

Class Scheduling Guidelines and Best Practices

Committee on Academic Priorities

In January 2019, the Smith College faculty approved a new Day-Time Schedule, which went into effect for fall 2019 semester class scheduling. This was the product of several years of CAP discussion and considerable input from chairs/directors and other faculty members.

The new schedule resolved some scheduling and compliance issues (e.g., overlapping double time blocks and insufficient seminar meeting times), and helped us achieve modest scheduling improvements in the 2019-20 academic year. As such, it represents an important first step. Course sections continued to be bunched in the “peak” 10:50 and 1:10/1:20 time slots, however: In fall 2019, nearly 50% of course sections were scheduled in these times, leading to a shortage of appropriate classrooms and, more importantly, continued student frustration due to class conflicts. To effect a significant and lasting change in scheduling, the day-time schedule must be paired with reasonable scheduling guidelines. CAP is thus recommending a set of new policies and practices to achieve these goals and purposes:

- maximize student access to courses (i.e., minimizing conflicts),
- accommodate a range of pedagogies and discipline-based needs,
- encourage use of the full academic day and week,
- balance course demand against learning space/classroom type and availability,
- optimize use of classroom space and instructional technology,
- provide instructors the opportunity to balance their teaching responsibilities with research and service,
- facilitate compliance with federal credit hour requirements and Smith policy,
- establish clear priorities for registrar processing of room requests, and
- promote a set of “best practices” that, if adopted by everyone, will help make scheduling a more transparent, efficient, and collaborative process.

Smith Policy for Scheduling

The scheduling guidelines are rooted in the current *Code of Faculty Legislation and Administrative Practice*:

57. The Schedule for Classes

- a. The schedule shall be constructed with reference to the interests of the College as a whole and shall subordinate the interests of individuals thereto. It shall be permanent in its details so far as is consistent with the principle just stated. All proposals for changes in the schedule and for the placing of new or unscheduled courses must be referred to the Registrar and the Provost and Dean of the Faculty.
- b. The College has a five-day teaching schedule in accordance with the weekly schedule of classes shown below, classes being scheduled within a time block noted by a single letter.
- c. Each department shall ensure that its courses are equitably distributed across time blocks.

61. Preparation of Assigned Work

- a. Smith College complies with federal regulations defining a credit hour.
- b. Normally, a four-credit course involves twelve hours per week of academically engaged time over the course of the semester. Academically engaged time is generally three class or contact hours per week plus nine additional hours of academic work for the course per week.
- c. For courses carrying more or fewer than four credits, the Smith College expectation is three hours per week of academically engaged time per credit over the course of the semester.

Scheduling Guidelines and Best Practices

Departments and programs may schedule course sections into any regular, approved slots, subject to the availability of appropriate classrooms. **To maximize student choice and allow efficient utilization of classroom space, departments and programs are encouraged to use all approved course times, including early morning and evening time blocks.** Departments are not strictly required to use all time blocks but must strive for balance across days of the week (balancing MW/F and TR), times of the day (early morning, morning, afternoon, evening) and peak/non-peak class times. To meet this goal, **CAP has identified the following course section distribution objectives for undergraduate courses:**

- **No more than 40% of course sections should be scheduled in the peak time blocks (10:50 and 1:10/1:20),** and particular care should be taken to balance those across time blocks and days.
- Departments are encouraged to achieve 20% of course sections scheduled during the early morning (8:00/8:25), 4:10 or other late afternoon and evening time blocks (as approved by CAP).

When scheduling, departments should strive for equal distribution between junior, senior, non-core and adjunct faculty, while still taking into account particular circumstances in an equitable and fair manner (e.g., an individual faculty member's work-life issues, important academic/committee responsibilities, or other fixed professional obligations). With the exception of laboratory instructors, each faculty member should expect to offer at least one course section in an off-peak time block over a period of one or two academic years.

Departments should further ensure that all course sections meet contact hour requirements, as described on the Provost/Dean of the Faculty website (<https://www.smith.edu/sites/default/files/media/Documents/Provost/academically-engaged-time.pdf>). The registrar's office will review this as courses are entered and consult with the department as needed if compliance issues arise.

