

MSUM Scheduling Task Force Report October, 2006

I. Introduction

The MSUM Scheduling Task Force was appointed by President Barden on February 8, 2006 to provide him with recommendations in a number of areas related to class scheduling. We were charged to re-examine the current daily class schedule and to make recommendations that:

1. Improve and simplify the complicated daily class schedule currently in place.
 2. Appropriately accommodate the course credit changes that will result as MSUM moves to the new Dragon Core program.
 3. Revisit the "prime time rule" which limits departments to scheduling no more than 60% of their classes from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
 4. Speak to the appropriateness of MSUM moving to centralized room scheduling, beyond the current change for large classrooms.
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Members of the Scheduling Task Force:

Associate Registrar Ginny Bair, Records Office
Dr. Laurie Blunsom, Arts and Humanities
Dr. Tim Borchers, Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences
Dr. Matt Craig, Social and Natural Sciences
Professor Layna Cole, Education and Human Services
Dr. David Crockett, Admin VP & Dean of the College of Business and Industry
Mr. Bob Schieffer, Instructional Media
Dr. Wade Swenson, Business and Industry
Registrar Jayne Washburn, Records Office
Mr. Alex Ellsworth, Student

The ad hoc task force first met on March 9, 2006. At this meeting discussion involved the areas that need to be addressed including adjustment of starting times, potential for expanded evening offerings, and problems caused by overlapping time frames. The group also discussed ways to maximize use of facilities, current department ownership of classrooms, instructional media configuration, and the concept of centralized room scheduling.

In order to gain further information regarding the issues involved with class scheduling, the group decided to: 1) create a student survey, 2) create a faculty survey, 3) compile a list of current classrooms and department ownership information, 4) meet with Department Chairs by College, 5) report on the number of classes, distributed by time slot, 6) report on the type of instructional media equipment installed in classrooms Fall 2006.

The primary problems with the current time scheduling options are overlapping time frames causing room scheduling problems and students being unable to schedule classes due to the overlapping time frames. Another problem is that there are departments who do not schedule classes during the current required time frames. Fall 2006 shows 200 sections outside of the current time frame scenarios. Departments and Deans need to monitor the schedule more carefully so that these problems do not occur. The Records Office will also monitor these schedule inconsistencies.

While each department has unique scheduling concerns, i.e., Education Department block schedule, Sciences labs, Art and Music performance and studio classes, this group believes that

these departments need to take into consideration the requirements of students to be able to fill their schedules with a combination of Dragon Core and major courses when preparing their term schedules.

Our recommended time frames would alleviate the overlapping problems, provide more 75 minute Monday and Wednesday options, and it also allows for travel time between NDSU and MSUM for the tri-college students and frees Friday afternoons for department meetings and university meetings. The shift to the half hour will take getting used to. This shift will allow for those departments wanting to offer early morning sections to accommodate the PSEO students, and working students who want to take classes prior to their classes at high school or prior to work. The students responded positively regarding three credit classes starting on the half hour instead of the hour.

I. Student Survey

The Class Scheduling Task Force conducted a survey of students during the Spring 2006 semester. The survey was available online and was announced twice on the student listserv. The sample size was 155 students. No attempt was made to randomize or stratify the sample.

The results of the survey suggest several conclusions:

- Students prefer taking courses before 2 p.m.;
- Most students arrive on campus by 10 a.m. each day;
- Though interested in more half-semester and evening courses, students are not interested in more weekend offerings;
- Students reacted positively to having more 75 minute classes on Mondays and Wednesdays, creating a four-day week for them;
- Students have occasional difficulty in balancing three and four credit classes in their schedule because of time overlap;
- Though some students would not take a 7:30 a.m. class, there is interest in that time slot by a number of students;
- Students adjust their work schedules to their class schedules, with most students working in the afternoon, evening, or on weekends.

