# Recommendations of the Learning Spaces Governance Committee
## Executive Summary

**In order to provide more teaching spaces for the University's ever-increasing numbers of students**, the Learning Spaces Governance Committee is recommending a set of new policies and good practices that will achieve these goals and purposes:

1. To **double the length of daily teaching times** when classrooms are offered to teaching units (with an initial two-year "light" phase for optimizing the final plan),
2. To **make efficient use of our most popular classrooms** by defining structures, called 'blocks', for requesting room assignments during prime-time (9:30-2:20) *(Appendix A)*,
3. To **establish clear priorities for processing room requests during prime time *(Appendix B)*,**
4. To **offer flexible scheduling times** that provide classrooms without scheduling constraints,
5. To  **provide new policy tools that will expedite the work of the Office of the Registrar** in order to (a) **announce an extremely firm set of class times to students three weeks before they register for classes** and (b) **confirm the details of teaching resource needs for teaching units** for the next academic quarter,
6. To **promote a set of 'best practices'** that define good behaviors that, if adopted by everyone, will help to make classroom scheduling a more open, efficient, and collaborative process, and
7. To **mitigate the impacts of teaching classes after 3:30 PM**, especially in seasons when classes extend past sunset

The transition to the new policies and practices should be actively promulgated immediately with phase-one implementation starting in the spring quarter 2018.

## Background

One of the primary missions of the University of Washington is the education of its students.  We achieve this in various ways, the most common of which is the traditional mode of courses scheduled in classrooms. The scheduling of classes has become progressively more difficult for both departments and the central administrative units (Office of the Registrar, Health Sciences Room Reservations) as the University grows both in population and in number of sections offered.  For example, in autumn 2015 approximately 800 of 4000 requests for classrooms could not be honored at the time of request.  Nearly all were eventually scheduled, though in some cases the final assignment occurred within days of the start of the course's academic quarter and required the offering department to change its offerings. This is becoming a more frequent practice.

There are no longer enough classrooms to continue the scheduling of classes at popular times of the day, 9:30 to 2:20.  As a result, class scheduling often turns out to be a frantic and time-consuming effort—often unsuccessful and sometimes stressful—to meet conflicting demands. Scheduling offices are caught in the middle with few policy tools or transparent processes to provide instructors and students a firm academic schedule well in advance of course registration each quarter.

The impacts of the present classroom assignment practices fall on students who cannot enroll in or plan for future courses, on faculty who cannot arrange schedules that provide predictable times for their

scholarship and other responsibilities, on staff who are expected to provide for the classroom resources needed for the normal functioning of the academy, and on anyone who must coordinate a class schedule with jobs or with responsibility for childcare or eldercare.  Fixing the current problems, as we propose here, will impose collateral hardships on students and faculty alike.  Finding the optimum balance of benefits and consequences is a challenge since we all have individual needs and expectations.

The Learning Spaces Governance Committee ("Governance Committee") was formed by Provost Gerald Baldasty in May 2015 to explore how best to cope with these issues.  Our recommendations are listed in this report.

## Implementation Goals and Methods

One obvious and effective option is to increase the number of hours per day when classes can be scheduled and to formulate the necessary policy tools to make this workable by moving classes into the expanded instructional day.  The "Fixed Distribution Model" is the most attractive means to implement more class hours. FDM is described in the next section. In addition we explored the adoption of a clear and simple block-scheduling policy that helps attain effective use of extant classrooms during prime hours. The block schedule is shown in Appendix A.

Implementation of any FDM will result in adjustment problems as courses are spread throughout a longer day.  FDM may not be popular (as changes in the cadence of life rarely are) and may cause scheduling changes for other academic activities such as departmental meetings and colloquia.  Thus we propose that FDM be phased in over two academic years starting in autumn 2017.  This provides time for departments to plan and for the Registrar's Office to make mid-course corrections.

Moreover, the Registrar's Office and Health Sciences Room Reservation office both require a palette of simple policy tools so that they can prepare class schedules far enough in advance for students to plan their quarterly activities. Accordingly, an important goal for these scheduling offices is to fix room assignments for nearly all (~97%) classes and to post the results no less than three weeks before class registration opens for students.

