

**Austin Peay State University (APSU)**  
**Faculty Senate**  
**Academic White Committee Report**

**Interim report due 1/29/26**

**Final report due 3/26/2026**

**Academic White Committee, 2025-2026**

- Jane Semler (Chair), College of Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics
- Charles Gonzalez, College of Education
- Matt Hampton, College of Business
- Jessica Morris, College of Arts and Letters
- Tyler Nolting, College of Behavioral & Health Sciences

**Abstract**

The Academic White Committee was charged with examining current course cap practices at Austin Peay State University and developing a transparent, data-informed framework to guide future decisions related to course enrollment limits. Building on and further illustrating prior work from the 2024–2025 Academic Red Committee, the committee reviewed institutional data, pedagogical best practices, and existing policy structures to identify common challenges, including inconsistencies across course sections, perceived inequities in enrollment distribution, and concerns related to faculty workload and student access. As a primary outcome of this work, the committee developed a standardized decision-making flow chart and accompanying procedural guidance to assist department chairs and academic units in evaluating whether to adjust course caps or add sections. This framework is intended to promote consistency, support high-quality instruction, incorporate discipline-specific needs, and improve transparency in course scheduling decisions. The committee recommends adoption of this framework as a practical tool to supplement existing university policy and to support equitable and sustainable enrollment management practices.

**Committee Charge**

The committee will examine the rationale for current caps, their impact on pedagogical effectiveness, student access to courses, and faculty workload. The goal is to propose a data-informed and transparent framework for setting and adjusting course caps to support high-quality instruction and equitable student outcomes.

**Considerations**

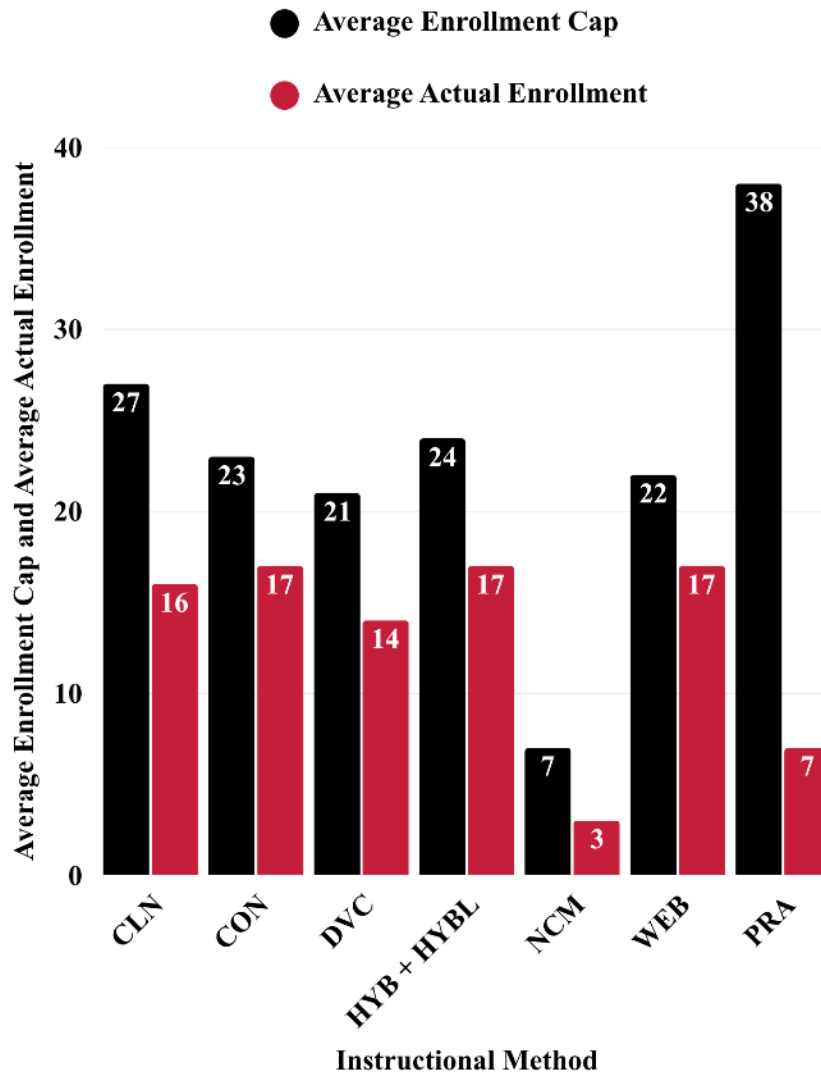
- The committee charge is a continuation of the charge completed by the 2024-2025 Academic Red Committee.
- Based on the report from the 2024-2025 Academic Red Committee, the following foundational information has been adopted:
  - APSU’s course caps are generally aligned with those of peer institutions.
  - APSU’s course caps are generally at or below discipline-determined best practices.
  - The Crafton Hills Community College procedure for establishing and modifying course caps may be a good framework from which to develop a similar procedure to modify course caps at APSU.
- The committee identified the following key problems which we hope to solve by instituting a procedure for modifying course caps:
  - Lack of alignment of course caps across sections of the same course.
  - Perception that popular sections are allowed to fill at a higher enrollment at the expense of less popular sections of the same course.

