

What is the best choice for expanding the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 final exam schedule slots? GC Senate retreat forum discussion August 10, 2011

Issue snapshot provided by Provost Sandra Jordan's August 8 e-mail to the campus:

The University Senate Retreat and University Senate Meeting is scheduled for August 10th. One of the items on the agenda will be a discussion of the exam schedule. During the meeting, I will ask the Senate to discuss and advise me on the best solution to a problem that is created through the implementation of our new institutional class schedule. Before I make a decision, I want to fully understand the implications of the various options on your classes. As a campus, we will need to make a decision this week to allow faculty to complete their syllabi in a timely fashion.

History: In the past GC had twelve standard meeting times each week during which classes could be offered. Traditionally, then, we were able to schedule 3 exams per day (each exam slot was 2 hours and 45 minutes in length) over the course of 4 days of final exams, between 8:00 and 5:00 p.m. Evening classes then held their exams on the evening of their regular class day, starting at 5:00 p.m. Once we had assigned the classes that met during the standard meeting times to a final exam time, we worked in the classes that were held off-schedule to ensure that there was no overlap or conflicts for students.

And here's the problem:

Issue: This fall is the first semester that we are implementing the new class schedule and common university meeting time. As part of this plan, we have increased the number of approved course meeting times that are available each week from our older model of 12 standard meeting times to 14 standard meeting times. This change allows us to utilize our space more effectively with fewer class "overlaps" and provides a common meeting time on Friday afternoons. However, with this plan we cannot fit 14, 2 hour and 45 minute exams into four, 9 hour days in a manner that does not create overlaps in the final times that would not cause conflicts for students.

Recommended Solutions: After reviewing this problem, the following solutions have been suggested:

Option 1: reduce all final exam meetings to 110 minutes (1 hr, 50 minutes)

1) Reduce the amount of time allotted for each final exam period from two hours and 45 minutes to one hour and 50 minutes. This would allow us to give each class a designated time, but it would also leave Friday afternoon unused. Reducing the testing time may not work well for those programs who use national exams that are 120 minutes in length.

Option 2: Add final exam meetings on Saturday

2) Extend finals (which currently run from Tuesday, December 6 to Friday, December 9) into Saturday. This would allow us to add several new testing times to the list without shortening the time allotted for each exam period.

Option 3: Add more morning and evening meetings in existing schedule

3) Begin Finals for "day classes" at 7:00 a.m. (exam schedule would be 7:00, 10:00, and 4:00), and ask evening classes to take their finals from 7-10 p.m. on Tuesday through Friday. This suggestion may not harmonious with our "student-first" values. Additionally, we have a couple of odd 2 nights per week courses that might be well- accomodated with this approach.

Discussion goal: Each option has advantages for some and drawbacks for others, and choosing any one will involve tradeoffs. The goal of this discussion is to use the wisdom of group deliberation to illuminate the full range of benefits, concerns and tradeoffs for each option so that Dr. Jordan's decision can be informed by the priorities and values that emerge from the multiple perspectives represented in our discussion.

Format: In breakout groups moderated by a volunteer facilitator, participants will discuss each option using the provided question outline. In addition to the facilitator who will remain neutral during the discussion, each group needs a volunteer recorder and a timekeeper

Ground rules for each group discussion:

Be honest and respectful

Listen to understand

Be supportive (of other participants, the facilitators, the notetakers, and the process)

It's OK to disagree, just do so with curiosity, not hostility

Be brief

Group discussion guide

Option 1: reducing final exam meeting times to 110 minutes

What are all the advantages you can think of to this approach? What do you appreciate about this approach? Make your best case for it, and identify who benefits from this option.

What are all the disadvantages you can think of to this approach? What concerns and/or questions does this approach raise?

If this option is chosen, what trade offs have to be made?

Option 2: Option 2: Add final exam meetings on Saturday

What are all the advantages you can think of to this approach? What do you appreciate about this approach? Make your best case for it, and identify who benefits from this option.

What are all the disadvantages you can think of to this approach? What concerns and/or questions does this approach raise?

If this option is chosen, what trade offs have to be made?

Option 3: Add more morning and evening meetings in existing schedule

What are all the advantages you can think of to this approach? What do you appreciate about this approach? Make your best case for it, and identify who benefits from this option.

What are all the disadvantages you can think of to this approach? What concerns and/or questions does this approach raise?

If this option is chosen, what trade offs have to be made?

After all options have been vetted:

What seem to be the points of common ground that emerged from your group discussion?

What fundamental tensions, differences or tradeoffs did you hear that need to be further addressed?

Can the group recommend an option? If so which one?