Experience shows that annual requests for large rooms (≥250 seats) are highly predictable.  We propose to exploit this in order to recommend that the assignment of large classrooms be prepared and published annually rather than quarterly.  This will provide departments with valuable teaching spaces well in advance and save some scheduling overhead in the Registrar's Office.

## The Fixed Distribution Model

The committee considered the positive and negative impacts of the Fixed Distribution Model" ("FDM") in which each department must distribute its room request evenly in every class hour within a ten-hour teaching window (8:30, 9:30 . . . 5:30).  Such a practice is simple, fair, reasonably predictive (provided that pressures for available classrooms do not increase), and relatively easy for the Registrar's Office to enforce. We note that similar policies have been adopted successfully at UCLA, USC, Northwestern, and elsewhere.

Adding additional hours to the classroom schedule is the most effective way to meet the increasing demands for more instruction.  Models of previous room requests suggest that a 10-hour instructional day (FDM-10) will be sufficient for greatly reducing unmet requests.   Accordingly, FDM-10 has been the baseline for policy design purposes. This is the most central of the policy recommendations presented in the next section.  Other recommendations of best practices are secondary and supplementary.

## Supplementary Recommendations

Fixed policy is the yin to the yang of flexibility as the needs and aspirations of students at the University evolve.  While good policy is strategic and inherently robust, it is also rigid and best imposed gently and sparingly.  It is highly desirable to establish a set of supplementary good tactical scheduling practices that support and complement new policies.  These are presented after our policy recommendations.

Classes in the Health Sciences have different needs and rapidly evolving expectations than those on the upper campus.  Therefore, at least for now, we recommend that HS class scheduling be handled more informally than for the upper campus. The existing partnership between the Registrar's Office and Health Sciences Room Reservations should simply continue with adjustments as needed to meet shared goals: optimization of classroom facilities and enhanced predictability of class offerings before student registration opens.

We believe that class scheduling can begin to develop into a collaborative village exercise provided that policies and good practices are clearly written and promulgated to all parties.  Once the lines of authority and responsibility are clear then anyone can understand how to find their way through the complex scheduling process with minimal disruption and angst.

## Proposed Classroom Scheduling Policies

*1. **Open the classroom-scheduling window by adopting a fixed-distribution model (FDM)** in which **departments spread their courses evenly across a 10-hour teaching day (FDM-10) starting in spring 2018.***

To ease the transition we recommend a phased approach to FDM adoption: in the first two years, we recommend that units be restricted to no more than 12% of their general-assignment-room classes starting in any given instructional hour.   This provides the University with time to adjust, to make policy corrections, and to assess the impacts of FDM on student enrollment and faculty scholarship.  Thus the Registrar's Office will have two years to monitor progress to our goals and to formulate mid-course corrections before final policy is fully operational. If necessary the University will implement FDM-10 in year 3 where no more than 10% of a unit's general-assignment-room classes may begin in any given instructional hour.

Departments with fewer than twenty-five room requests annually (i.e., those that cannot spread 10% of their courses evenly in every hour) will be limited to no more than two-thirds of their sections in prime time as averaged over all of their annual requests.

This policy will be strictly applied to a department's overall request for general-assignment rooms. Additionally, it will apply to a department's requests for large-capacity classrooms as a subset. Any exceptions are considered extraordinary and must be approved annually by the Provost.

*2. **Maximize room utilization by implementing 'block scheduling'.***   All requests for classrooms during prime time must conform to defined scheduling times ("blocks") so that unassignable gaps in room use are eliminated.  The block schedule is fully described in Appendix A.  Our recommendation for block scheduling has been crafted to try to accommodate diverse disciplinary needs while also trying to harmonize the current patchwork of meeting schedules.  Sections that do not conform to the scheduling blocks will still be considered, but only after the conforming sections have been scheduled, especially during prime time (9:30 AM – 2:20 PM).

