

It's Time for A Change

A Proposal for Restructuring Course Scheduling at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

Prepared by the Campus Climate Committee

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Statement of the Problem

In 2000, an Ad Hoc Committee comprised of the Registrar (Sally Mancoske), the Chair of the Academic Actions Committee (Laura Riddle), the Interim Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences (Denise Scheberle), and the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs (Timothy Sewall) called for a change in the standard course schedule. The need was driven by students' inability to register for courses because of numerous time conflicts, and by the difficulty in scheduling all-campus events, committee meetings, department meetings, and other campus groups. The proposal specified 6 scheduling principles to be adhered to by any scheduling change, and then proposed 8 possible course scheduling configurations (one being the "status quo") that could address the two problems outlined above. Unfortunately, the proposal did not get very far as many units expressed concern that the solutions proposed would be worse than the problems they were designed to alleviate.

Since that time, the completion of the Mary Ann Cofrin classroom building and remodeling of Laboratory Sciences has improved classroom accessibility, although a recent analysis of current course scheduling practices by Deborah Furlong, Director of Institutional Research, has indicated that 15% of undergraduate lecture-type courses offered during the Fall 2004 semester were scheduled at irregular times, creating potential accessibility problems. More significantly, the need for common meeting times remains critical, as groups have to schedule meetings at odd hours in order to get people together.

The Campus Climate Committee (CCC) has identified six dimensions of positive climate (respect, communication, trust, shared experiences and values, recognition, and support). During the fall, 2004 semester, the CCC discussed at length a variety of ways that these elements of a positive campus climate could be encouraged. Out of the myriad of problems and solutions that were offered, committee members kept on coming back to the idea that little time for open communication exists because there was no open block of time for people across the campus to meet *en face*. Thus, the CCC decided to focus on a solution for the two elements of communication and the opportunity for shared experiences. Committee members believe that restructuring our current standard course schedule so that there are common meeting times for all-campus events and group activities would encourage a greater sense of campus community and alleviate some of the stress created by the significant lack of time for people to engage in meaningful dialogue.

The Proposed New Standard Course Schedule

The desire to find open meeting times resulted in a careful examination of the different schedules that were originally presented by the 2000 Ad Hoc Committee. We learned that having just one open meeting time would essentially defeat the purpose of scheduling all-University programming, as this time would quickly be swallowed by many other campus needs. The schedules originally posited by the 2000 Ad Hoc Committee also seriously cut into valued meeting times *without adding additional* times

for classes. Thus, in this proposal, the changes to the standard course scheduling advocated by the Campus Climate Committee are based upon a new course schedule that was adopted by Syracuse University for their Spring, 2005 semester. In advocating this proposal, the Campus Climate Committee decided to adhere to the Academic Affairs Scheduling Principles that were adopted by the Academic Affairs Team on December 1, 2000 (see Appendix A). In addition, this schedule would create the following changes:

- ◆ Monday-Wednesday-Friday classes would change from 50 minute periods to 55 minute periods. The number of such time slots would be reduced by one as compared to the current schedule.
- ◆ There would be 9 additional two day per week classes (Monday-Wednesday, Tuesday-Thursday, Wednesday-Friday), changing from 75 minute periods to 80 minute periods.
- ◆ There will be two common meeting times (termed "*University Hours*") on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. The CCC felt that these time slots would be most useful for scheduling meetings and maximizing campus participation in the University Hours.
- ◆ Because of the additional two-day-a-week time slots, the University Hours would not erode class meeting times.
- ◆ As a result of the above changes in scheduling to create University Hours, the semester would be shortened from fifteen weeks to fourteen weeks.
- ◆ The Academic Affairs Principles were amended by the Campus Climate Committee with the inclusion of one time slot/month devoted to all campus programming (see Appendix A).

Benefits of the New Course Schedule

The proposed change to the standard course schedule would include the following benefits:

- ◆ Create common meeting times for faculty, staff and students.
- ◆ In addition to having meeting times, students would have a time to work on projects required in many classes.
- ◆ Add additional two day per week time slots, which are very popular on campus.
- ◆ Allow the opportunity for creative change in campus programming and courses (as in the General Education program).
- ◆ Make it possible for the Freshman Orientation program (FOCUS) to make a smooth transition from the orientation to the first day of classes (without the usual Labor Day interruption).
- ◆ Allow for study days during the Fall semester.
- ◆ Put UW-Green Bay in line with schedules from other UW campuses.
- ◆ Allow faculty to have additional time for scholarship and faculty development.
- ◆ Present facilities management with additional time for campus maintenance and clean-up.

