



VANCOUVER

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Renny Christopher, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  
FROM: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Course Scheduling Task Force  
DATE: 3/21/17 (revised 4-21-17)  
RE: Proposal

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The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Course Scheduling Task Force was formed in October 2016 to address Goal 3, objective 2.1 in the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan. The charge called for us to “increase course scheduling and delivery format options to better meet the needs of the student population.” This issue was raised in the SEM Works study, which pointed out that we currently offer a traditional schedule, but enroll non-traditional students. The goal of the task force was to study the issue and present an evidence-based proposal in early Spring 2017 for possible implementation in Fall 2018.

### The problem

Effective scheduling that meets student demand is of great concern on our campus. Enrollment is growing, but the number of classrooms is static. We offer the majority of our courses from 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM, creating scheduling conflicts for our students, competition for classroom spaces, and congestion in the parking lots. Our students are balancing their coursework with family obligations and work schedules. According to state standards, we need to fully utilize our classroom spaces before we would be able to request additional classroom buildings. We need to consider increasing the use of hybrid delivery formats to meet students’ requests. We need to incorporate High Impact Practices, which include more hands-on, engaged, problem-solving learning activities (Kuh, 2007), to better meet our students’ needs. The campus has a long-standing goal to incorporate a “no class hour” in order to allow for clubs, meetings, and campus events.

## The process

In October 2016 the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (AVCAA) formed a task force to work on this assignment. The Task Force membership needed to provide a wide array of perspectives about course scheduling on our campus and included representatives of the following roles: an admissions counselor, an academic coordinator, a hybrid methodology expert, the Registrar, a faculty leadership representative, another faculty member, a student, a department scheduler, and the AVCAA.

- Admissions counselor = Currently vacant (previously Curtis Burge)
- Academic coordinator = Sarah Rolerkite
- Hybrid expert = Mike Caulfield
- Registrar = Mary Pat Dutton
- CFR representative = Michael Berger
- Faculty representative = Marcelo Diversi
- Student = Samy Reel
- Department scheduler = Julie Points
- AVCAA = June Canty

The task force met every other week for six months and began its work by reviewing the current scheduling patterns with data provided by the Registrar's office. We confirmed that we have too many classes offered during the 10 AM- 2PM time slots and relatively few courses offered in the early morning or late in the afternoon. We reviewed the documents from 2011-2012, the last time the scheduling patterns were changed, and discussed the rationale that was used as well as the process. We also reviewed data on capacity in our parking lots, provided by our Campus Security office.

## Review of research

We formulated research questions and conducted a review of the relevant literature to identify research-based best practices. We formulated research questions and conducted a review of the relevant literature to identify research-based best practices. We wanted to answer such questions as:

- What is the best class length/meeting interval? (Or is there one?)
- What are the impacts of scheduling on student success?

- What are best practices in terms of interdepartmental communication about scheduling lower division and/or UCORE classes?

We discovered that relatively little research has been published about course scheduling in four year colleges, but did locate studies that were done at community colleges and in high schools. We found support for the need to change scheduling practices to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners, including the fact that today's students deal with the complexities of full-time jobs, family and personal commitments (Richelieu, 2016). There was a call for colleges and universities to embrace online learning and scheduling flexibility, the need to balance student needs with faculty interests and administrative issues (facilities and funding support), and the recommendation to use surveys to determine students' needs (Stauffer, 1991).

We found research supportive of having longer class sessions with fewer meetings per week, generally referred to as "block scheduling." Block scheduling plays an active role in changing curriculum and instructional approaches as teachers adapt to sustain student interest and attention over longer periods of time (Calvery, Sheets, & Bell, 1999). There are advantages of longer class periods, including the chance for the instructor to plan imaginatively, the opportunity for students to work together collaboratively and discover knowledge for themselves, time for the instructor to fully develop an idea in one class session, and that exams can be thought-provoking instead of just using objective-style questions (Cooper, 1997). In addition, longer class sessions bring the need to move from traditional lecture/discussion format to a more hands-on, project-oriented curriculum, which is one of the high impact practices (Day, Ivanov, & Binkley, 1997). Block scheduling has been thought to bring an improved climate because the day is perceived as more relaxed (Day, 1995), it provides greater flexibility and more sensitivity to brain functioning, and is preferred by students (Kruse & Kruse, 1995).