3. ***Enhance the predictability of class schedules by assigning large classes annually.***  Courses that will be held in large-capacity classrooms will be scheduled for an entire year in the preceding winter quarter (at the usual time for autumn-quarter assignments). For now, the scheduling of smaller classrooms will be scheduled quarterly, as at present.

*4. **Prioritize the assignment of courses needed by many students.***  Gateway or required courses or courses with special scheduling needs (such as the lecture sections of lab courses) will be the first to be considered and scheduled by the Registrar in prime time, but only when they fit into the block schedule requirements (above).  We realize that scheduling conflicts will occur (with or without blocks) since no system can anticipate or solve everyone's needs.  These will be handled informally, though the ultimate authority for resolving them continues to lie with the Registrar's Office.  A standing committee with representatives from the Faculty Senate, the Office of the Registrar, the Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs, and the Graduate School will meet annually to define and assess this list of high-priority courses.

5.  ***Establish enforcement policies.***  The Registrar's Office will periodically monitor the actual seat occupancy in classes held in large lecture rooms.  Department chairs will be required to justify all observed significant discrepancies between projected and actual enrollment.  Future requests for such courses will be automatically revised for realistic enrollment if the differences are sustained for two or more quarters.

## Best Practices: Registrar's Office

University programs and student expectations evolve, so course scheduling needs a concomitant degree of flexibility.  Flexibility and policy do not usually coexist peacefully. So a prioritized set of principles provides everyone with transparency into how scheduling requests are processed outside of the policy recommendations above.

 • **Clarity, fairness, and equal access.**  All departments have equal priority for room assignments.  Class teaching traditions are respected but not inviolate.  The Registrar's Office will endeavor to balance all requests for classrooms fairly and equitably. Individual departments will define their preferred

instructional locations on campus.  The Registrar 's Office will take those preferences into consideration when trying to maximize the room assignments for the University.

• **Assign rooms that are preferred by instructors, especially after 3:30 PM.** The Registrar's Office will make every effort to assign suitable classrooms that are preferred by instructors.  Courses with special classroom equipment require careful consideration.  Classrooms in use after 3:30 during autumn and winter months should be aggregated within safe buildings close to campus shuttle services and safe bus stops.  (These buildings will be reported to the Police Department.)

• **Publish course schedules three weeks prior to course registration (~97% completeness)**.  This allows people to organize their lives in advance.  Working students, faculty with official administrative duties, and those who use childcare and eldercare need this information to organize their lives.  The Registrar's Office should move the request deadline earlier if necessary to realize this goal.

• **Settle conflicting requests amicably.**  The Registrar's Office (through the authority of the Provost) holds the ultimate responsibility for room assignments.  This authority must be used carefully since mandating the respect and the cooperation of academic units is essential for effective scheduling.

• **Communicate frequently with academic units on policies, problems, and performance.**  the Registrar's Office will make an ongoing outreach effort to stay well informed about scheduling issues being faced by all departments.  This includes continuing coordination with Health Sciences through their Office of Academic Services & Facilities. In cooperation with UWIT, it will also publish "heat maps" of classroom demands for the previous year as a whole and by department.  The Office of the Registrar will do its best to provide all departments with other timely data that they may need to submit and optimize their schedule requests every quarter and to use in their course planning.

The goal of developing a collegial scheduling effort requires trust and open communications. Accordingly high-level staff from Registrar's Office or the Health Sciences should meet every autumn with appropriate schedule coordinators to provide feedback and data summaries to departmental schedule coordinators, reviews of and timely information about changes in scheduling policies, updates in classroom technologies, forthcoming changes in departmental scheduling needs and practices, and generally to solicit the advice and suggestions of schedule coordinators.

• **Stay aware of academic issues and concerns of the faculty.**  The Registrar's Office should seek a standing invitation to the Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning in order to keep abreast of academic issues of concern to the faculty.  The feedback from FCT&L is especially important as changing policies are being implemented. They must also remember that the ultimate responsibility for the success of UW's academic program lies with the faculty (Faculty Code 23-43).  That is, the faculty have a strong vested interest that the normal scheduling of courses supports the highest academic quality.