- ◆ Foster increased interaction time among faculty, students, and staff.
- ◆ Offers a more efficient use of university time.

Lessons Learned from Syracuse University

Syracuse University's change to a new course schedule was a two year process that involved faculty and administration. As a first step, an intensive investigation of the literature on the effects of course scheduling on undergraduate and graduate learning outcomes was conducted by Noreen Baubatz, Teaching Consultant, at Syracuse's Center for Support of Teaching and Learning. This review indicated that at these levels of instruction, different scheduling formats do not appear to have significant effects on the academic performance of students (with the possible exception of the marginal student, who is likely not to drop out of a three day a week course schedule as opposed to 2-day schedules). Illene Noppe contacted Ms. Judy O'Rourke, Senior Administrator to the Vice Present for Undergraduate Studies at Syracuse University, in order to gain further insights on the process Syracuse University used to change its course schedule. Syracuse University's main goal was to create a standard course schedule, as idiosyncratic schedules were normative and created a chaotic timetable. The process took two years, and involved faculty focus groups and the work of a Senate governance body (Committee on Instruction) to effect the change. In addition, an exception process was set up for those courses that could not match the standard schedule. Ms. O'Rourke also referred Prof. Noppe to Ms. Joann Godfrey of the President and Vice President's office of SUNY-Morrisville, a 2-year-campus of the SUNY system that is in the process of moving toward being a four-year campus. Unlike Syracuse, Morrisville is similar in size to UW-Green Bay (3500 FTE and approximately 135 full-time faculty). The Morrisville course schedule has made common meetings a top priority (unlike Syracuse, which has chosen to focus on standardizing their schedule). Morrisville has had their two "holy hours" (Tues and Thurs from 1 – 2) for the past thirty years. Originally proposed by the faculty, the Morrisville schedule dedicates each of those hours to a specific activity (e.g., first Tuesday is their "Faculty Congress" meetings, the second Tuesday is open to any group, the 3rd Tuesday once again for Faculty Congress, and the 4th Tuesday is for all campus faculty meetings). Ms. Godfrey reports that campus faculty and staff are very content with their scheduling system, and there have been no proposals for change.

Feedback Received Thus Far

The CCC invited members of the campus community (faculty, academic and classified staff, and students) to discuss the proposal schedule (posted on the Campus Climate Committee web site), to ask questions, and to provide feedback to the Committee. As of the date of this proposal, the CCC has received comments and questions from students, faculty and classified staff. As a result of this feedback, the CCC recognizes that studio classes and science labs will need special attention in changing our course scheduling. The comments (both positive and negative) have been compiled in terms of three main issues (University Hours, semester length, and time slots of the new schedule). Below is a summary of these comments:

University Hours: A number of comments were supportive of the University Hours. It was perceived as a “definite plus” to have a known time each week when no classes were scheduled. Comments noted that a number of universities have such common meetings, and that these work very well for these campuses. Classified staff felt that they would participate in all campus programming as long as they were permitted to close their offices. Negative comments pertained to the times selected for the University Hours, the concern that such times would not be utilized for their intended purpose, that Student Services Offices may see an increase in student traffic during these hours, and that the intended purpose of improving campus climate may not be actualized.

Semester Length: Positive comments pertained mostly to how the “extra week” would be used. Strong support for the shorter semesters (i.e., returning to an earlier UWGB calendar) would lead to having exams before graduation, not backing up into Christmas, and slotting in time for travel courses in the winter. Athletics also suggested that this would help to alleviate a number of scheduling difficulties. Representatives from Student Government were very positive about the reduced length in semester. Classified staff did not express any serious concerns about changing the length of the semester. Negative comments pertained to concerns about student learning and course management. In particular, several faculty feel that adding in five extra minutes to each class session *is not equivalent* to having an additional week for finishing up projects and covering all topics. Faculty in COA expressed the concern that there would be problems in scheduling performances because of the loss of a week.