Respondents were asked to provide written comments about the class schedule as well. Some repeated comments include:

- Being done by early afternoon to go to work—scheduling classes during the “actual school day”;
- Taking evening courses only when day courses are full;
- Classes students take are too spread out over the day;
- Taking Tri-College classes is difficult because of the time it takes to get from campus to campus

In sum, the survey results suggest that some minor tweaking of the current class schedule would be helpful, but that larger changes to accommodate their lifestyles is not necessary at this time.

Additionally, the task force examined the number of part-time students enrolled in evening courses. There were 3,340 students enrolled in classes that begin after 4 p.m. during the Fall 2007 semester. Of those students, 505 (15%) were enrolled in fewer than 12 credits that semester. The remaining 2,835 students (85%) were registered in 12 or more credits for the term.

Survey Results Summary

The demographic information of the respondents is shown below.

Year in School	
First year	13%
Second year	16%
Third year	37%
Fourth or more	18%
Graduate	Less than 1%
Residence	
On campus	28%
Off campus	72%
Primary Major	
Arts/Humanities	14%
Business/Industry	21%
Education/Human Services	36%
Social/Natural Sciences	28%
Undeclared	2%

The students surveyed indicated that they prefer taking classes before 2 p.m.

Favorite Time for Classes	
Between 8-10 a.m.	27%
Between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.	61%
Between 2-4 p.m.	4%
4 p.m. and later	8%

Offering more evening classes was met with mixed results by the students, though more students agreed or strongly agreed that more evening classes should be offered than those who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

More evening classes?	
Strongly Agree	9%
Agree	26%
Neutral	35%
Disagree	17%
Strongly Disagree	12%
Total	99%

However, more students were opposed to offering more weekend classes than were in favor of an expanded weekend schedule.

More weekend classes?	
Strongly Agree	7%
Agree	11%
Neutral	32%
Disagree	23%
Strongly Disagree	28%

Students were interested in having more classes that meet for half the semester.

More half semester classes?	
Strongly Agree	18%
Agree	39%
Neutral	29%
Disagree	11%
Strongly Disagree	4%

Though 24% said they would never enroll in a 7:30 a.m. class, 18% said they would even if they had other options for taking the course.

When asked when they arrive on campus, 82% of the students said they were here by 10 a.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays while 80% reported being here by that time on Tuesdays and Thursdays. By 11 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 89% of the students reported being on campus.

When asked if they would prefer more 75 minute classes that meet on Mondays and Wednesdays (and not Fridays), 74% of the students agreed or strongly agreed.

A major concern of the task force is classes that overlap in time. Of the students surveyed, 12% reported they usually have difficulty balancing three and four credit classes because of time overlap. An additional 55% said they sometimes have difficulty with time overlaps.

When asked how they balance their work schedule with their class schedule, 22% reported that their work schedule depends on their class schedule. Fewer students work in the mornings than in the afternoons, evenings, or weekends. Only 5% reported that their class schedule depends on their work schedule.

Favorite comment from the student survey: "I commend the Administration for taking a proactive approach in trying to find a solution in this growing problem. Just remember that there can only be so much done, and then it is up to the student to prioritize school in their lives."

III. Faculty Survey

Faculty were surveyed online to gather their concerns about the daily course schedule and get an idea of what types of teaching times they desired. Notice of the survey was sent to Dragonews on May 5, 2006 and results were tabulated on May 22, 2006. There were 65 unique responses; two faculty members submitted the same responses twice.

The survey consisted of several multiple-choice response questions, to gather specific areas of interest to the task force, and several free response questions to allow faculty to express opinions or concerns that went beyond the options offered in the multiple choice questions. The survey and results can be found in the "Faculty Survey" tab. Fifty-one percent of the faculty teaching four credit classes reported that they prefer 75 minute classes 3 days a week, and 57.6% of the faculty teaching three credit classes prefer 75 minute classes 2 days a week. Forty percent of the respondents indicated the importance of having one, one-hour time open per week in the daily schedule for departmental meetings.

