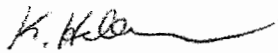


November 11, 2003

TO: Emily Hoover, Chair, Assembly Committee on Educational Policy

FROM: Ken Heller, Chair, Classroom Advisory Subcommittee 

RE: Non Standard Scheduling/Unplaced Course Problem

This letter replies to your request of September 5, 2003, in which you asked that the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee (CAS) consider whether ACEP should send forward a policy recommendation to the Senate and administration that would prohibit classes from being offered at non standard times.

The context of your question is the continuing central classroom supply-demand/ unplaced course problem that is largely caused by classroom utilization inefficiencies that are broadly called "non standard times": courses that do not conform to the Senate approved policy on class scheduling or to the Provost's guidelines that limit peak time scheduling to 60% of sections taught. The Classroom Advisory Subcommittee and Assembly Committee on Educational Policy have been on record for some time as being greatly concerned about this problem and the resulting adverse impacts on the quality of teaching and learning on the Twin Cities campus.

CAS strongly agrees that we have a significant problem, and notes with concern the warnings from Classroom Management that the Scheduling office will not be able to successfully place future semester course loads without a substantial improvement in central classroom utilization.

We believe that existing policy and guidelines are adequate. This is not a question of needing new policy. It is more a question of how to increase conformance with existing policy. CAS considered the "prohibition" option, but decided in favor of a more incentive-based and less draconian approach. We believe that the new scheduling system improvements that will be implemented in December 2003 offer the basis of this necessary improvement in central classroom utilization.

The Classroom Advisory Subcommittee recommends:

- That ACEP endorse and strongly support OCM's Electronic Course Scheduling project initiatives (described below).
- That ACEP endorse and strongly support OCM's incentive-based approach to having departments comply with existing Senate approved policy and Provost Guidelines for class scheduling. This approach provides incentives to conform to existing policy & guidelines. It also provides for an alternative (and a vetting process) to permit departments to use non standard times if they determine that they cannot conform.
- That ACEP take note that this approach allows departments, with associate dean approval, to place non-standard time courses in departmental classrooms. This helps improve central classroom utilization (and helps solve the problem), but still presents course access issues for students. ACEP should caution that this should be an infrequently used exception for reasons of pedagogy.
- That the Provost send a letter to Deans discussing the necessity of compliance with policy and the importance of this effort.
- That OCM provide feedback to the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee and to ACEP on the results after the Fall 2004 schedule is complete. This feedback should include an assessment of whether this incentive-based approach adequately controls the problem and whether more stringent action is required.

BACKGROUND

The Office of Classroom Management (OCM) advises that the completion of the Electronic Course Scheduling (ECS) project in December 2003 will bring major changes and improvements to the scheduling process. These improvements may offer the best solution to this ongoing and vexing problem. The improvements occur at a critical time, as the number of unplaced courses is again on the increase, and classroom supply is declining due to renovation projects. **OCM is on record as saying that they will not be able to place all courses in central classrooms in the Fall 2004 semester unless the U makes a substantial improvement in utilization.**

Currently, the scheduling process requires that departments submit, and that OCM's scheduling office iteratively process, multiple paper forms for each of UMTC's 14,000+ course sections. In addition to being slow and cumbersome, this paper intensive system has not allowed Scheduling to provide timely feedback on course submissions that deviate from the established Senate scheduling policies or the Provost's scheduling guidelines.

Scheduling has done extensive reporting and provided volumes of data on the causes of inefficient utilization of central classrooms (non-standard times, excess use of peak time, over projecting enrollment, projecting excess sections, etc). This information to departments has identified non standard issues at the individual and specific course section level, and excess peak time issues to the exact hour level of detail. The information has been somewhat useful for those departments that apply it to the management of future scheduling needs. However, the information has always been provided too late to be a helpful tool department administrators and schedulers to use in fine-tuning the course submission for a given semester while it is in progress.

This will dramatically change in December 2003 when the ECS comes on line and when the scheduling production starts for Fall semester 2004. Under the new system, departments will submit scheduling inputs in an on line, web-based system. For the first time, the new system will allow instant feedback to departments that will specifically flag course submissions that deviate from the Senate policy and from the Provost guidelines. For the first time, the U will have an opportunity to solve scheduling/unplaced course problems before the scheduling algorithm runs -- not afterwards when department and central schedulers have been forced to play catch up.

NEW APPROACH

The Classroom Advisory Subcommittee supports the OCM intention to utilize the new scheduling features to provide rapid feedback to departments, and to make that information part of an effort to reward compliance with existing policy by prioritizing the schedule submissions of those who are in compliance. The corollary is that those who are not in compliance will receive lower (or "space available") priority in central classrooms.

The Classroom Advisory Subcommittee also supports the implementation by OCM of a procedure that will return submissions that are non-standard or in excess of 60% in peak time. (OCM will identify the number of hours in excess of 60%. The department will determine what specific courses to associate with the excess hours). These course submissions may be changed to conform and resubmitted (by the deadline) by the department, in which case they will be processed for placement in central classrooms along with other correctly submitted courses. Alternatively, the department may justify the non-standard or excess peak time need to the appropriate associate dean and, if so approved, schedule the course in a departmental classroom. As a second alternative, after associate dean approval, the course may be resubmitted to Scheduling for placement in a central classroom on a "low priority/space available" basis.

Given the high demand for central classrooms, this low priority for non-standard or excess peak-time courses means that those courses that remain outside the currently approved policy will likely not be assigned to a central classroom, especially at peak hours. Conversely, courses that meet policy will have an enhanced placement opportunity and a reduced likelihood of being changed or moved at the last minute. OCM will attempt to place non-standard time or excess peak time course submissions in central classrooms on a "space available"/ not-guaranteed basis.

CONCLUSION

The Classroom Advisory Subcommittee supports this incentive-based, "carrot" approach by OCM as opposed to a more stringent "enforcement" based approach, or an outright prohibition of non-standard courses. The Subcommittee notes that existing policy provides ample exceptions to the standard time requirement. CAS also notes that this brings UMTC more in line with how other Big Ten counterparts handle non-standard or excess peak time requirements for general purpose classrooms.

OCM advises that the risk of this incentive-based approach is that it will not sufficiently control the problem and we will continue to have central classroom shortages and unplaced courses. If this is the case, future, more stringent action, such as prohibition, will be necessary.

We believe that communications will be an important part of implementing the new Electronic Course Scheduling project enhancements in December 2003 in conjunction with the start of production for the Fall 2004 semester schedule. The ECS project has been ongoing for nine months and has been widely publicized in scheduling, classroom, registrar and student services channels. ACEP and senior administration officials can play an important part in broadening the understanding and importance of this effort that will hopefully allow UMTC to get the unplaced course problem under control.

cc: Charles Campbell, Chair, Senate Committee on Finance and Planning
Craig Swan, Vice Provost