- Perception that faculty are not involved in the setting of course caps, and that course caps are set inappropriately for the discipline, instructional method, or other best practice factors.
- Compensation for highly enrolled courses is not aligned with the workload increase and should be more finely tuned. (For example: extra compensation for every 10 additional students over the established course cap, rather than the current workload policy of +1 WLC for > 60 students in an undergraduate lecture course.)
- The committee notes that APSU follows Policy 2:001 to establish course caps when a new course is introduced. Therefore, the committee focused on creating a process for course cap evaluation and modification. This procedure would augment Policy 2:001.
- The committee focused only on undergraduate courses as graduate course caps are largely dictated by discipline, accreditation, and enrollment and are less likely to produce the pressure points identified above.
- Finally, the committee suggests revising the course minimum enrollment requirements currently in place (minimum 15 students) to reflect the best practices described in detail in the 2024-2025 Faculty Senate Academic Red committee report which are summarized below.

**Review of previous work completed by the 2024-2025 Faculty Senate Academic Red Committee**

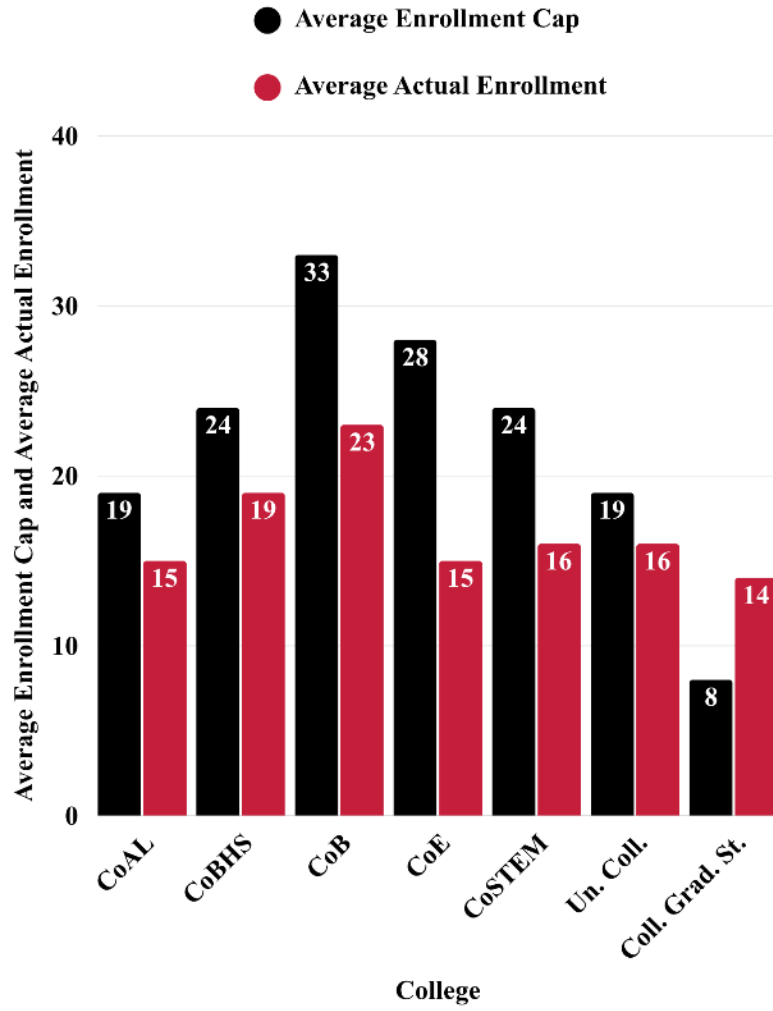
<b>Instructional method</b>	<b>Recommended course cap (undergraduate students)</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Online learning	20	
Science laboratory courses	15-25	Safety, equipment, complex problem-solving and discussion
Reading-writing intensive humanities	10-20	Facilitate discussion, analyze texts, writing workshops, individualized feedback
Research Methods in Social Sciences	10-20	personalized instruction on research design, data analysis, and ethics
Clinical Practice for Professional Programs	8-10	Accreditation dependent
Studio-based Learning in the Arts	5-15	individual instruction, hands-on learning, critiques, rehearsals, space and equipment

