Academic Transformation Working Group: Time Use & Scheduling

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Transformation Working Group Charge:

CU Denver teaches to a predominantly commuter, working student population. The need to work while attending college predictably conflicts with and imposes hardship on the affected learners and instructors. Given CU Denver's aspiration to make education work for all, it is imperative that we rethink and adapt the inherited Carnegie-inspired academic calendar cycles and instructional time grids to meet the multitasking needs of our student populations, in a way that is financially affordable, flexible, and work-life-balance-friendly to all of our learners without compromising academic rigor and quality.

Taking the needs of diverse learners into account, this working group will explore the following questions:

- Is the organization of classes that we currently have meeting learner needs?
- Are there ways to better utilize summer, evening, and weekend schedules to better support our learners' schedules and time to graduation?
- What does our data on classroom availability tell us about students' current scheduling needs?
- What does our data regarding online course engagement tell us about our students' needs for flexibility in course scheduling?

Goal

Explore possibilities for re-envisioned course schedules and instructional time grids that optimize use of learner and instructor time, and account for campus-wide learner supports.

Charge

This working group will study carefully the constraints imposed on the academy by federal financial aid access considerations, credit-hour definition and requirements for accreditation, and other relevant concerns. With these variables in mind, the working group will make recommendations for changes to course schedules and instructional time grids in a manner that allows us to be responsive to the time management and financial needs of our students.

Our Work:

The Academic Transformation Working Group for Time Use and Scheduling included campus community members from multiple areas. The team met every other week starting in November and engaged in thoughtful group discussions about the charge set forth. We collected important information and insights through presentations from OIRE and the Registrar's Office, collaborated across units using a Miro Board, and collected information from students and faculty through surveys. The group also participated in a webinar hosted by Inside Higher Ed about course scheduling and student success. All of this allowed us to think deeply about how we currently approach time use and scheduling and to provide insights and recommendations on how best to support our students, faculty, and staff.

The surveys were to collect specific information related to student and faculty experiences and preferences. The student and faculty surveys were completed, and we have received the results.

Insights and overarching recommendations:

Streamline what CU Denver is good at/known for/values and become better at those 3 things. We believe that having consistent experience, transparency between colleges, and robust training and onboarding to understand the university armature for success- students, faculty, and staff could assist in creating this culture. We are a system of interlocking parts that must be maintained, supported, and given agency to improve for the betterment of all of us. Clarity allows for easy budgetary decisions.

Recommendations:

Alignment of the Organization of Classes with Learner Needs

Upon examining the current organization of classes and the efficacy in meeting learner needs, it is found that while generally satisfactory, improvements can be made. Enhancing the availability of in-person and hybrid courses is crucial for international students, who face limitations on online credit hours due to VISA status requirements, and for veteran students relying on VA benefits. To address this, it is recommended to prioritize increasing the accessibility of in-person and hybrid course options to better cater to the diverse needs of these student demographics.

Recommended Actions:

- Initiate the semester earlier and adjust breaks accordingly to address the imbalance between Monday/Wednesday and Tuesday/Thursday 3-credit standard time grid classes.
- Revise the academic calendar per recommendations from the 2023 Observances + Holidays working group. Ensure alignment with related policies to optimize scheduling efficiency.

- Coordinate spring break dates with local school districts to facilitate better coordination for students and families.
- Implement two shorter breaks during the Fall semester: a mid-semester long weekend break and a Thanksgiving long weekend break. Consider adopting a model like that of CU Boulder (as reported in the Daily Camera and Colorado.edu).
- Enhance communication and planning by announcing the final exam schedule earlier. Publicly post the final exam schedule for all stakeholders, including students, faculty, and advisors, and ensure that final exams are not scheduled back-to-back.
- Support the efforts of the Registrar's Office in creating a dedicated website to list the final exam schedule, improving accessibility and transparency for all stakeholders involved.

Summer, Evening, and Weekend Course Offerings to Expedite Graduation

In evaluating ways to better utilize summer, evening, and weekend schedules to support learners' needs and expedite graduation, it was found that offering more robust summer courses could significantly benefit students.

