

Grid Committee 2003 Report

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The Grid Committee 2003, appointed by the provost, has evaluated the current grid and concluded that significant changes are needed. The committee operated on the following premises:

- a) The grid must accommodate the Carnegie standard for classroom instruction.
- b) The College will continue to have a primary mix of 3-credit and 4-credit courses in the liberal arts. The arts will continue to have a broader mix (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4 and more credits), as they have in the past.
- c) It is not the role of this committee to engage in the current 3- vs. 4-credit debate, other than to (a) observe that it complicates the ability to achieve a common grid, and (b) propose a grid that accommodates both 3- and 4-credit lecture courses that meet the Carnegie standard.
- d) There is no consensus among the academic divisions as to what is needed pedagogically. Humanities and Social Sciences courses are predominantly 2-day-a-week, 4-credit courses. Natural Sciences has many 4-credit courses that meet 3 days a week, and also has labs that meet one day for up to 4 hours. Arts courses are predominantly 3-credit and meet in 1, 2, and 3 day-a-week formats.
- e) Courses need to be better distributed across the grid by the academic divisions. In particular, Friday is underutilized in the current grid. This causes a variety of problems, not the least of which is the "suitcase syndrome," where students leave campus as early as Thursday for 4-day weekends.
- f) Scheduling of general education courses for Arts students, and arts electives for LAS students, should be facilitated during course planning by the academic divisions.
- g) Common meeting times continue to be a major problem, with the Wednesday noon slot becoming very crowded with competing committee meetings.
- h) A new grid must be in place for Fall 2004 courses in order to comply with SUNY and Middle States mandates.

Conclusion:

1. The committee recommends a return to the Monday/Thursday, Tuesday/Friday grid with Wednesday as a common "swing" day.
 - This fully utilizes Friday as a class day.
2. The proposed grid has two 110-minute morning blocks, three 100-minute afternoon blocks, and an evening block beginning at 6:30 p.m. The blocks are separated by 10-min. intervals for travel between classes.

- The 100-minute blocks meet the Carnegie standards for 4-credit courses that meet twice a week. The committee takes no position on whether seat time is the best way to address the 4-credit issue.
 - Courses that need less than the full 100-minute block could start later or end earlier, as long as they remain within the block.
 - The two morning blocks were lengthened by 10 minutes each to accommodate Music scheduling needs.
3. Classes that meet 3x a week will use Wednesday as the “third” day.
 - For example, Natural Sciences or Music courses that meet 3x a week would meet on a MWTh or TWF schedule.
 4. “Double blocks” for 1x per week classes are allowed on Wednesday a.m., Tuesday p.m., and Friday p.m.
 - The number of courses for which a 1x, 150- or 200-minute class is desirable pedagogically should be limited. Divisions should schedule an equal number of these 1x classes on Tuesday and Friday afternoons, to maximize use of classroom space. (If all were scheduled on Tuesday afternoon, you effectively lose the use of those rooms on Friday afternoons.)
 5. Language and science lab sections can combine blocks as needed.
 - Wednesday morning is ideally suited for these labs but is insufficient to meet the volume of courses, thus they can be scheduled in double blocks as needed, as long as the two Wed. “common” periods remain open.
 6. Wednesday has two designated common times, midday and late afternoon. No courses would be scheduled during the 12:30–2:10 block. No LAS courses would be scheduled during the combined 4:10–5:50 block and 5:50-6:20 “dinner break,” and the Arts divisions would be encouraged to minimize class scheduling, wherever possible, in that block.
 - The current midday Wednesday free time has become clogged with meetings. The new midday block would be longer and the second “free” block in late afternoon would facilitate campus business and student activities. The midday slot could be designated for divisional and faculty meetings, while the later time could be used by the Senate and other interdivisional committees.
 - It is understood that the Arts divisions cannot adopt a “hard freeze” on classes in the late afternoon slot. Instead, they would be encouraged, wherever possible, to minimize the number of offerings (and affected faculty and students) with careful planning.
 - Faculty members would be expected to be on campus on Wednesdays.
 7. A 30-min. “dinner break” is provided for LAS courses. The committee recognizes that the Arts may need to schedule rehearsals and other academic activities during this time period.
 8. Percentage allocations will need to be assigned to the new grid blocks to help ensure that courses are distributed across the grid. (Each semester, Academic Affairs monitors the grid distribution of LAS courses according to a set of existing, committee-defined percentages. However, closer attention is needed by the academic divisions when planning each semester’s schedule.)

9. The Registrar's Office will allocate classroom space solely on the basis of class size and pedagogical requirements. Personal preferences concerning rooms or buildings are not valid considerations. The College should purchase, or develop, scheduling software to assist the Registrar in making room assignments.
10. Availability of general education courses for Arts students and arts electives for LAS students is primarily a planning/scheduling issue, not a grid issue; however, it is a critical issue. The committee recommends that the Arts and LAS maintain a common planning calendar so that scheduling decisions can be made collaboratively, and well in advance. (An advanced planning calendar was instituted for LAS in 2002 and took effect for 2003/04 course scheduling. The Arts are encouraged to adopt the existing 2004/05 planning calendar.) The current consultation on scheduling between the Arts and LAS should continue to be developed, refined, and codified.
11. In light of the difficulty that many students have scheduling their general education requirements, it is worth considering the feasibility of offering some Saturday courses that fulfill these requirements. (Continuing Education has offered a limited number of accelerated Saturday courses for more than a decade.) The committee did not attempt to reach consensus on this issue because it requires marketing research and broader discussion among academic stakeholders. However, it might help students meet their requirements while reducing scheduling pressures on the weekday grid.
12. Student participation in arts performances, athletics, and other activities continues to be a concern. It is impossible to create enough common free times in the grid to accommodate these activities. The committee believes that the solution lies in specialized advising for student athletes so that they can avoid classes that are likely to conflict with their practice and game commitments (i.e., "Block E" in the proposed grid). It is our understanding that this was tried with some success during the past academic year. Such scheduling should help minimize conflicts between academics and athletics.
13. It is also worth considering whether Blackboard can provide the additional contact time required by the Carnegie standards. Discussion boards, online chat, etc. can enrich the course without increasing class time. Using these tools effectively requires a significant commitment in student and faculty time that may justify the higher number of credits. It would, in turn, reduce the pressure on the grid.

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