Time Slots from the New Schedule: Positive comments about the changes in time slots referred to the increase in two-day per week time slots, longer blocks of instruction, opportunity to re-think courses, and a more commuter and work friendly schedule for students. Negative comments referred to potential conflicts with science labs and studio classes, the reduction in the MWF time slots, the odd starting times for classes, resistance to teaching (or attending) a late Friday time slot, the doubling up of Wednesday classes because of the MW and WF time slots, and having to deal with maintaining students’ attention spans.

As a result of the concerns voiced above, UW-Green Bay’s Registrar, Mike Herrity, has served as a consultant about the proposed changes. Appendix B is a FAQ sheet prepared by the Registrar’s office that attempts to answer and respond to some of the major questions and issues involved in this change in course scheduling.

Suggestions for University Hours and the “Extra Week”

The CCC has created some possible scenarios for the University Hours (Appendix C) and the extra week (Appendix D). It is important to recognize that these are suggestions that can be modified prior to implementation of the new course schedule.

Evaluation

As with any major change, it is important to assess its effects. The CCC proposes a three-pronged evaluation as the new course schedule is implemented. The first would involve collecting information about the satisfaction, problems and benefits of the new schedule. This data should be collected from *all* campus constituents (faculty, students and staff). The second facet of evaluation should examine the impact on student learning outcomes. The CCC agreed that the ultimate goal for the change in course scheduling should focus on the students and their needs. Obviously, a more positive campus climate benefits us all, including students. This evaluation could look at pre- and post-grades, test scores, or other forms of evaluation of student learning outcomes. In addition, there should be an examination of student retention and absentee rates (see recent article by Gump in *College Teaching* indicating that student absentee rate outside of the “prime” 10:00 – 3:00 time slots do not differ). The last prong, related to the one above, could involve research on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. In particular, the CCC would be interested in learning about the types and number of creative solutions devised by faculty and academic staff in response to the restructuring of classes.

Conclusion

It is evident that many models exist for a standard University course schedule. These schedules need to consider the size of the institution, the number of courses, the types of programs offered, and whether or not the schedule is meeting the needs of the campus. The Campus Climate Committee considers the UW-Green Bay current schedule as not meeting the needs of the campus, and believes that the Syracuse model represents an excellent match between the characteristics of our institution and its ability to solve a number of issues of concern. The Senior Administrator at Syracuse suggested that we attempt a computer model that matches the new schedule with the old, so that the campus community can see exactly what changes. Preliminary work has thus far indicated several issues that need to be addressed but that the changes in unit programs as a result of restructuring course scheduling may be accommodated (see FAQ sheet in Appendix B). *It is also important to remember that these changes would not go into effect until the Fall, 2007 semester.* Hopefully, this will provide sufficient time to plan for changes, tweak the model and work through anticipated problems.

In addition to finding a schedule that has a good fit with a campus, a University community has to be in a position to cope with and welcome change. The Campus Climate Committee believes that UW-Green Bay is ready for a change, which can energize our campus, lead to creative programming, and promote a more positive campus climate.

Appendix A

Academic Affairs Scheduling Principles of the 2000 Ad Hoc Committee

Note: These principles were adopted by the Academic Affairs Team on 12/1/00. Standard course times are those indicated in the standard course schedule adopted for the campus.

1. The budgetary unit chair will be responsible for following these principles and, in consultation with his/her faculty and dean, recommending the semester and summer course schedules of the unit to the dean.
2. Addressing the learning and curricular needs of students will be paramount in determining when and where courses are scheduled.
3. All three-credit courses will be scheduled using standard class times unless there is a pedagogical reason not to do so (e.g., studio meeting times may be an exception to this rule).
4. Courses carrying four or more credits and all laboratory and studio meeting times will be scheduled in a way that minimizes conflicts with other course offerings.
5. Budgetary unit courses scheduled during the regular workday will be distributed across all standard class times. Budgetary unit chairs will be encouraged to establish a unit "no-class" period each semester to accommodate meetings and other activities.
6. The Deans (or their designee), will have responsibility for coordinating budgetary unit course schedules to ensure that course, institution-wide, are appropriately distributed and in accordance with the above principles. The Deans (or their designee) will also serve as the liaison with the Office of the Registrar and be responsible for resolving any issues associated with class scheduling and room assignments.

