

ACADEMIC MASTER PLANNING SPRING 2011 ROUNDTABLE

On April 1, 2011, the Faculty Senate Roundtable was held addressing the broad topic so Academic Master Planning. The participants included faculty and administrators. Master Planning consisted of three moderated groups: 1) Resource Utilization- time and space 2) Summer School and 3) Innovations in Instruction. The roundtable was held at President Keenum's residence with significant assistance from Debby Golson and the hospitality of the Keenums.

University Administrators participating in the Roundtable included President Keenum, Wes Ammon, Tim Chamblee, Anna Dill, Jerry Gilbert, Bill Kibler, Gary Myers, Mike Rackley, Lynn Reinschmiedt, Peter Ryan, Butch Stokes, Amy Tuck, and Don Zant. The Faculty Senate was represented by Hart Bailey, Tom Carskadon, Ted Dobson, Jerry Emison, Dana Franz, Holly Johnson, Meghan Millea, and Greg Munshaw. From the General Faculty Angi Bourgeois, Steve Elder, Sally Gray, Robert Long, Peter Messer, Linda Morse, Nancy Reichert, Steve Taylor, and Kevin Williams attended. Special thanks for Ann Ray, Joe Farris, and Kylie Crosland for dedicating their time to maintaining records of the discussions which enabled the groups to run smoothly.

The three groups were moderated. Resource Utilization was moderated by Hart Bailey; Summer School was moderated by Jerry Gilbert, and Innovations in Instruction was moderated by Meghan Millea. The rest of the participants were divided into three groups. The groups shifted from topic/moderator every 40 minutes.

SCHEDULE:

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| 1:00 – 1:20 | Welcome from President Keenum and round the room introductions. |
| 1:20 – 2:00 | First round of discussions |
| 2:05 - 2:45 | Round two of discussions |
| 2:50-3:30 | Round three of discussions |
| 3:30-4:00 | Central Reporting of Findings |

Each moderator had a note taker helping to keep a record of the discussions. The following summarizes the discussions with each topic area.

Resource Utilization- time and space

The themes discussed by the resource utilization group fell into broad categories of classroom management and scheduling, delivery of content, informing decision makers, and providing faculty incentives.

Classroom management and scheduling

One of the themes discussed by the groups concerning resource utilization was the use of classroom space which intertwined with class scheduling discussions. As enrollment continues to increase, the

number of class offerings and the utilization of existing classroom space needs to expand. Members of the groups expressed some concerns about current utilizations and offered innovative ideas to modify offerings.

Consistently participants reported that classes are not sufficient scheduled through Friday afternoons. Several Monday-Wednesday (M W) classes meet using a Tuesday-Thursday (T Th) schedule which inefficiently blocks rooms on MW and decreases utilization on Fridays. Moving to MWF rather than MW scheduling could improve room utilization and increase the number of class time slots.

Night class offerings could be expanded to more fully utilize class space. Faculty and students would need to identify the appropriate blocks of time for class meetings. For example, should classes meet once per week for 2.5 hours or twice per week for 1.25 hours? The group discussion indicated there would be sufficient demand from students for night offerings, including MSU staff taking classes after work and students whose required course schedules conflict with general education class times.

Another suggestion for expanding the class schedule was to begin earlier in the morning, 7:30 a.m. especially on T Th. Another university has experimented with offering guaranteed course registration without committing to a class meeting time to entice students into accepting off-peak offerings.

On a broader scale, changing the time slots during the semester can alter the duration of the semester and the windows of time between class, which would allow broader space utilization as students move into and out of the perimeter buildings of the campus for classes. One suggestion specified replacing the M W F 50-minute classes to 60 minutes and the 75-minute T Th classes to 90 minutes. These alternatives could permit more time between classes (15 minutes) and reduce the number of class meetings needed to meet contact minutes which expand the calendar time between terms.

The campus is not fully utilized in the summer, which is discussed in further detail in another part of this report. It was noted in this group that there is uncertainty about class scheduling in the summer. There may not be enough students enrolled to offer a course and the 9-month faculty may choose not to teach in the summer. The uncertainty about future offerings is an incentive for students to rely on fall and spring offerings and the uncertainty about courses “making” is a disincentive for faculty to commit to summer teaching.

In addition, there was some discussion about Honors students using their early enrollment privileges to over register for prime courses and drop later which is inefficient in terms of creating sections to accommodate students with later registration.

Delivery of content

One way to accommodate the larger enrollment without expanding the number of classes offered is to increase the class size which introduces a different set of responses.