Additional considerations:

- Lectures, colloquia, first-year seminars and other non-seminar courses may use only one class time block, unless an exception has been approved by CAP.
- Laboratories, studio art and other performance courses may combine two time blocks into a single 3-hour time. No course may use more than 2 time blocks, unless an exception has been approved by CAP. (Standing exceptions exist for many studio art and performance courses.)
- Seminars must meet a minimum of 150 minutes. Seminars may combine any two contiguous time blocks into a single 160-minute block, with the exception of TR 4:10. Evening time blocks may be expanded to 180 minutes. Departments should spread seminars throughout the week, rather than clustering them on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon (per the former day-time schedule).
- Departments that use fourth hours (e.g., MTWF or MWRf) are limited to blocks that have designated additional days (8:00/8:25, 9:25, 10:50). Classes that meet five days a week should avoid using two peak time blocks whenever possible.
- Departments requiring use of a registrar classroom may not schedule discussion sections during the peak hours (10:50-2:35), unless using the third period of the 80-minute block in which the lecture is scheduled (e.g., lecture on MW, 1:20-2:35; discussion scheduled F, 1:20-2:10). Otherwise, discussion sections should be scheduled during non-peak times, such as early morning, late afternoon, Fridays, or evenings on which classes are held, or the fourth period of an approved block.
- Departments that offer multiple-section courses—often gateway courses—are encouraged to schedule at least one of the sections during the earliest block. Evening and late afternoon (TR 4:10) courses can also fulfill the early morning/late afternoon distribution objective.

- Multi-section courses offered in the same semester should be scheduled so that all sections meet at different, non-overlapping times.
- If a course does not conform to scheduling requirements and has not been granted an exception by CAP, it will not be entered by the registrar into the system, will not appear in the schedule of classes, and will not be available for student registration.

Classroom Scheduling Priority

When scheduling classrooms, the registrar's office will prioritize (1) the expected enrollment of course sections in relation to room capacities, and (2) the pedagogical and technological/equipment needs of the instructor. The registrar's office will make every effort to assign suitable classrooms that are preferred by instructors, but classroom requests indicated on the department schedule of classes or instructor preference form are considered requests only and are not guaranteed. If the registrar determines there are too many course sections and not enough appropriate classrooms for a given time slot, they will determine the best way to match room capacities with course section sizes, configurations (lecture versus seminar), and technologies/equipment to course requirements.

Additional factors include the following:

- Priority will be given to course sections scheduled within the standard schedule over sections scheduled at nonstandard times. Course sections scheduled at non-standard times can effectively block a room or two or more stand periods, preventing other sections from using the room.
- Course sections that do not meet the entire semester and/or fractional-credit course sections that do not use an entire time block (e.g, scheduled only T of a TR block) have lower priority in classroom scheduling.
- Credit-bearing course sections have priority over non-credit subsections such as discussion sections and film screenings. Non-credit events such as tutoring sessions or study groups are not scheduled by the registrar's office. They may be scheduled by the department/office directly through the events management system after the end of the add/drop period.
- For learning spaces that are department-priority/registrar-managed, the department has priority in assigning courses into the classroom at the time the semester class schedule is created. Departments are encouraged to maximize their use of their priority classrooms before requesting registrar classrooms. The registrar's office may use any unscheduled time after the initial department schedule is developed for general assignments. Once rooms are assigned, course sections will not be removed from joint-controlled classrooms if there is a change in the department's offerings.
- Department-controlled learning spaces are typically specialized rooms such as laboratories or studios, and are not available to the registrar's office for general use or other events, unless permission is granted by the department.

If necessary due to classroom or equipment constraints, the registrar's office may contact departments to propose alternate times and/or rooms for individual courses.

CAP believes classroom scheduling can be a collaborative process provided that policies, guidelines and best practices are understood and followed by all parties. Departments that are unable or unwilling to make a collegial scheduling effort and/or place an excessive number of course sections in a time block will receive lower priority for sections needing registrar classrooms.

Classroom Accessibility

Classroom assignments may be changed when the room is determined to be inaccessible for a student or instructor. Instructors should notify the registrar's office as soon as they identify any barriers to their own or a student's access to or within a classroom. The registrar will make every effort to relocate the course section to a comparable, accessible room. The registrar's office and the Classroom Committee should work closely with the Office of Disability Services to ensure that classrooms and academic buildings are fully accessible for disabled students and instructors.