Faculty indicated they want a variety of options in offering three and four credit courses (addressed by questions 1 and 2). Each option for teaching a four credit course--two meetings a week, three meetings a week and four meetings per week--is used and has faculty who prefer it. Each option for teaching three credit courses is also used. The flexibility of the current daily schedule is valued according to many of the respondents. In fashioning our proposal we have tried to preserve flexibility while eliminating overlap between course times.

The questions related to teaching formats forced respondents to choose between options; for example, respondents who teach three credit courses were asked to indicate whether they preferred offering those courses two days a week or three days a week. In retrospect we should have allowed respondents to indicate all of the formats they use since the appropriate format depends on course content and the type of student in the course.

To justify building in some sort of meeting time:

When asked about the importance of building a regular meeting time into the daily schedule, 66% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "It is important to have one one-hour time open per week in the daily schedule for scheduling meetings." A much smaller percentage, 33%, agreed or strongly agreed that building more than one hour into the schedule for meetings is important.

However, several people pointed out in the free-response questions that a single one-hour meeting time per week may not solve many problems because not all meetings can happen in that one hour.

To justify a 30 minute shift in start times (or at least to argue there isn't much opposition):

Faculty were asked to comment on shifting class start times by 30 minutes. Of the respondents, 65% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement "Start classes on the half-hour, rather than the hour would be helpful." The remaining responses were almost equally split between agreeing and disagreeing with the statement.

To justify adding MW three credit options:

A large fraction, 80%, of the faculty responding to the survey either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I would like to see options in the daily schedule for scheduling three credit classes on MW (currently the only two-day-a-week option is TH)." One response pointed out that there are two-day-a-week options at 3PM and 4PM on MW; however, the options we propose have the virtue of not overlapping.

To motivate changes in the schedule:

Almost two-thirds (61%) of the faculty responding to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The overlap of class times allowed in the current class schedule is a problem." Only 16% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

IV: Department Meetings

Feedback was gathered from each college via task force members visiting meetings of department chairs during Spring Semester 2006. They were asked the following questions: 1) Would you be in favor of starting classes on the half hour instead of the hour? 2) Would you have faculty available to teach classes if more evening and/or Saturday students wanted to complete degrees at MSU Moorhead? 3) With our current schedule, do you have any problems scheduling department faculty meetings or other types of meetings? 4) What problems do you encounter in putting together your semester schedule? What ideas do you have about ways to address those problems? 5) What works well for you in putting together your semester schedule? 6) What concerns do you have about the daily schedule?

Along with the above questions, chairs were asked to identify any challenges faced in scheduling courses using the current format as well as changes they would like to see implemented in order to improve the current format. Using feedback from the department chairs, the task force drafted a new scheduling format. Drafts of this format were shared with all the colleges early fall semester 2007 through department meetings. Chairs were asked for feedback on the proposed scheduling format. Below is a brief listing of common scheduling issues raised by departments.

Common comments gathered from department chairs across campus:

- It is important that course times don't overlap one another.
- It is important to create lab schedules that don't overlap with other required courses.
- Desire to create more options for scheduling courses.
- Classes need to be in rooms that accommodate the number of students in the course as well as the technology or media needs of the course (i.e. math needs long chalk boards).
- Many departments expressed a desire to have first shot at scheduling particular rooms in their areas for certain classes.
- There should be more options for Monday/Wednesday 75 minute courses while still maintaining the option of 3 or 4 day per week 50 minute courses.
- Evening courses should have a variety of start times.
- It is desirable to have a common time where no courses are scheduled in order to accommodate meetings and University-wide gatherings.
- There is interest in scheduling ½ semester courses in blocks.
- There is a concern that faculty may not want to teach night classes because their daytime obligations might not be reduced accordingly.
- Many programs are structuring courses that do not fit the current scheduling format or the proposed scheduling format. Therefore, there needs to be a way to make exceptions to the new format.

See "Dept Meetings" tab for notes from each of the College meetings.

V. Time Scheduling

The Spring 2006 schedule was evaluated for situations where departments offered their courses at non-standard times as listed in the Daily Calendar approved by President Barden in 1998.