Recommended Actions:

- Increase the availability of core and required classes during the summer semester to better accommodate student schedules and facilitate timely graduation. Collaborate with each department to identify and offer ideal required 8-week summer courses.
- Review and, if necessary, revise faculty contracts and hiring plans per discipline to ensure alignment with the expanded course offerings and to support increased summer course availability.
- Enhance faculty diversity by implementing strategies to broaden the pool of candidates during hiring processes, enriching the academic experience and expertise available to students.
- Introduce 8-week course offerings during the Fall and Spring semesters to provide students with additional scheduling flexibility and accelerate progress toward graduation.
- Prioritize advanced planning in course scheduling to optimize resource allocation and enhance efficiency in meeting student demand.
- Explore and invest in a system that facilitates proactive course scheduling based on student needs and historical analytics, enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of course offerings to student preferences and academic requirements.

Classroom Availability Data to Understand Student Scheduling Needs

Upon examining our data on classroom availability and its implications for students' scheduling needs, it is evident that while there is an abundance of midsize classrooms, our current prioritization of large classes for scale courses limits our flexibility to meet preferred class sizes of 25 to 50 students.

Recommended Actions:

- Consider more flexible room configurations that allow for scalable capacities. This could increase our variability and expand the number of courses offered.
- Increase the number of course sections to accommodate the preferred class sizes of students between 25 and 50, thereby enhancing scheduling flexibility and potentially supporting the diversification of faculty hiring to meet varied course demands.
- Establish a "no-bumping" policy to prevent non-class events from displacing scheduled classes, ensuring consistency and reliability in course scheduling for students and faculty.

Flexibility in Course Scheduling

In examining our data regarding online course engagement and its implications for student scheduling needs, it is evident that students prefer multi-modal course options, attending both in person and online. Specifically, for Undergraduate students enrolled in Spring 2023, 17% were exclusively enrolled in online classes, 36% were enrolled in only in-person classes, and 47% were enrolled in a mix. On the other hand, Graduate students tend to select either in-person or online exclusively, with only 18% being in mixed modality.

Recommended Actions:

- Offer a diverse range of course modalities to accommodate varying student preferences, including incorporating in-person and online components where feasible.
- Conduct training sessions for all Deans and Chairs to ensure comprehensive understanding and adherence to the university's scheduling framework, emphasizing the importance of course flexibility within defined constraints to enhance consistency and clarity for students, faculty, and staff.
- Implement clearly defined modes of course delivery, such as remote/asynchronous, to replace the prevalent use of the term "hybrid" and provide a clearer classification for courses.
- Enhance transparency in course selection by clearly indicating course modality in course descriptions, enabling students to make well-informed decisions during the course selection process.

- Improve the usability of the Class Search user interface to streamline the course discovery and selection process for students, enhancing efficiency and user experience.
- Investigate and potentially adopt user-friendly course search models, like the one utilized by the University of Colorado Boulder (https://classes.colorado.edu/), to enhance the course search and selection experience for students.
- Enhance course planning and scheduling processes through increased information sharing at the campus level and between schools/colleges and departments. Utilize predictive analytics to anticipate course demand and minimize conflicts by analyzing historical trends of concurrently taken classes.
- Establish a pathway for students to switch to another course early in the semester if their current course proves unsuitable. This pathway should be accessible after the census date but early enough to facilitate seamless transitions, addressing specific needs such as transitioning from Math 1110 College Algebra to Math 1108 Stretch College Algebra-I.

Additional Ideas for Future Consideration

- Exploring the implementation of a structured course buildout for first-year freshmen during orientation to align with their core requirements and field of study, potentially improving enrollment forecasting and section planning.
- Evaluating the feasibility of providing Course Coordinators with continued access to CUSIS course scheduling throughout the semester to enhance responsiveness to course-related inquiries and facilitate timely adjustments during registration periods.
- Assessing the potential benefits of implementing a mechanism for Course Coordinators to promptly build or open sections as needed, aiming to minimize delays in student enrollment and scheduling.
- Investigating the potential impact of introducing Course Reservation for degree-seeking undergraduate students to streamline the enrollment process and support timely progress toward graduation.
- Considering options to provide students who remain on waitlists with opportunities to enroll in courses in subsequent offerings, ensuring equitable access to required classes and promoting timely degree completion.
- Exploring the potential benefits of Course Reservation for students, particularly its role in facilitating on-time graduation and academic progression.
- Reviewing the scope and eligibility criteria of Course Reservation to ensure alignment with program objectives and student needs, particularly focusing on its exclusivity to undergraduate courses and students.

Contributing Members

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