

Report: Faculty Senate Budget Committee
April 25, 2006

This year the committee addressed the concept of alternative scheduling and its possible contributions to our faculty, students and staff. We have attempted to approach the various possibilities within the constraints of our University Strategic Plan. As an integral part of our study we developed a survey for soliciting faculty feedback. We started with the belief that this would provide a means of successfully solving our current parking problems, would result in better classroom utilization, and thus better serve the educational needs of our students. With the help, first of Senator David May and then Senator Chris Taylor, a comprehensive survey was developed for the faculty. It appeared to address all the pertinent issues - but was put on hold since the administrative review surveys were being sent to the faculty.

We then received an unsolicited document from Rob Christensen outlining many of the possible schedule permutations. He had been serving as an interim Senator while Senator Deters was on leave, and had been in a university that used one of these alternative schedules. After studying his document and spreadsheets [cf. March Minutes], the committee took a couple of steps back to reassess the bigger picture. In the light of our 2006-2010 Strategic Plan [Strategic Direction 2.5] we are to *"increase the head count enrollment to 20,000 by the year 2010,"* and *"to maintain an overall student to faculty ratio at or less than 19-1."* We feel that alternative scheduling may well prove to be part of such an overall enrollment strategy, but it will require input from every academic and support constituency of the university. So we have concluded that it would be ill advised to survey only faculty.

Based on the possible patterns offered by Dr Christensen there are three things that must be explored: [1] the schedule for day classes, [2] the schedule for evening classes, and [3] the possibility of weekend school. This would apply to both on-campus and off-campus schedules. Within each of these areas more questions and permutations must be addressed.

Day Scheduling:

Starting with the assumption of 150 minutes/week for a three-hour course the consequences are very different for a "flip Friday" schedule versus a 2 by 2 scheduling with a fifth free day. Would your department choose to offer one 2 hour and 30 minute section per week, or 2 - 1 hour 50 minute sessions. In the music department they need shorter sessions with longer breaks [e.g., 30 min. and then 15 min. for break].

Overall, it appears we lose sessions on the 2 by 2 schedule that we would have to offset. Possible strategies would be:

- start earlier
- finish later
- create night classes
- create classes on the fifth free day
- combinations of 5th free day and Saturday sessions
[2 - 1 and _ hr. sessions]
- develop "weekend school"

Evening Scheduling:

We saw a couple of difficult questions here.

[1] If we offer 1 session/per week, when would you start evening classes? How late would the last class period start?

[2] If we offer 2 - 1 hr 15 min sessions, night school could start at 4:00 - 10:30 with 4 sessions offered. A student could do 12 hours of credit in night school - attracting a very different demographic. But if we are not careful the evening offerings could pirate students away from day classes. Perhaps this arrangement would work best in our extended programs and on extended campuses - allowing more time for assimilation of material.

Weekend School:

How will we define weekend school? Would we treat it as a Friday/Saturday combination with 2 - 1hr 15min sessions? Only Friday? Only Saturday? [Each of these would require a 2 and _ hour session/week]. Again there would need to be "begin/end" decisions made for any alternative schedule.

Would departments be able to attract enough new candidates? Wouldn't the onus fall to departments to develop the most attractive alternative offerings for their potential students? Implementation of weekend school might hurt day classes on the main campus but not on extended campus. If a student can enroll in night and weekend classes we might end up pirating from ourselves. Students would work in the day and get their degrees at night and on the weekend. What is needed is to play to a new market or we will not reach strategic enrollment goals.

While we may not like the analogy - we are increasingly competing in an educational environment where access to education is 24/7 - and students are facing diminishing financial support and increasing time demands from work - family - and school. We are being evaluated on how we get students, hang on to them and graduate them - so on-line is not a complete solution. When we stood back it was obvious that this is new product development that impacts every university constituency [not just faculty]. Are students even interested in a new "product"? And even if they do want it, can we make the adjustment and afford it?

Conclusion:

The Committee backed away from the specifics and asked ourselves *why* would we do this? What are we hoping to accomplish? Do these alternatives work for all constituencies: e.g., faculty, students, and support staff? Even if the faculty wanted to make these changes we must ask ourselves two important questions: [1] Is it feasible to put into place? And [2], what are the costs? Do the costs justify the required expenditures of time and money and benefit the faculty, staff and students?