- Spring 2006: 4 credit courses less than two hours long per meeting at non-standard times – 38 courses
- Spring 2006: 3 credit courses less than two hours long per meeting at

- non-standard times – 113 courses
- Spring 2006 Class Start Time: 74% of the classes were offered during prime time 10:00-2:00

There are 1,405 sections offered Fall 2006, and 75% of the classes are scheduled between 9:00 a.m. and 3:15 p.m.

While we will never please all of the people all of the time, we believe that the ultimate goal in building a new daily calendar is to avoid room conflicts and time conflicts for students.

VI. Rationale for Proposed Daily Class Schedule Grid

One of the Task Force on Class Scheduling charges was to improve and simplify the daily class schedule currently in place. The current schedule has become less efficient with the implementation of the new Dragon Core courses and with the changing demographics of our student population.

The current schedule has times which overlap and causes problems for students and classroom utilization. The proposed schedule eliminates these issues during the daytime hours, while at the same time providing more options for scheduling lab classes.

Surveys completed by students and faculty indicated that there is an increased need for 3 credit classes that meet twice a week for 75 minutes. This need is especially important for professionals who are returning to school for additional education. The proposed schedule allows for the traditional MWF 50 minute classes beginning at 7:30 am and starting on the half hour every hour through the 12:30-1:20 pm time frame. Beginning at 1:30 pm all time slots are 75 minutes long continuing into the evening hours. This schedule also helps to make Friday afternoons more available for department and/or organizational meetings. There was also feedback asking for opportunities to offer half semester courses in the evenings and the proposed evening times are designed to provide this.

Starting courses on the half hour on MWF will accommodate students who take courses through Tri-College. The proposed schedule also provides more opportunities for non-traditional class times in a number of ways. The 7:30 am slot will allow departments to offer classes to students who may need to go to work after attending an early morning class. The afternoon and evening times allow more classes to be scheduled each day. Departments wanted more options for offering evening classes. While there are overlapping time frames in the evenings, room conflict and student schedule conflict is not a problem.

With the implementation of the Dragon Core more of our classes are now 3 credits rather than 4 credits, and the new scenario takes this into consideration. As more departments move to three credit offerings, this schedule is designed to provide them with the time and facilities needed for these classes.

VII. Centralized Room Scheduling

To accommodate a more centralized scheduling model, efforts are being made to ensure that teaching environments are equipped with technology and presentation equipment to support instruction.

A plan of standardization is being employed to help ensure that instructors are able to move from room to room and still be able to easily operate the installed technology. Recognizing that there are many teaching styles and that there are a variety of equipment configurations necessary to support instruction, a 4-tiered approach to classroom design is being used.

Level 1

- TV
- DVD/VCR
- Overhead Projector (transparency)
- Manual Screen

Level 2

- Video/Data Projector
- Laptop Computer Hook-up
- DVD/VCR
- Speaker
- Overhead Projector (transparency)
- Electric Screen

Level 3

- Video/Data Projector
- Teaching Console
- Laptop Computer Hook-up
- DVD/VCR
- Speaker
- Overhead Projector (transparency)
- Electric Screen

Level 4

- Video/Data Projector
- Teaching Console
- Integrated Control System
- Laptop Computer Hook-up
- DVD/VCR
- Document Camera
- Distributed Sound system with P.A.
- Overhead Projector
- Electric Screen

For efficient room use, classes requiring a higher level of technology installation will be scheduled in those rooms that support those needs, while classes requiring less technology will be scheduled in rooms at a lower level.

In the past, many classroom installations were accomplished by efforts of individual academic departments. This model does not support centralized scheduling since many departments require their particular classes to be scheduled in “their” room, with “their” equipment. To address some of this room ownership issue, Academic Affairs has taken the responsibility of updating and equipping rooms from more centralized university funds, instead of from individual departments. Rooms now are equipped in a standardized, general way to allow ease of use for all instructional activities. In cases where specific departmental needs exist, accommodation is made with the installation of specialized equipment within classrooms.

