



Strategy #2: Deploy Strategic Course Scheduling

To: Dr. Clifton Sanders, Provost for Academic Affairs

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Executive Summary

This year, the strategic scheduling collaborative work team met to provide tactical guidance on the schedule and to discuss the strategic aims of scheduling at SLCC. Our scheduling office does an excellent job of working with departments to build a schedule that provides sufficient student access to needed courses and works to create classroom and human resource efficiencies. Nevertheless, the committee recognizes that the college can do more to adopt data-driven approaches to scheduling, provide more Provost office direction when it comes to scheduling priorities and procedures, and ensure compliance when it comes to individual departments following scheduling policies.

Charge and Background

As the strategy lead, you are responsible for strategy implementation to include the following:

- Develop the scheduling committee to become a forum where scheduling data gets further synthesized and reported to the Provost office and Executive Cabinet.
- Continue to evolve the data we're gathering from DegreeWorks and College Scheduler.
- Create a Scheduling Handbook—a document that moves beyond our current practice of scheduling “guidelines” to create more clarity and consistency of approach, especially when it comes to following the bell schedule. The handbook should also provide more specific direction on how we schedule emerging sites where we're trying to grow enrollment.
- Work with SLCC's Business Process Analyst Kelsey Pesta to study the current process of building the class schedule with the goal of providing a set of recommendations for improvement.
- Engage stakeholders to ensure participation, collaboration, and clear communication.
- Maintain the internal communication with regular updates on the work accomplished. This should include a minimum of three written updates per academic year.

Approach and Progress on the Charge

Results on specific aspects of the charge

Reporting to the Provost: The scheduling committee has done more in the last two years to update the Provost office on the state of the schedule (fill rates, course closures, etc.) and where we are seeing challenges and opportunities.

Data from DegreeWorks and College Scheduler: College Scheduler has been successfully implemented and adoption of College Scheduler as the primary registration tool used by SLCC students continues to increase. OSS uses College Scheduler as the sole registration tool in New Student Orientation and, as such, with each new student cohort we are seeing increased usage. To date, 57,391 unique users have accessed the system and 410,275 unique logins have occurred. Next year, we will have two full years of data to analyze.

Recent adjustments to preload schedules for specific programs, specifically in the Health Sciences area of study where schedules tend to be more sequential, have been very effective. The Office of the Registrar and Academic Records is looking to roll out preloaded schedules in CTE and Communication Arts & Media as next steps. Other improvements surrounding integration with DegreeWorks, help text/customized instructions, and ability to preload by section CRN are planned for the upcoming months.

Create a scheduling handbook: Tom Hanson developed a brief handbook that can provide SLCC administrators, faculty, and staff with a clearer understanding of the scheduling procedure; and to make recommendations for more effective scheduling practices (see Appendix). In Fall 2022, eight (8) AD's/Chairs from five (5) Schools were recruited to pilot the handbook, focused primarily on "Run/Cancel & Enrollment Management" for Spring 2022 and the Fall 2022 "Edits Process." Concerning the former, participants utilized Academic Insight Dashboard tools and a [strongly] recommended, Dec. 22nd target deadline for Spring 2022 decisions. Overall, pilot members cancelled "iffy, super-low, stagnant," or "ill-fated" sections prior to the deadline but were likely to hold off on most classes; this hesitancy mainly stemmed from their "local knowledge," as well as apprehension over the predictive accuracy of Dashboard features. In sum, the handbook appears helpful in encouraging AD's/Chairs to be proactive and diligent in how they engage with the scheduling process. However, the pilot elucidated the value AD's/Chairs place on their tacit knowledge of departmental operations.

Work with Kelsey Pesta: Kelsey consulted with the committee early in the academic year; she provided an invaluable framework to guide how we consider procedural flow. We certainly need to reengage Kelsey next year and be more intentional with her expertise and assistance.

Engage stakeholders: For certain, the committee's composition ensures that major stakeholders are represented. Nevertheless, extra efforts were made. For instance, David Brower, from the Scheduling Office, assisted with handbook revisions, based on his experiences on the front line. In addition, Tom Hanson met with approximately 100 students to extract informal, qualitative data on their experience with the scheduling process. Overall, College Scheduler and DegreeWorks received accolades, but students were frustrated about classes being cancelled, especially once they had solidified their semester plan in College Scheduler. Furthermore, students recommended that a) lecture classes be broadcasted to classrooms at other campus locations b) the College explore more innovative scheduling options (e.g., 5-week classes; 3-week classes over Winter Break), and; c) academic departments remove inactive courses from the catalog.

Challenges and Limitations

In some areas, staffing is an obstacle to strategic scheduling. In areas like Chemistry or Computer Science, for instance, a lack of qualified adjuncts or limited full-time capacity means that we cannot always schedule courses where and when we want to.

Strategic scheduling is also challenged by two cultural conditions. Within some areas, we still need to overcome a culture of building schedules that satisfy faculty preference. We're also challenged when it comes to scheduling at certain sites.

Efforts to move up the run/cancel date, via the handbook pilot, were met with unforeseen challenges. For instance, students may be enrolled in a summer course that is contingent upon [at least] a "C" grade for a spring prerequisite course. To make final, run/cancel decisions before grades are posted and before the "purging" of non-passing students is problematic.

Recommendations

Our conversations this year culminated in three main recommendations for College Planning Council to consider.

1. SLCC should adopt new scheduling software that provides enhanced analytics and uses airtight algorithms. In this manner, the college can enter an advanced phase of data-driven scheduling and provide stakeholders with useful, more accurate data to populate extant platforms, inform decision-making, and enhance procedural integrity.
2. The college should adopt a comprehensive and transparent scheduling handbook that not only codifies the scheduling procedure but also ensures consistency across the college and secures buy-in from stakeholders. To this end, the committee will improve the handbook by incorporating data-driven developments, collaborating with stakeholders, and considering the academic needs and cultural pulse of each campus. Piloting the handbook was useful in recognizing and appreciating the nuance involved with scheduling decisions. Moreover, the prescriptive nature of the handbook remains to be seen. Nevertheless, through this strategic endeavor, the committee identified three (3) guidelines that could be easily enforced and pay dividends:
 - a. Complete the Initial Round Edits and Final Round Edits by their deadlines.
 - b. Follow the bell schedule when and where it can be.
 - c. Discontinue or suspend inactive courses.
3. SLCC should establish campus/site-based goals for programs, such that we provide a reliable way for students to map out their coursework through graduation. This issue was a recurring theme within strategic scheduling reports and presentations from the past several years. Indeed, the lack of established, site-based programming creates a cascading effect on other aspects of scheduling. Therefore, the committee recommends that each location have a 1-2 year, coursework plan available to students, undergirded by proactive marketing efforts, community outreach, and definitive decisions on where academic programs should be

housed. To this end, the committee will be more engaged in opportunities and activities to help establish campus/site-based programming.