Special Report

The Official Dictionary of Class Programming

A standardized set of definitions and terms used in programming and marketing classes for adults

LERN

"Information that Works"

Active Classes

This is the number of classes actually held in a session or year.

Annual

A twelve-month period. There is no standard year for class programming. Some programs measure a "fiscal year," while others measure a "calendar year" from January through December.

Annual Enrollments/Registrations

Annual enrollments/registrations is the total number of registrations for a program for a twelve month period. Do not include registrations or refunded registrations for canceled classes, only those who registered for active classes.

Average Class Fee

The average class fee is the average fee charged to participants for a single class. It is important in analysis of income and in forecasting enrollment projections.

The best way to determine the average class fee is to divide the total registration income for a session or year by the total number of registrations for that time period. This is the method LERN recommends to calculate this statistic. For example, if your class program had $50,000 in registration income for a year and had 2,000 enrollments for that time period, the average class fee would be $25.

Average Class fee is now also a critical measurement by, and for, Divisions.

Average Income

Sometimes called the average income per person, this is the dollar figure the average participant pays in a particular session or year. To determine this figure, divide the total registration income for a session or year by the number of participants for that time period. For example, if a class program's registration income for a session is $20,000 from 1,000 registrations coming from 400 participants, the average income per participant is $50. (Not to be confused with the average income per registration, in this case, $20.)

Average Income

Sometimes called average income per registration enrollment, this is the same as the average class fee. See "Average Class Fee."

Average Participants Per Class

The average participants per class figure is the average number of participants taking any given class. It is important in analyzing enrollments and projecting future enrollments and registration income.

To determine the average participants per class, divide the number of registrations per session or year by the number of active classes held. Do not include either canceled classes or registrations for canceled classes in the figure. For example, if a class program has 5,000 enrollments for a year and offered 417 classes, of which 333 were active classes actually held, then the average participants per class would be 5,000 divided by 333, or 15.

Average Participants Per Class is now also a critical measurement by, and for, Divisions.

Auxiliary Income

Self-generated income that is not registration income. For example, auxiliary income could come from the sale of T-shirts, books, tapes, or other fee for service income.

Break-Even Point For A Class

The point at which an individual class income equals the direct expenses for that class. The break even point for a class is figured as the registration income for that class, less all direct expenses, including promotion expenses; production expenses, such as teacher fee. No indirect costs are included, including no staffing costs, and overhead.

If you have many classes and promote them as a whole, determine the promotion costs for an individual class by dividing your total promotion costs (brochure, brochure distribution, advertising, etc.) for the session by the number of classes offered.

Brochure

A publication published every session listing all of the classes offered and registration information and form. Other terms for brochure include catalog, schedule, and guide. LERN uses "brochure" as the generic term.

Brochures Distributed

An important statistic in analyzing promotion. This is the number of brochures actually distributed, not the number of brochures printed. Brochures distributed is measured per session. Only if the term is followed by "per year" would the figure indicate the number of brochures distributed annually.

"Distributed" includes brochures mailed, put out in stores and shops (even if some of them were not actually taken), inserted in newspapers, given to teachers and others, and distributed from the class program's office. The only brochures not included in this figure are brochures printed and kept bundled or otherwise not distributed. It also does not include any media advertisements or other promotions not involving the actual brochure.

Participant Ratio

This is the number of brochures it takes to get one registration. It is determined by dividing the number of brochures distributed by the number of registrations for a given session or year. It is an important statistic in analyzing promotion, increasing the number of brochures distributed, and forecasting future enrollment. For example, if a class program distributes 100,000 brochures for a session and receives 2,000 registrations, the brochure:participant ratio is 50:1.

This statistic can also be expressed inversely as a response rate.

Budgeted Income Per Class: This is the income for repeat classes expected and budgeted.

Canceled Class

A class which was offered and promoted in the brochure, but for whatever reason was not actually held. Reasons include lack of sufficient registrations, a teacher becoming ill or otherwise not able to teach, meeting space not obtained, and so on.