The literature also identified some negative consequences of moving to block scheduling. Students were found to perform better in classes that meet later in the day and in classes which meet more often during the week (Dills & Hernandez-Julian, 2008). Some academic areas need to meet more frequently and with short, focused sessions (Fike & Fike, 2013). In addition, block scheduling makes it harder for students who were absent and/or when there are disruptions to the schedule (Calvery, Sheets, & Bell, 1999).

### Next steps

Our next step was to conduct electronic surveys of four constituent groups: faculty (all ranks and types), academic advisors and admissions counselors, current students, and prospective students. We advertised the surveys through a variety of methods and had

great support from MarComm, ASWSUV, and Student Affairs and Enrollment. After the surveys closed, we discussed the findings and posted the results and summaries of the comments on the Academic Affairs website. The findings were inconsistent, but gave us ideas about what is most important to each of the constituent groups.

Faculty showed a preference for 75 and 150 minute classes, the need to preserve full days for research/scholarship, low interest in weekend classes, and high interest in hybrid classes. Academic advisors reported what they hear from students, including an interest in mixing online, face-to-face, and hybrid classes, a desire to be on campus for classes 2 times per week, and interest in evening classes. Current students indicated they want to be on campus up to four days per week. They showed low interest in Friday and weekend classes, and are interested in mix of online, face-to-face, and hybrid classes. They also commented that their work and family commitments affect scheduling. Prospective students showed a preference for 50 minute classes, that they were interested in being on campus 3 days per week, and that they expect work and family commitments will affect their course scheduling.

### Formulating a solution

We then began to work on ideas for a revised scheduling grid that would offer students and faculty members more flexibility. Departments could work with faculty to identify the courses that would best be taught (in terms of success for students) in 50 minutes/3 times per week format, courses that are best taught in 75 minutes/2 times per week format, and courses that are best taught in 150 minutes/1 time per week format. Time slots would be organized to maintain the current schedule for classes taught via AMS. A time slot would be preserved for a “no classes” hour to allow for campus events and club meetings. We went through several drafts, conducted a trial run using the Spring 2017 course schedule, shared the proposal with the Faculty Assembly, asked several schedulers to try out the new grid, and then incorporated all the feedback we had gathered into the final version (see Appendix A). We also rewrote the Scheduling Guidelines used by the academic directors and the department schedulers and included a stronger message about the need to spread class offerings over the full day and even into the evening and the encouragement to develop more classes using hybrid delivery so that we could meet students’ requests (See Appendix B). We also created a list of ideas for the campus community to work on in the future, including finding a way to have more time between classes to allow for students and faculty to talk, to give students a quick break, and to meet the needs of students with mobility issues.

### The proposal

We propose that the WSU Vancouver campus moves to the new course scheduling grid, shown in Appendix A, beginning Fall 2018. This course scheduling grid was designed to increase flexibility in scheduling without taking away options currently available. Courses can be offered: (1) Monday/Wednesday/Friday in 50-minute blocks; (2) Monday/Wednesday, Wednesday/Friday, or Tuesday/Thursday in 75-minute blocks; (3) Monday or Friday in 150-minute blocks. Original start times were retained to allow for system-wide AMS course delivery. Since aspects of block scheduling are often discipline specific, we recommend that academic units decide on the approach that best fits their learning goals. An open meeting block has been reserved on Friday from 1:10 – 2:00 PM.

The proposed schedule was designed with the success of our students foremost in our minds, while also allowing faculty more flexibility to balance teaching, research, and service loads. The change process requires a commitment to good communication. Departments will need to work together to eliminate scheduling conflicts the students they share may face. We will likely need to extend the schedule planning window at first to provide more time to work out any kinks in the system. This proposed course schedule asks faculty, administrators, and staff to revisit the needs of our student population when proposing class times, locations, and format, with special attention to hybrid formats and pedagogy that implements High Impact Practices. We, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Course Scheduling Task Force, believe that this proposed schedule and standards fulfills the original charge to “...better meet the needs of the student population.”

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