Concentration of these efforts has been on “general-use” scheduled classrooms. Rooms that are specifically used by individual departments (labs, studios, etc.) have not been brought into this centralized model for equipping rooms. Departments are encouraged to work on planning efforts to identify and prioritize needs within their departmental spaces to ensure instructional needs are being met.

Maintenance and updating of classroom environments is a continuing effort. To help provide a more user-friendly way to provide centralized, accessible information about facilities, the university is in the process of implementing a new addition to the EMS centralized scheduling software called Virtual EMS. This new addition provides web-based access to information about room configurations and improved look-up capabilities to members of the campus community.

Scheduling of classes within areas such as the College of Education, School of Business, and the Natural Science departments are being coordinated to maximize usage of facilities. Departmental computer labs, science labs, art, music, and theater spaces with specialized functions will be scheduled by the assigned departments with coordination between departments that share the facilities. The Records Office will have responsibility for scheduling classrooms with a capacity of

80 or more students. Final responsibility for assuring maximum usage of classrooms will reside with the Records Office.

Listed below is a link to Instructional Media In Classrooms. There is a variety of presentation media installed in MSU Moorhead classrooms. The building links include a room by room listing of what is available in each room.

<http://www.mnstate.edu/media/ClassroomServices/ClassConfigDocs/ClassConfig.htm>

VIII: Prime Time Rule

The prime time rule regarding no more than 60% of the courses should be offered between 10:00 and 2:00 was addressed. This rule was first implemented when the university's enrollment was over 9,000 students. Our current enrollment of near 7,500 doesn't have the same problems when the university was over 9,000 students. Facility usage, parking, etc. could have been factors needing to be addressed at that time. It appears that currently some departments tend to offer more of their classes outside of the "prime time" than others.

The task force discussed the fact that it might be more appropriate to address the need for Dragon Core courses being offered at times distributed throughout the day, including evening classes, rather than focusing on an individual department's need to follow a 'prime time' rule. It is possible that with the elimination of overlapping class times, the need for a prime time rule may not be as pressing.

The responses received from students and faculty indicated a preference for classes to be scheduled in the middle of the day. Dragon Core courses need to be offered across the board, students will go to MSCTC to take their science courses. Dragon Core courses in a related department requirement need to be offered outside prime time. Dragon Core complaint, inability to finish liberal arts requirement in sciences course labs want at night.

IX: Summary and Recommendations

- Utilize the revised daily calendar with all classes required to begin at the listed start times.
- Properly distribute the courses being offered across the days of the week and periods during the day.
- Departments are encouraged to collaborate with one another when planning term schedule for classes required by other departments.
- Departments are encouraged to work on planning efforts to identify and prioritize needs within their departmental spaces to ensure instructional needs in the classroom are being met.
- While the last time a scheduling committee met and established a calendar was in 1998, this committee recommends revisiting the time schedule every two to three years.
- Departments are responsible for scheduling classes in a way that efficiently uses assigned classroom space.
- Departments are responsible for scheduling classes in a way that uses student time wisely and efficiently, as well.
- Courses should be scheduled in evening hours on a rotating basis so a broad cross-section of the curriculum is offered by the department.

- While no mandated open time is included in the schedule, Friday afternoons (from 2:30 to 5:00) will generally be available for faculty and student meetings and for university-wide colloquia.
- Academic Deans are responsible for monitoring adherence to these criteria.

Submitted by: Jayne Washburn, Registrar
10/30/06

Note on Summer Schedule:

Summer class times will remain 7:30-9:30 am, 9:45-11:45 am, 12:00-2:00 pm, and 2:15-4:15 pm with evening classes beginning at any half hour from 4:30 pm on. Classes meeting for more than 2 hours per day should be scheduled in a manner that will remain within as few time frames as possible. (e.g., a class which is three hours in length should not overlap three of the time slots listed, but should be scheduled within two of the times listed.) Workshop format classes which meet for longer periods of time in a given day should be scheduled in a balanced manner within departments/colleges.