Catalog

Same as brochure. See "Brochure."

Class

A class is a learning activity in which there is a teacher and one or more participants. A class may meet one night, meet several times, meet all day, or be a tour if learning is involved. It is a generic term covering all learning activities that can be measured.

In addition to in-person classes, the term now includes a variety of online classes.

Class Cancellation Rate

The class cancellation rate is the percentage of classes canceled in any given session due to insufficient registrations and any other factors, such as the teacher not showing up. To determine this figure, divide all the classes canceled (if two sections of the same class topic are canceled count it as two classes) by all of the classes offered in the session.

Class Cancellation Rate should be measured annually for the entire program. Class Cancellation Rate is now also a critical measurement by, and for, Divisions.

Class Fee

The price charged to a participant for a particular class or course. Sometimes called a "course fee."

Classes Offered

This is the number of classes listed in the brochure or promoted in some way. It includes both active classes (those actually held) and canceled classes (those that were promoted or advertised but not held). The number of classes in a session is all of the separate groups meeting for that session. If one topic or course title has three sections, that is three classes/events. Each individual class is counted once, regardless of how many times it meets during the session. For example, a class meeting six times is counted as one class.

Class Program

This is a generic term developed by the Learning Resources Network (LERN) to designate any organization offering classes for adults. A class program may be an entire organization or part of a larger institution. It is an organizational unit which programs and markets classes for adults, registers participants, and evaluates the classes.

Classes Per Participant

Sometimes called number of classes per person, this is the average number of classes each participant takes during the year. To determine this figure, divide the number of registrations for a session or year by the number of participants for that time period. The number will be 1.0 or greater. It is usually between 1.0 and 2.0.

Course

Same as class. See "Class."

Division

A group of classes that has one of the following in common - - subject matter, audience, or format. It is not what a single program coordinator manages. Divisions range from 2% of a program's class revenue to 30%. Divisions under 2% of class revenue should be combined. Divisions more than 30% of class revenue should be divided into two or more Divisions.

The average program has from 5 to 15 Divisions.

Divisions are now a critical unit and measurement for improving class program financial success.

Drop-Out Rate

The drop-out rate is the percentage of participants who register for classes but are not in attendance at the final meeting. To determine this figure, divide the total number of participants attending the final class meetings (if one person is taking two classes count each class attendance) by your total number of registrations for the session, then subtract that percentage from 100% to get the drop-out rate.

Enrollments

An enrollment is the same as a registration. See "Registration" for definition.

Financially Self-Sufficient

This is a class program in which self-generated income, such as registration income and income from brochure advertising, or other fees for services, equals or exceeds expenses without any subsidies included in income. See also “Subsidies.”

Expenses includes direct costs (promotion + production) and these indirect expenses: staffing salaries and fringe benefits, supplies, computers and software, rental of classrooms if not owned by the program or institution of which the program is a part. A totally financially self-sufficient program is one in which self-generated income exceeds direct expenses and the indirect costs stated above. If the class program is sponsored by a larger institution, such as a college, university, school or school district, city or municipality; indirect costs of building overhead, mortgage or rent, utilities, custodial services, furniture, etc. are NOT to be included in costs for the class program. The ownership, and thus responsibility and cost, are an obligation of the larger institution; not within the control of the class program.

Flyer

Some programs refer to a brochure which promotes only one event or class as a flyer.

Go-No-Go Point

The number of registrations needed to cover production costs of the class. This metric is used to determine whether a class program should run, or cancel, an individual class. The rationale for running the class if it covers just production costs (teacher primarily) is that while the class is indeed losing money, the promotion expenses spent have already been spent, and that any indirect staffing costs also have already been spent. Since the class program does not lose any more by running the class than by canceling it, most class program leaders report the participant cancellations results in future registration losses by the cancelled participants is a substantial lifetime income loss as well as negative publicity result.

