This is a follow-up to the “Class Sizes” memo of March 9, 2009 to clarify its interpretation.

As stated in that memo, it remains important that our teaching resources be deployed efficiently and effectively if the University is to fulfill its mission as an educational institution of the highest quality. This necessarily involves allocation of these resources in equitable, pedagogically sound ways with the interests of students in mind. The most effective way of achieving this is to capitalize on the University of Waterloo’s traditional collegial decision-making capacities: effective decision making at the department/school level, cooperation among academic units, and between academic units and the higher levels of administration.

Under Policy 40, it is the role of the Chair to determine equitable workloads for faculty members, including teaching assignments, and nothing in the previous memo should be read in a way that conflicts with that policy. The intention was to draw attention to the financial difficulties for the University that attend the consistent offering of classes with very small enrolments. Decisions about course offerings and teaching assignments at the departmental level should be sensitive to these constraints.

While the members of Deans’ Council are aware that there can be special circumstances that can justify the offering of small classes, the previous memo was intended to communicate that such classes can only be afforded in special circumstances – hence it suggested a default presupposition that such classes should not be offered on a consistent basis. Just as Chairs determine teaching loads, it is the role of the Deans to allocate teaching resources among the academic units in a way that is fair, efficient and pedagogically sound, and within the resource constraints the Faculty faces. Therefore, departments that need, for sound pedagogical reasons, to offer small classes should expect to be asked to justify those offerings to the Dean, and we all must recognize that Faculties may face difficult choices if the available teaching resources make it impossible to continue to offer all the small courses deemed pedagogically important by Departments.
Chairs, curriculum committees, directors of cross-disciplinary programs, and faculty councils are encouraged to be creative and proactive in designing programs to make our use of teaching resources both cost- and pedagogically effective.