes*	3.07	92.5
Other	2.76	89.9

** Please note that 30 percent of the students with primarily small classes were students in the Honors College. This percentage was much higher than the population as a whole (10%) and may have impacted the grade point average and retention results.*

For additional information about this study, please contact the Office of Academic Assessment and Institutional Research.

Sherry Woosley, December 2005