Income

Income is registration income plus any other income, such as subsidies, institutional reimbursements, grants, or other monies coming to the program. In a totally financially self-sufficient program, registration income and income are usually the same.

Independent Contractor

A legal term used by some class programs to designate teachers as independent agents and therefore not employees of the class program. In order to maintain this distinction, the class program usually also maintains that the responsibility for learning and teaching in the classes are the responsibility of the teacher and participants, not the class program itself.

Instructor

Same as teacher. See “Teacher.”

Materials Fees

Materials fees are charges to participants in addition to the normal class or course fee and a registration fee. The money is totally to cover materials such as paper, books, art supplies or whatever supplies are necessary for the class. Materials fees are most often paid directly to the teacher or some entity other than the class program.

New classes

A new class is one that has not been offered in the last three years, or longer, including classes that have never been offered by the class program. A new class is predicted to be a financial winner if it covers its direct costs, not including indirect costs, in its first offering. New classes have a substantially higher rate of cancellation than repeat classes, which have been successfully offered in the previous session or year.

No-Show Rate

This is the percentage of participants who register for one or more classes but do not attend the first class or any subsequent class meetings. To determine this figure, divide the number of no-show registrations by the total number of registrations.

Online

A broad term that refers to classes that are offered online. The term includes but is not specific or limited to simultaneous offerings of classes in real time with in-person classes; self-study or self-paced learning; asynchronous online courses; and several more formats.

See the LERN briefing on Online Classes for the latest on terms and definitions for online classes.

Operating Margin

Often called gross profit in the for-profit sector, it is Income minus Direct Expenses (including promotion and production costs). Expenses do not include staffing and other indirect costs. Operating Margin is expressed both as a dollar figure, and as a percentage of income.

It should be calculated for the overall class program on an annual basis.

LERN now suggests Operating Margin is a critical measure for Divisions.

Participant

A participant is a person taking one or more classes. If one person takes three classes, that is one individual participant. If two people take a class, that is two participants.

Participants Per Session

This is the number of participants or people who register for a particular session. It is NOT the same as the number of registrations per session. For example, if each and every one of 1,000 people registers for two classes for a particular session, the number of registrations for that session is 2,000, but the number of participants per session is 1,000.

Production

Production expenses are direct expenses that include teacher or instructor costs, classroom rental, handouts, cost of sending out evaluations, and any materials costs. Production expenses are a variable expense, because production costs vary by size of income and registrations.

Production expenses are essentially those direct expenses incurred after a participant registers for a class.

Productivity Rating

A measurement developed by LERN to establish a baseline ratio from which a class program can measure changes in its staff productivity. To find the productivity rating of a program, divide the annual total class income by the FTE (full time equivalent) staff persons employed by the program.

Promotion

Promotion expenses are those direct expenses involved in trying to get participants to register. They include the brochure; brochure distribution; advertisements for classes; digital marketing costs such as websites, email, digital ads, social media, and videos, including contractors hired for the promotion. Not included in promotion expenses are staffing costs, which should be counted as part of program indirect costs, or G&A.

To determine your promotion or marketing expenses as a percentage, divide your total dollar promotion expenses by your total registration income. These numbers can be either for a session or annually. Annually is statistically a better time period to use.

Registration

One person taking one class. If one person takes two classes, that is two registrations. If two people take a class, that is two registrations.

Registration Fee

A fee charged in addition to the class fee to cover costs of registering a participant. It is charged only once per participant, regardless of how many classes the participant registers for.

Registration Income

Registration income is the total dollars income generated from participant fees. These fees include class or course fees plus any registration fee added to the class or course fee. It does not include any materials fees if those fees are paid to the teacher or some other entity.

Registration income is usually calculated by session and by annual registration income.

Registrations Per Session

The number of registrations for a given session, not including registrations for canceled classes. It does include registrations for which monies were refunded for active classes. An average number of registrations per session would be the actual registrations for the class program's last year divided by the number of sessions offered in that year.