In addition to the above 6 principles, the Campus Climate Committee recommends the adoption of the principle below:

7. *One University Hours time period per month will be left open for all-University programming. During this time, with the approval of the Chancellor, all offices may be closed to facilitate full campus participation.*

APPENDIX B

REGISTRAR PERSPECTIVE

Where would the problems be?

Willingness of faculty to use 8am and late afternoon. Without use of these times the new model could not work.

Bio 202 in the fall, 12 labs would pose a problem - would we let one course stop us?
 Could it be an exception? Would two, three, etc. stop the plan?

Other courses which may be problems – trying to look closely at 4cr courses and courses with labs to see where problems might arise, not yet finished

Where would there NOT be problems

Do not foresee any tech problems with new scheduling model

No change to Friday schedule not much going on after 1:50 about the same with new schedule

Evening schedule would largely be unaffected, 5pm starting time might best be moved to 5:15.

Advantage

Semester could be arranged so typically graduation would occur after finals.

Due date for grades would be before 12/24, usually several days before

Assuming we chose to do this - last day of finals would be never be later than December 18

APPENDIX C

Alternative Proposals for Use of University Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:50*

These proposals go from most to least structured:

Proposal 1.

First and Third Tuesdays: All-Liberal Arts and Sciences Meeting Time and All-Professional and Graduate Studies Meeting Time

First and Third Thursdays: Unit-level and/or Area-level Meeting Time

Second Tuesday and Fourth Thursday: All-Campus Programming

Second Thursday and Fourth Tuesday: Faculty Senate, Classified Staff Advisory Council, Academic Staff Committee, and Student Senate Meeting Time

Proposal 2:

First and Third Tuesdays: Unit-level and Area-Level Meeting Time

First and Third Thursdays: Faculty Senate, Classified Staff Advisory Council, Academic Staff Committee, and Student Senate Meeting Time

Second Tuesday and Thursday: Committee Meeting Time

Fourth Tuesday and Thursday: All-Campus Programming

Proposal 3:

First and Third Thursdays: All-Liberal Arts and Sciences Meeting Time and All-Professional and Graduate Studies Meeting Time

Second and Fourth Thursdays: All-Campus Programming

Tuesdays: Committee Meeting Time

Proposal 4:

Second Tuesday and Fourth Thursday: All-Campus Programming

University Hours Principles:

* The actual days and times for these hours are negotiable (other possible times are: WF 3:45-5:05), but should be held to the following principles:

1. Classes are not scheduled during these times.
2. The hours should be selected so as minimize as much as possible disruption of department course offerings.
3. One University Hour per month should be devoted to all-university programming that should be accessible to all members of the campus community.

APPENDIX D

Alternative Proposals for Using the “Bonus Week” Gained with Shifting to a 14-week Schedule

Currently, the duration of both the fall and spring semesters is 15 weeks each. The proposed course schedule change would permit 14-week semester schedules. Several suggestions have been put forth by the campus community for using the “bonus” week gained with shifting to a 14-week schedule.

Fall Semester Possibilities.

Note: Whether the following possibilities could be used in tandem would require review of the actual calendar.

A “bonus week” could be used to:

1. Ensure that fall semester always starts after Labor Day.
2. Ensure that Orientation immediately precedes start of fall semester.
3. Ensure that students have study days before final exams.
4. Ensure that fall semester final exams end before Commencement.
5. Create a “Fall Break,” perhaps to coincide with the Thanksgiving holiday. A fall break could include a week-long intensive 1 credit course (research with faculty, freshman seminar, readings course, or other creative course like an “Interdisciplinary Week”).

Spring Semester Possibilities.

Note: Again, whether the following possibilities could be used in tandem would require review of the actual calendar.

A “bonus week” could be used to:

1. Ensure that the spring semester always starts the week after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (i.e., the following Monday, rather than the Tuesday following MLK).
2. Create a “Spring Break II” that could include a week-long intensive 1 credit course (research with faculty, freshman seminar, readings course, or other creative course like an “Interdisciplinary Week”).
3. Ensure that students have study days before final exams.
4. Ensure that the spring semester ends one week earlier.