**Table 1: APSU's Average Enrollment Cap and Average Actual Enrollment by Instructional Method**

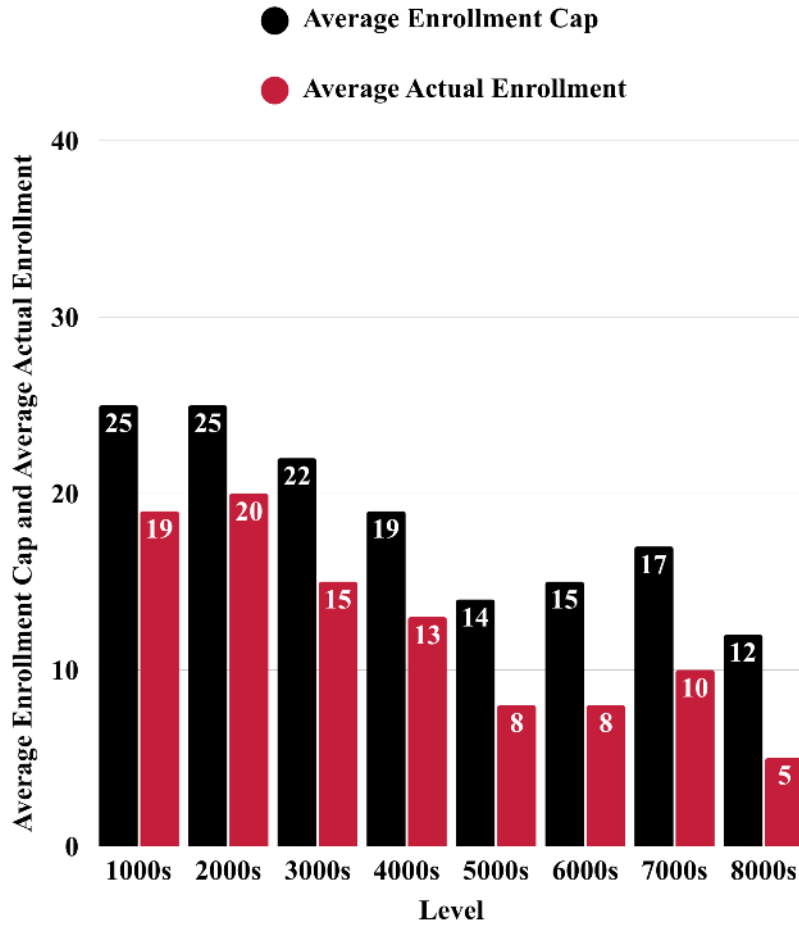


- CLN = Clinical
- CON = Conventional face-to-face
- DVC = Synchronous Desktop Video Conferencing
- HYB = Hybrid/Blended & HYBL = Hybrid Light
- NCM = Non-conventional Media (ex. Private lesson)
- PRA = Clinical Practicum
- WEB = Online/Web

**Table 2: APSU's Average Enrollment Cap and Average Actual Enrollment by College**



**Table 3: APSU's Average Enrollment Cap and Average Actual Enrollment by Level**



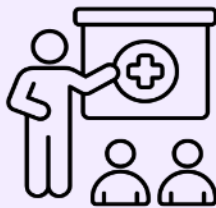
# A SUMMARY OF BEST PRACTICES FOR CLASS SIZES

(Information from the 2024-2025 Academic Red Committee Report)



## CLINICAL COURSES

- Standard is 6–10 students per instructor; local Tennessee practice and NP oversight suggest 6–8 students for clinical sessions.
- Caps are primarily driven by facility constraints and accreditation.



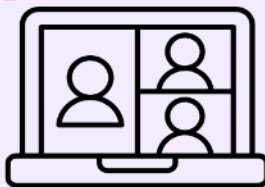
## LABORATORY COURSES

- A faculty member or TA should supervise no more than 25 students.
- APSU Radiologic Tech labs are smaller for safety/equipment (as low as 6 per lab activity).