• **Revise the Final Exam Schedule.**  The Office of the Registrar will re-assess the final exam schedule and revise it where necessary to accommodate block scheduling patterns more equitably. The revised exam schedule should be posted no later than the posting of the Autumn 2017 Time Schedule.

# Best Practices: Provost

• **Take measures that add to the safety and convenience of people attending late afternoon classes.** For example, consider expanding ride services if necessary, especially during Pacific Standard Time. Advise and take counsel from the campus police on strategies for assuring safety during the dark months.

• **Invest in drop-in childcare for students and faculty involved in late-afternoon courses**.

• **Invest in classroom equipment and transitions to alternate methods of instruction that allow instructors to modify their courses in ways that alleviate seating pressure during prime time.**

• **The proposed policies and practices in this document should be promulgated in a highly visible fashion to all faculty, faculty governance groups, and students with an invitation for feedback and suggestions.**

# Best Practices: Academic Units

We are recommending more prescriptive scheduling methods than in previous years, in order to assure predictable classroom spaces for students and preferred spaces for faculty.  We list some potentially useful practices next.

• **Understand the classroom scheduling process in detail.**  Departments that understand the new patterns of block scheduling should be able to develop requests strategies that lead to desirable and expeditious outcomes.  With a little patience and the active support of the Registrar's Office we expect that disruptions will abate within one or two years.

• **Consider alternate teaching modes and strategies.**  Departments with course needs that do not conform to the block-scheduling guidelines above are urged to consider alternate modes of instruction to bring the course into compliance with blocks.

• **Remind faculty about the line of authority for assigning courses.**  Department chairs should occasionally remind instructors that full authority and responsibility for assigning instructors to classes lie with the chairs.

• **Fairness and sensitivity.** Chairs will, of course, use this authority equitably and fairly to support faculty with special personal needs (such as child or eldercare) or important academic responsibilities or fixed scholarship obligations to others.  Commuting and other conveniences will take lower priority.

• **Post or circulate quarterly schedules where students and faculty will see them.**  This should occur as soon as the Registrar's Office has supplied them to the department's chair or administration.  This applies to all undergraduates and graduate students affiliated with their departments.

• **Contact the Registrar's Office early (preferably a full year) regarding major changes in scheduling requests.**  Departments that anticipate adding a new course of significant size or modifying the total number of in-class hours of existing courses should work closely with the Registrar's office as far in advance as possible to probe schedule implications.

• **Understand that the Provost delegates full authority and responsibility for class scheduling to the Office of the Registrar.**  However, all matters that affect the quality of the University's curricular quality and policy are the responsibility the faculty.

• **Take note of the revised final exam schedule.**  The spread of teaching times through the day will have a concomitant impact on the schedule of final exams.  Some faculty may wish to structure final exams so that some or all students need not be on campus for their final exam; however, the time and duration of every final exam must still adhere to the official final exam schedule and the existing final exam guidelines and rules.

• **Actively work to mitigate enrollment issues.** In practice the fixed distribution model may lead to smaller enrollments in courses that meet outside of prime time.  Departments that anticipate special hardships in TA support or other impacts from attendant major losses in enrollment (>25%) should identify such courses and work with deans and the Registrar's Office to explore mitigation measures.  Please note that a satisfactory outcome cannot be assured.

# Appendix A: Block Scheduling Patterns

The Registrar's Office will treat requests somewhat differently for rooms requested before and after 2:30.  For requests between 9:30 and 2:30 the Registrar's Office will endeavor to maximize seat usage in classrooms every day.  This is to be achieved by prioritizing courses that conform to the scheduling blocks below into the room schedule first, with special priority for gateway, required, and special-needs courses.  (Please note that because there is only one instructional hour before prime time, schedule blocks begin at 8:30 in order to maximize prime time scheduling.)

Non-conforming requests for rooms during these hours will be fitted into the schedule on a best-effort basis after conforming requests have been scheduled. Requests for rooms at 2:30 or later need not conform to the block schedule patterns, although it is strongly recommended that they do so.