There are a limited number of large classrooms.

The method of assessment can be logistically dictated by the size of the class i.e. using multiple choice rather than short answer tests and eliminating or reducing other written assessments.

Some content cannot effectively be delivered in large sections.

Smaller classes may improve student success rates, especially in the freshman and sophomore years.

Another way to accommodate increased enrollment is to engage innovative teaching that employs technology to augment and substitute for contact time. For example, podcasts of lectures could allow for a faculty member to deliver content across multiple sections. Other universities have adopted such deliveries which may warrant further consideration. Members of the group discussed a particular product called "Second Life" to expand content delivery.

Instructors could adopt blended learning which may involve online instruction with in-class time used for applications.

Informing decision makers

Another general theme to the discussion is the degree to which there is information that is unknown that could improve our decision making. For example, when classes are full there is no record of the unmet student needs.

Departments create offerings without full information about anticipated registrations. If students were to fill out full degree program plans, then departments would have more accurate estimates of seats needed. This is not expected to be a binding schedule, but rather a plan.

Faculty incentives and time

Innovations in instruction need to be supported which could be in the form of technology, recognition within the evaluation process, or instructional design assistance, among others.

Automate processes that are currently manual that absorb faculty time.

The issue of faculty advising sparked significant debate. Many of the faculty wanted a more staff and technology supported approach to assist students in making a schedule. Even career development could be handled, at least in part, by staff. For some of the participants, advising is a large component of their time allocations and they asked for a different system to be considered.

One recommendation was to implement a data management program that will enable faculty to identify the current work of colleagues.

Special thanks to Joe Farris for documenting the discussion of this group.

Summer School

The topic of summer school was included in the roundtable discussion of academic master planning because the university is not operating at full capacity during the summer which provides opportunities for expanding offerings without being constrained by physical resources. Each discussion group began with Dr. Gilbert explaining some possibilities for summer utilization. In particular, strategically offering courses in the second summer term which could relieve some of the demand put on the system in the fall. Freshmen could be enticed to enroll early, before the fall term, by offering preference in residence hall housing or scholarships which would reduce the cost of summer tuition. The discussion in each group tended to focus on three general topic areas. First, the groups discussed the merits, challenges, and details of an early start program. Second, the groups discussed using the summer term to offer programs of study that could reduce the time to graduation. The third topic, broadly defined, included logistical issues associated with expanding summer utilization.

Summer early start

The early start program would entice students to sign up for classes in the second term of summer. The target students could be academically high achieving freshmen and at-risk freshmen. High achieving students could take two general education classes which would relieve pressure on high-demand general education courses in the fall semester. At-risk students could take one course and a study skills course. Potential incentives to the students would be either preference in housing or lower tuition rates. Courses that might be considered for this program could be general education courses such as history, psychology, English composition, and biology which typically have high fall demands.

Participants discussed additional benefits to the program including the early introduction to campus might facilitate better adjustment to the responsibilities of independent living. Matching high achieving students with at-risk students might provide a good dynamic for a learning community environment or peer learning activities. If students are unsuccessful in their first term in college, two courses is less damaging to long term GPA than a 4-course load failure in the fall term. The course size could be smaller which may also help students perform well and successfully adjust to college.

Concerns were also expressed by the participants. Balanced recruitment might be difficult if at-risk students are late in the application/admission process. Some of the students might otherwise be taking general education classes from community colleges in the summer. If this program noticeably decreases demand for those schools, those schools might oppose such a program at MSU. The intensity of summer school may be too challenging for students and the content may not be sufficiently developed as a foundation for future studies.

Participants also mentioned that courses that are eligible for college level examination program (CLEP) may not be suitable for the summer offerings in the early start. If an early start program is successful, the university may consider extending the program for community college transfer students to facilitate the transition to the campus. Bridging programs for at-risk students have been implemented at other universities. It would be appropriate to review the effectiveness and fit of such programs for our university.

Degree Cycle

In addition to an early start program, the groups discussed the potential of developing programs that effectively use summer school to reduce the degree cycle period, potentially to a three-year program of study. Basically, the departments involved in the degree program would guarantee the offerings of key courses to proceed through the degree program in the first and/or second summer terms each year. Shorter periods to degree could be marketed to appeal to students; it might be particularly appealing to students in pre-professional degree programs.