## ONLINE/STUDIO-BASED COURSES

- Recommended max is 20 for undergraduate, 8–15 for graduate, and 5–15 for studio-based courses.
- Small sizes boost engagement and instructor–student interaction, especially below 14, where instructor participation is key.



## WRITING/LITERATURE COURSES

- Writing: No more than 15–20 per section, 60 students total for all courses an instructor teaches per term.
- Literature: 30–35 per section (with assistant help); writing-intensive lit: max 20–25; honors/research seminars: 15.



## WORLD LANGUAGE COURSES

- No more than 15 students per section for optimal communication and feedback.
- Larger sections require extra support for instructors to maintain pedagogy.



## OTHER OBSERVATIONS

- APSU and its peers often lack strict, centralized cap policies—departments set their own caps based on discipline, pedagogy, room, and accreditation.
- APSU's own cap structures generally align with these national standards, though room for improvement exists.



- The committee recommends that department curriculum committees review course caps on a three-year cycle. Courses may be staggered for initial and subsequent reviews.
- The committee recommends implementation of the flow chart shown in Appendix B or the Interactive flow chart in Appendix C as a guide to this scheduled review.
- Departments may encounter challenges at various steps as they work through this flow chart. These challenges should be used as opportunities to collaborate with colleagues to develop solutions tailored to the discipline and to the relevant student population. Each step should be fully resolved by department faculty before moving forward. The department's collective expertise is the best guide for determining what works best for each unique context.

## References

Austin Peay State University (2023, May 12). *Austin Peay State University. 2:001 Curricular Development and Modification Approval*. <https://www.apsu.edu/policy/numerical-policy.php>.

Faculty Senate Academic Red Committee. (2024, November). *Course caps review according to different pedagogies such as writing intensive, reading intensive, math, lecture, technology using both regional and national comparators*. [Unpublished committee report]. Faculty Senate, Austin Peay State University.

## Appendix A: Procedure for Modifying Course Caps or Increasing Sections

### I. Definitions

- a. Course Caps mean the maximum number of students that can be enrolled in a course, as listed on the Course Bulletin.
- b. Sections are the number of different offerings of the same course, often provided in different modalities and/or different days or times of day.

### II. Factors in determining if the course cap should be raised

- a. *Physical Capacity*: seats cannot be added if the room is already at maximum fire code capacity. Sometimes a class can be assigned to a larger room, but this is not always an option.
- b. *Effective Teaching Capacity*: each department may determine their own pedagogical or instructional effectiveness guidelines. Dialogic, writing-intensive, or “lab” courses may require lower student-teacher ratios to allow for interaction, grading workloads, or quality instruction.
- c. *Faculty Motivation*: when it is not feasible to add a section, raising the cap may be an option, if the existing faculty/TA can handle the increased workload.
- d. *Prerequisites and Prioritization*: Certain majors may reserve seats for seniors or other priority registrants who may need the course to stay on track with their academic plan.

### III. Factors in determining if the number of sections should be increased

- a. *Availability of Faculty, Instructional Staff, or TA*: Adding a new section of a course is determined on the number of instructors or TAs available to a unit.
- b. *Scheduling*: Adding more sections means finding time and physical space (unless sections are not taught on-ground).
- c. *Institutional or Fiscal Responsibility*: the budget of the university, college, and unit should be considered when increasing the number of sections of a course. The student-to-faculty ratio and support of high-demand majors should also be a consideration, especially when weighing the need for adjunct or tenure-track faculty.