Blocks are defined here, as well as in the table and figure below:
1. Blocks for 50-minute classes ("hour-long classes") must have starting times of 8:30, 9:30, 10:30, 11:30, 12:30 or 1:30 and meet at the same starting time throughout the week.
2. Blocks for 80-minute classes ("90-minute classes") have starting times of 8:30, 10:00, 11:30, 1:00 and meet at the same starting time throughout the week.
3. Blocks for 110-minute classes ("two-hour classes") have starting times of 8:30, 10:30, or 1:30 and meet at the same starting time throughout the week.
4. Blocks for 170-minute classes ("three-hour classes") have starting times of 8:30 and 11:30.
5. Classes that meet three times per week must meet on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.
6. Classes that meet twice per week in large-capacity classrooms meet only on TuTh.  Classes that meet twice per week in other classrooms have more flexible options (MW, MF, WF, or TuTh).
7. Classes that meet four times per week can request any four days of the week.

## Tabular Presentation of Scheduling Blocks

## A. Blocks for Large-capacity (250+ sized rooms) during prime time

| Duration | Days | Start Time |
|---|---|---|
| **50-minutes** | MWF, 4x/wk, or 5x/wk | 8:30, 9:30, 10:30, 11:30, 12:30, 1:30 |
| **80-minutes** | TuTh | 8:30, 10:00 11:30, 1:00 |
| **110-minutes** | TuTh | 8:30, 10:30, 1:30 |

## B. Blocks for all other rooms during prime time

| Duration | Days | Start Time |
|---|---|---|
| **50-minutes** | 1x/wk, MW, MF, WF, TuTh, MWF, 4x/wk, or 5x/wk | 8:30, 9:30, 10:30, 11:30, 12:30, 1:30 |
| **80-minutes** | 1x/wk, MW, MF, WF, TuTh, MWF | 8:30, 10:00 11:30, 1:00 |
| **110-minutes** | 1x/wk, MW, MF, WF, TuTh | 8:30, 10:30, 1:30 |
| **170-minutes** | 1x/wk, MW, MF, WF, TuTh | 8:30, 11:30 |

## C. All rooms starting at 2:30

*Blocks are optional.* All requests will be considered with equal priority consistent with reasonably effective use of classrooms.