The currently upper level courses are not regularly offered in the summer which makes it difficult for students to map out a program of student that includes accelerated completion. Because students cannot plan for upper division courses, these courses may not have sufficient demand to offer which decreases the incentive for faculty and thus departments to schedule them. The guaranteed summer offerings would provide students more flexibility in scheduling their courses over the fall, spring, and summer schedules and build more stability into the summer schedule. When planning summer course offerings, departments may build additional stability into the offering if they are able to offer 4000/6000 split courses to appeal to both undergraduates and graduate students.

The shorter degree cycle with summer school offerings may lower the overall tuition cost of the degree.

Logistical Considerations

Other logistical issues related to summer school include faculty commitment. The students may be enticed to demand summer courses through guaranteed housing or lower prices. However there must also be incentives for faculty to teach these courses. It is important to maintain the quality of instruction fall, spring, and summer; however, faculty are typically on 9-month contracts. Thus summer instruction is optional, contracted work. One suggestion was to increase the minimum enrollment in summer classes to 20 which would enable the courses to make sufficient revenue to increase instructor pay to 12% per course rather than the 7.5% currently paid.

Developing a stable summer offering that is embedded in degree programs and programs of study will build needed stability into the summer schedule which reduces risk on the parts of faculty, students, and departments. The rates of pay and minimum course numbers should be considered to ensure that the summer budget at least breaks even.

For any summer program—early start or rapid degree cycle—the university should ensure that services are sufficiently available and the programming across the campus is available to support their out-of-class development and campus integration/connectedness.

Special thanks to Ann Ray for taking notes for these group discussions.

Innovations in Instruction

This group focused innovative ways that instruction can be modified to accommodate growing enrollments, shrinking faculty numbers, space limitations, and technology advances while maintaining a high quality education and experience for our students.

Instructional Innovations

Several teaching innovations have been adopted across the campus. One example discussed by the groups was the pod instruction used by the History Department. Under this arrangement, students receive instruction in one large class, taught by a faculty member each week. This faculty member oversees the instruction of smaller, breakout or pod sections facilitated by graduate students. The feedback from the groups was generally positive about this model of instruction. Mentoring by the faculty member who is overseeing the instructional pods can help graduate students transition into independent instructors. There were also some concerns expressed including potential disparity between quality of instruction from different graduate students and that students are interacting with the graduate students rather than the faculty member. It is not clear how to count this type of instruction and management in terms of faculty workload. It is not less work per course for the faculty member because the management of the pods requires regular meetings and mentoring with the graduate students. From a scheduling perspective, advisors were concerned that the lecture and pod scheduling is difficult to manage because it requires two scheduling slots for one course. It is also difficult to effectively arrange classroom space. If this type of model could work in other disciplines then the management of space could be coordinated to effectively utilize the large lecture halls and smaller classes through rotation with other pod-based classes.

Another way to reduce the need for instructional resources currently in use is to allow students to bypass Math 1 and/or English Composition 1 if their ACT scores exceed a predetermined threshold. One concern expressed is that students are paying for educational content not received when bypassing courses.

In some cases, technology can help manage content delivery through blended courses. These courses substitute at least some of the class instruction time with online instructional time. There are standards for equivalence between online and classroom instructional time. Concerns expressed were related both to costs and faculty time. Online textbook modules and interactive assignments can be expensive for students. Developing one's own modules can be time consuming in terms of training and development. Self-created lessons and assessments need to employ technology and pedagogical tools properly but may vary significantly in quality.

Time and Space Utilization

One way to manage time and space management is to use intensive semesters that might include having class from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. These types of courses typically work best for small graduate classes. Another thought was to have Friday, Saturday, Sunday intensively over a shorter period of time.

Another way to extend time utilization would be to offer classes earlier (7:30 a.m.), later in the day, on Friday afternoons, or Saturday mornings.

Other Considerations

Two big concerns about capacity is the number of faculty and the number of classrooms.

Butch Stokes reported that a classroom needs assessment conducted on campus indicated a need for four large (450 seat) auditoriums and additional small classroom spaces. The most problematic area in scheduling is auditorium space. His office first schedules auditorium space then smaller classroom spaces and schedules prime times before other time slots (MWF 9-1). Prime time is when 85% of classrooms are used and 85% of seats are filled. They asked departments to spread out classes to give students more choice.

Faculty need to develop skills and specializations to teach using different methods.

Faculty could team teach courses to take advantage of specialization, but students often do not like switching instructors.

There is a need to mentor first year faculty on general university issues which could utilize Grisham Master Teachers and/or Giles Distinguished Professors.

Quality instruction takes time and effort which may not be sufficiently or consistently valued across the university.

Special thanks to Kylie Crosland for recording these discussions on innovations in instruction.