### Request to Modify the Course Cap or Number of Sections

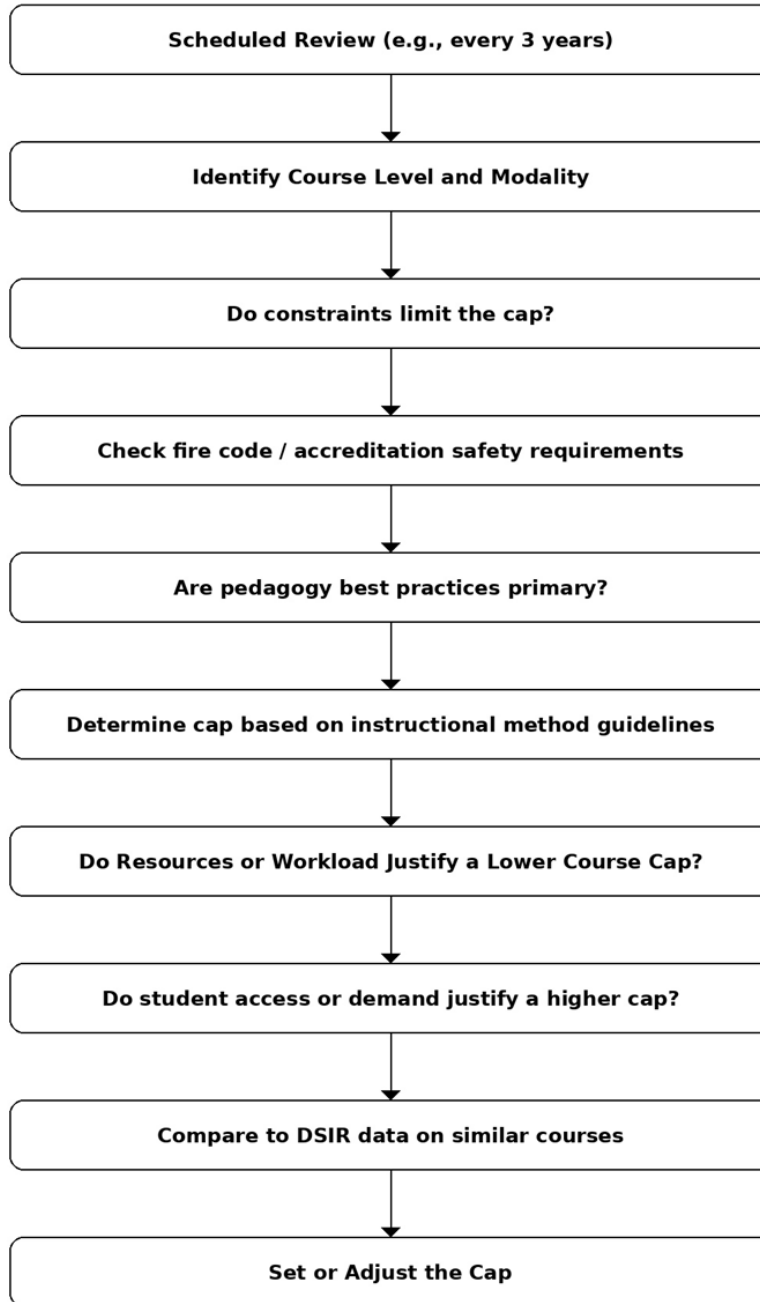
Modifications to the number of seats or number of sections of a course needs to be justified with *at least one* of the below criteria, and it is recommended that *two or more* of the above factors be included in the rationalization.

- A. Course Modality
  - a. Lab vs. lecture vs hybrid, etc.
- B. Instructional Delivery
  - a. Nature of classroom activities, nature of instructor-student interactions, use of collaboration, etc.
- C. Student Assessment
  - a. Types/amounts of individual assignments, projects, papers
  - b. Methods of student assessment, feedback, and evaluation
  - c. Program- or Course-level SLOs
- D. New Course within major
  - a. Should be comparable to other courses (SLOs, topics/scope, assignments, assessment, pedagogy, etc.).

## Appendix B: Flow Chart for Modifying Course Caps or Increasing Sections

How to Use This Flowchart:

This flow chart outlines the process for reviewing and approving course enrollment caps. A structured review of enrollment caps is designed to promote consistency, transparency, and equity across courses. All reviews and resulting recommendations should be completed in accordance with APSU Policy 2:001 to ensure consistency and compliance with institutional guidelines.



Below are the descriptions that should be visible when hovering over each step in the flow chart.

### **Scheduled Review (Every 3 Years)**

Departments should utilize an internal committee to conduct a scheduled review of course caps to ensure alignment with instructional capacity, student demand, and academic quality. It is recommended that departments use their curriculum committee for this review, as it provides appropriate faculty oversight and documentation. Monitor outcomes of course cap updates and repeat this review on a regular schedule (e.g., every three years) to ensure updates and consistent practices.

### **Identify Course Level and Modality**

This step evaluates key course characteristics that influence appropriate enrollment caps, including course level (1000–8000) and instructional method (e.g., CON, WEB, HYB, CLN, PRA). Departments should also compare the current enrollment cap to historical actual enrollment using DSIR data tables. The Faculty Senate Academic Red Committee Report provides these categories along with APSU's established norms to support consistent and data-informed decisions.