## Visual Representation of Scheduling Blocks
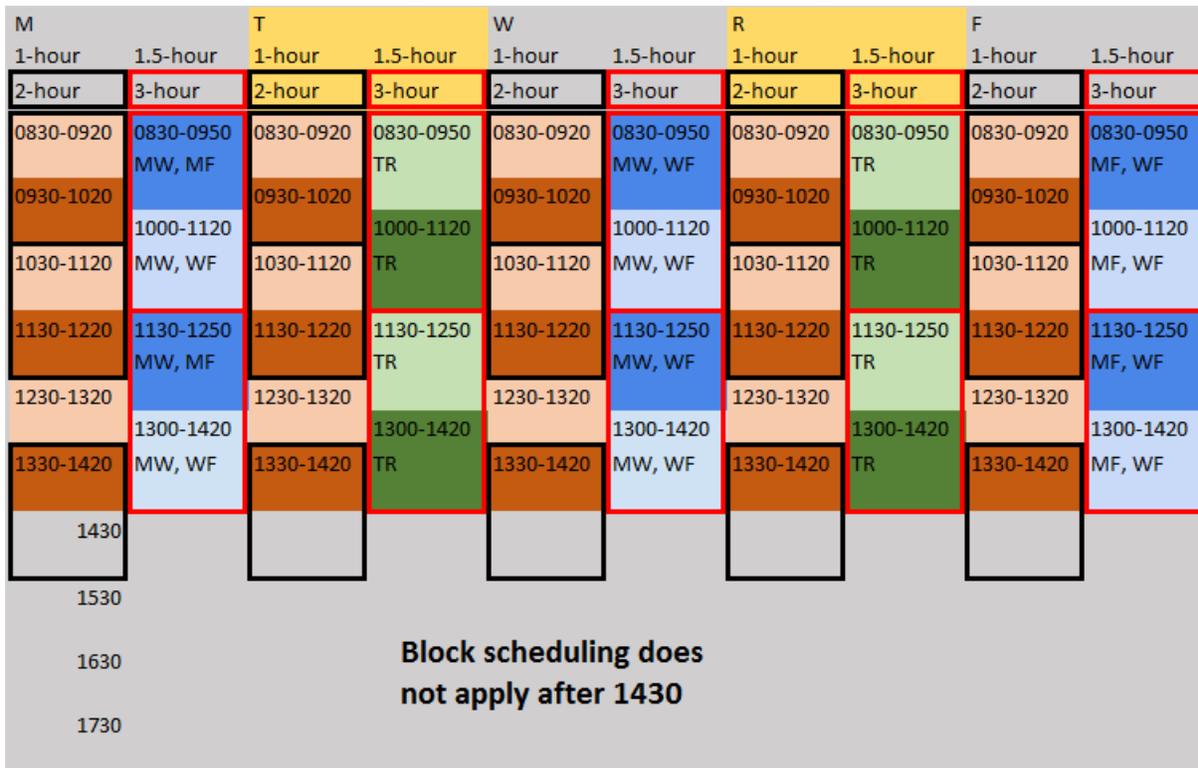


**Figure 1**. Illustration of block schedules. 50-minute class meeting times are shown as the beige and brown rectangles. 80-minute classes are shows as the light blue and dark blue rectangles, and the light green and dark green rectangles. 110-minute classes are shown as the black outline around two 50-minute meetings. 170-minute classes are shown as the red outline around two 80-minute meetings. Only certain class-day sequences are permitted (see chart)

# Block Scheduling Process

**A. The Initial Classroom Request and First Review Process**

1. The initial request process does not change from current practice (e.g., same deadlines)
2. A scheduling hold applies for 48 hours after the submission deadline. The purpose of the hold is to allow significant conflicts or other problems to be recognized by units. During this time all requests are posted by the Registrar's Office (along with other data such as heat maps) for review on a private website open only to unit schedulers. Units can modify their time requests.
3. The Registrar's Office begins the standard scheduling process (below) after 48 hours.

**B. Classes that start before 2:30** are fitted into the schedule in this order:

1. Gateway courses and those with special equipment requirements are the first to be scheduled into rooms of appropriate size and location.

2. All other block-compliant courses (see chart above).  Note that day sequences for large-capacity classrooms are more restrictive than for other rooms.
3. All non-compliant requests (e.g., MTuTh classes).

**C. Classes that start on or after 2:30** are not scheduled in blocks or with rigid constraints or priorities.

**D. The Registrar's Office Posts the time schedule three weeks prior to the deadline for student course registration.**  The schedule is considered fixed except under extraordinary circumstances.

## Appendix B: Definitions

**Large-capacity classrooms:** 250+ official seating capacity

**Mid-range classrooms:** 100-249 seating capacity

**Prime time:** Monday through Friday, 9:30am-2:20pm. Any class that includes instructional time within prime time is considered a prime time class for scheduling purposes.

**Priority courses:** Generally speaking, priority courses are those designated "gateway" or "special need" (see below). They do not include courses that are needed for a distribution requirement unless the same course otherwise qualifies as a priority course.

   The number of courses that will receive priority status is limited.  Requests for official priority scheduling status for courses must be submitted and approved in advance of the usual departmental request deadlines.

**Gateway courses**: Gateway courses are typically large courses that are required for more than one major or degree (e.g., MATH 124 or PHYS 121).

**Special-needs courses**:  Such courses are generally those that must utilize rooms with special equipment (e.g., high-fidelity video projector or sound system or discipline-related equipment that is not commonly available across campus) or furnishings (a laboratory demonstration table).

**Department:** While we have used 'department' as the scheduling unit throughout this document, we realize that for some schools and colleges, scheduling is handled through the dean's office. Our use of 'department' is for convenience and in no way is meant to usurp the deans' authority to determine which form of scheduling is best for his/her school or college.