Registrations Per Year

Same as "Annual Enrollments."

Refund

A refund is money given back to a participant. Different programs have different policies regarding refunds, and there is no standard refund policy. Refunds include money returned to participants due to illness, any other inability, or dissatisfaction with the class. Refunds also include money returned to participants whose classes were canceled due to insufficient registrations.

Refund Rate

The refund rate is the percentage of income returned to participants who registered for a class that actually took place. It does not include returned money to participants whose classes were canceled due to insufficient registrations. If a participant registered for an active class but did not pay, that is counted as income and as a refund. To determine the refund rate, divide the total dollars returned to participants in active classes by the total dollars of registration fees for that session. A desired refund rate is one that is less than 4% of income.

Repeat Classes

A repeat class is one that has been run successfully before, especially in the previous session or year. Repeat classes have substantially lower cancellation rates than new classes.

Repeat Rate

The percentage of participants in your previous year who also registered for the current year. For example, a repeat rate of 65% means that 65% of your participants from last year also registered for your current year.

Response Rate

This is the average response rate a class program receives in registrations from mailing out its brochure or catalog. For example, if a class program mails 100,000 brochures and receives 2,000 registrations from those brochures, the response rate is 2.0%. Response rate can also be expressed inversely as a brochure:participant ratio. Response rates are most commonly used by class programs using direct mail as the primary promotion method of distributing brochures.

Self-Generated Income

Any income that comes from fees generated by the program for services offered by the program. Self-generated income includes registration income and auxiliary income. It does NOT include subsidies.

Semester

Same as session. See "Session."

Session

A session is a period of time, usually one to four months, during which classes take place. Almost all sessions have a separate brochure and promotion describing the classes for that particular session. A session is NOT the number of classes offered, and it is NOT the number of times a class meets during a given session or term.

Sessions

This is the number of discrete and separate per year sessions offered in one year. The range in sessions per year is 1 to 12, with the average being 4.

Staff Expenses

Staff expenses are salaries and benefits for full and part-time staff employed by the class program. This does NOT include training costs for staff, staff travel, or other staff related expenses. The figure also does NOT include teacher expenses. Staff expenses are often expressed as a percentage of income. To determine the staff expenses percentage, divide the dollar amount of staff expenses for a year by the dollar amount of income.

Student

Same as participant. See "Participant."

Subsidies

Any monies not coming from participants or other direct fees for services. Subsidies include tuition reimbursement from state agencies, monies from a central institutional office, or staff salaries paid for by any means other than from registration income. To determine the percentage to which your program is subsidized, divide your subsidy income by your total income.

Surplus

Surplus is the amount of money left over at the end of the fiscal year. Surplus as a dollar amount is figured as the difference between income and total expenses. To be a financially self-sufficient class program, registration income and other self-generated monies must exceed total expenses. For example, a class program receiving $50,000 in subsidies, and spending $80,000 in expenses for that fiscal year is NOT financially self-sufficient. Expenses before surplus should include staffing, fringe benefits, office equipment, software dedicated to the program, supplies, etc. Expenses not included before calculating surplus are institutional overhead, including buildings and institutional staffing, even if that time is allocated for the class program.

Surplus Percentage

Surplus is often expressed as a percentage of income. To determine the surplus percent, divide the total dollar surplus amount by the total income for the fiscal year.

Teacher

A teacher is anyone who leads a class/event, sharing knowledge and promoting learning among the participants.

Teacher Expenses

Money paid directly to teachers for their services of teaching. Does not include materials fees, training costs, a teacher newsletter or other costs of recognizing teachers. Teacher expenses are often stated as a percentage of registration income.

Term

Same as session. See “Session.”

Year

Same as annual. See “Annual.”

The Official Dictionary of Class Programming *was updated in 2026.*
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The Learning Resources Network (LERN) is the leading association and organization in class programming.
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