### **Do Constraints Limit the Cap?**

The committee must consider constraints that influence course enrollment caps, including physical space (classroom size, seating layouts, lab stations, and safety limits), technology and support resources (LMS capacity, software, instructional support), and fire code and accreditation safety requirements. Enrollment caps must not exceed fire code limits, and when these constraints require a lower cap, that cap should be adopted unless a clearly justified exception is approved.

### **Check fire code/accreditation/safety Requirements**

Fire code, accreditation, and safety requirements provide hard or near-hard limits on enrollment. The attached Faculty Senate Academic Red Committee Report guidelines specify discipline-specific caps, such as clinical courses (6–10), lab sciences ( $\leq 25$ ), writing-intensive courses (ideal 15; max 20), studio courses (5–15), and online courses (~20 undergraduate; 8–15 graduate). Enrollment caps must not exceed fire code limits, and when these constraints require a lower cap, that cap should be adopted unless a clearly justified exception is approved.

### **Are Pedagogical Best Practices Considered?**

Does the course require substantial individualized feedback or rely on interactive methods such as discussion/dialogue, collaborative work, workshops, labs, or writing-intensive projects, teacher

led/student led, experiential learning, etc.? Does course pedagogy require a change in cap size versus standard lecture-style courses?

If YES → use Faculty Senate Academic Red Report guideline ranges (generally 10–20 students).

If NO → proceed to the next step.

### **Determine Cap Based on Instruction Method Guidelines**

The attached Faculty Senate Academic Red Committee Report guidelines provide suggested discipline-specific caps, such as clinical courses (6–10), lab sciences ( $\leq 25$ ), writing-intensive courses (ideal 15; max 20), studio courses (5–15), and online courses (~20 undergraduate; 8–15 graduate). Adjust caps as needed to maintain instructional quality, engagement, and modality-specific best practices. Departments may adjust caps on individual department-wide standards.

### **Do Resources or Workload Justify a Lower Course Cap?**

Consider student and faculty workload, including grading, feedback, supervision, and interaction needs, availability or use of TAs/lab assistants, as well as required equipment and resources (labs, software, technology, instructional support) and equitable student access to these resources.

### **Do Student Access or Demand Justify a Higher Cap?**

Evaluate whether current caps support student access and timely progression, maintain balanced section availability, and ensure students can enroll in required courses. Consider whether courses regularly fill to capacity, and adjust caps to balance demand with instructional quality and resource availability.

### **Compare to DSIR Data on Similar Courses**

Faculty should compare DSIR data on similar courses to inform enrollment cap decisions. Review historical enrollment, section sizes, and trends in student demand to ensure caps are consistent, data-driven, and aligned with institutional norms.

### **Set or Adjust the Cap**

Establish the final enrollment cap using all data and constraints (course level, modality, pedagogy, workload, resources, student access, DSIR trends). Document the rationale and ensure alignment with APSU policy and Faculty Senate Academic Red Committee Report guidelines.

## Appendix C: Interactive Flow Chart for Modifying Course Caps or Increasing Sections

### How to Navigate the Process:

- **Sequential Progression:** Begin at Step 1 and work your way down. The flowchart is organized hierarchically, ensuring that "hard" limits—such as fire codes and safety protocols—are addressed before flexible considerations, such as student demand.
- **Interactive Decision Nodes:** When you encounter a decision block, click YES or NO. This will instantly update the Guidance Panel on the right with specific prompts and policy context tailored to that choice.
- **Active Documentation:** As you click through, use the information displayed in the right-hand panel as a template for your meeting minutes. For instance, if you select "YES" for pedagogical constraints, the panel provides the rationale language needed to justify a lower cap.
- **Reference Tools:** Use the integrated Reference Boxes located within the flow; these provide the official APSU guideline ranges for different course types, such as Writing-Intensive or Lab Sciences, so you don't have to search through external reports.
- **Refine and Reset:** If the discussion shifts or you need to evaluate a different course modality, simply click Reset Roadmap to clear your selections and start fresh.

 [\[Access the Interactive Enrollment Cap Review Flowchart Here\]](#)

**Additional Guidance:** This tool is intended to serve as a structured agenda for departmental discussion. By working through these steps collectively, departments can ensure that enrollment caps are set with a high degree of internal consistency. We recommend recording the specific rationales generated during this process to maintain a clear departmental history, which is invaluable for future reviews, staffing plans, and internal quality assessments.