

Chair's Workshop: Scheduling April 28, 2005

Summary

Insights of Chairs on the Scheduling Process:

Katherine Brennan (History)

Dr. Brennan stated that the process of scheduling is often overwhelming. She noted that setting up a list of sections, including undergrad and graduate sections, and meeting times, was the first step. Difficulties included finding free rooms, understanding faculty wishes (particularly rotation of courses), and issues of sabbatical coverage. She also made a request that the Activities Period be restored from 12:15 to 1:30 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. She also noted that obtaining contracts for affiliate faculty in a timely matter was a problem.

Elissa Derrickson (Biology)

Dr. Derrickson noted that in her department issues of scheduling focused primarily around students in the major rather than core courses. She noted that there were complex distribution requirements, and that a 'per round' summary of registration would be useful. Other areas of complexity include phasing courses in and out, fairness and work load for faculty (Dr. Derrickson keeps a spread sheet showing faculty load over the past years and attempts to keep a balance for faculty between lower- and upper-level undergraduate courses), coordinating labs and rooms. She stated that there was currently no advocate for students in interdisciplinary majors.

Lisa Fairchild (Finance)

Dr. Fairchild stated that, as in most of the business school departments, she dealt with undergraduates as well as students in the MBA, Executive MBA, and Master's in Finance programs. She noted that she had to deal with multiple locations of classrooms (i.e., Timonium, Columbia, and Evergreen). Rotating coverage for weekend courses among faculty was an area that required special attention.

Amanda Thomas (speaking for Vic Delclos, Education)

Dr. Thomas mentioned two major challenges: the fact that education has eight different programs as well as eight coordinators, and the heavy use of affiliates (over 50). She also noted that predicting enrollments in education courses was particularly difficult.

College-Wide Challenges

Rita Steiner and Lorie Waldon

Ms. Steiner stated that receiving the scheduling information from chairs in a timely fashion was critical, and noted that students find changes in the schedule very difficult to deal with. Students who register electronically have even greater difficulties, since they have no one to consult with as they attempt to negotiate the new schedule. Students often are upset and ask why the schedule was changed after the printed schedule appeared. Ms. Steiner said that the students prefer using the printed schedule, and are not used to consulting the on-line version. Students also become upset when courses they need are scheduled simultaneously, and when labs restrict them from taking courses across the day.

Honna McGuinness and Debbie Herman-Miller

Dr. McGuinness stated that she was primarily involved in forecasting the numbers of students for many core courses. She noted that she built in numerous 'shadow sections' of courses so that changes can be made quickly. She said the coordination between departments is critical, and described some of the problems created for students by course cancellations and additions. She pointed out that if scheduling changes occur between advising and registration, the student has to go back to his/her advisor or deal with it by himself/herself. She suggested that the faculty reconsider the regulations on restrictions to lower level undergraduate courses and described the problems students have when they are blocked from courses in departments in which they are considering a major.

Lee Dahringer and Jim Buckley

Dr. Dahringer pointed out that accrediting agencies have requirements that affect course staffing. Challenges include forecasting student needs, making the path to graduation more clear to students, and the issue of 'course ownership' with some faculty members. He noted that few professors want to teach in the 8 AM time slot, or on Fridays. He stated that the course schedule affected the campus climate. He agreed that the submission dates for the schedule were placed too far in advance of the semester in question, and that this exacerbates many problems. He asked if there was a technical solution to this issue.

Dr. Buckley noted that it was important to match faculty needs with student needs in scheduling. He asked why advisors, chairs, and Records did not discuss these matters more regularly. He stated that affiliate contracts should be processed more swiftly and suggested a meeting with Human Resources on this matter.

Questions and Discussion

Several chairs questioned the length of time required to publish the schedule. More realistic dates for the submission of information on courses and faculty would make the process of scheduling easier for chairs.

One chair noted that he used a spreadsheet containing traditional faculty rotations, faculty preferences, lists of faculty who had been asked to teach in unpopular times, and two years worth of past schedules.

Another chair asked about the possibility of offering more MWF classes, and stated that the emphasis on Tuesday and Thursday classes was unfair to students. Another chair noted that his department did exclusively MWF classes, and that the problem was not as severe as some thought.

It was asked if there were other 'low use' times (aside from 8 AM) that might be available. Ms. Steiner noted that between 9 AM and 3 PM only seminar rooms are available. She stated that there was some flexibility after 3 PM and in the evenings.

Dr. Lowe asked how to best manage the difficulty of scheduling in Physics, Mathematical Sciences, and Computer Science, where courses and labs interrelate. Ms. Steiner stated that there was a need for more global thinking in the area of scheduling and suggested that a committee be formed to pursue this.