Guiding Principles for Classroom and Academic Scheduling

Introduction

Classroom and academic scheduling is central to our academic mission; impacts how and when we deliver instruction; influences the satisfaction of students, faculty, and staff with our campus environment; and is a significant contributor to the overall success and effectiveness of the Institute. More significantly, the scheduling and utilization of classrooms has broad implications for our teaching and learning environment, including our students' ability to complete their degrees in an efficient and timely manner and our faculty's ability to engage in their research and scholarship while still prioritizing the learning needs of their students. Further, class scheduling that is concentrated and uneven can lead to practical problems for campus resources, such as overcrowding and rushing on transportation, dining, and other services. Thus, the Institute establishes a range of policies and procedures to address both strategic and tactical issues of these limited classroom resources. Among the most significant challenges in this process are the following:

- Resources being allocated (including classroom space and faculty time) are scarce, expensive, and difficult to change on short notice.

- Individual priorities, preferences, and needs vary widely, both within and across major constituencies.

- While priority may be given to academic matters, course scheduling also affects demand for Institute resources, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, work-life balance, utilization of campus services, and other aspects of the campus environment.

- Scheduling must accommodate both short-term variations and long-term trends in enrollment, diverse types of degree programs offered (*e.g.,* traditional, online, evening, executive), and available space; scheduling must also be flexible and have the ability to respond quickly to innovation in instruction as well as curricular changes.

- Rapid changes in technology affect the way courses are taught, student and faculty expectations on classrooms, and the methods used for managing scheduling.

Given these and many other factors, the scheduling challenge cannot be approached by trying to find a solution that satisfies all 20,000+ students and faculty members. Instead, it requires negotiating complex trade-offs among competing – and sometimes conflicting – objectives. For example, scheduling most classes during mid-day hours may improve opportunities for work-life balance for faculty members with young children; however, such scheduling reduces options and increases conflicts for students and is less efficient in utilizing scarce resources.

These *Guiding Principles* are not intended to identify the single, best answer for specific situations. Rather, they represent a shared set of beliefs, from multiple perspectives, as a reference for the entire Institute community to use in making often-difficult decisions regarding both short-term and long-term classroom[1] and academic scheduling issues.

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[1] *The term "classroom" may refer to traditional classrooms as well as other types of spaces used for instruction such as lecture halls, laboratories, etc.*

General Expectations of all Classrooms - All members of the Georgia Tech community may reasonably expect …

1. classrooms that are clean and well-maintained and that have good acoustics, comfortable climate control, and appropriate working technology. Comprehensive and up-to-date information, including photographs, on the condition and characteristics of individual classrooms should be available online.

2. safety, security, and accessibility of classrooms throughout the campus and throughout any time classes are being held.

3. reasonable accommodations for ADA-compliant classrooms and ADA-compliant parking spaces near classrooms (or reasonable access to ADA-compliant modes of transportation). (This also applies for other policies or procedures related to ADA or individuals with disabilities or special needs).

4. Clear, up-to-date, and accurate information about classrooms; class scheduling; registration policies and procedures; and curriculum as well as access to robust and current tools, technology, and resources to support the class scheduling, registration, and advising process.

5. scheduling patterns to provide sufficient time between classes so that students do not have to leave class early or arrive late to get from class to class and faculty have sufficient time to get setup for their class session (including technology)

6. the Institute to have sufficient classrooms available throughout the entire scheduling day to accommodate expected enrollments and the variety of teaching and learning methods utilized.

7. the Institute to plan for and, as needed, expand the number and/or size of instructional spaces to meet current and projected student body size and mix of majors. The Institute will meaningfully address "existing adequacy of space" issues when proposing new academic degree programs to the Board of Regents.

Student Expectations of the Institute – Students may reasonably expect …

1. that classes required to graduate will be offered in a timely manner. At minimum, critical courses at the beginning/middle of long prerequisite chains should be offered every Fall and Spring semester at reasonable times of the week.

2. that required courses will be offered frequently enough so that students can take advantage of other opportunities such as co-op, internships, study abroad, and research experiences; further, where appropriate that colleges and schools will communicate and collaborate to ensure an integrated approach to the scheduling of required courses (*e.g.,* core undergraduate courses that span multiple colleges).

3. access to planning tools and/or academic advisors to help them regularly update/maintain their academic plans.

4. schedules that allow safe passage to and from classrooms (and nearby restrooms).

5. the Institute will offer and schedule required courses in suitable learning environments so that all students can create a class schedule that allows them to balance their academic work with their personal life and needs. Course schedules should reflect the nature of the degree program; for example, full-time, on-campus programs should be offered throughout the full scheduling day and week; evening or executive programs will naturally have different scheduling periods.

6. classes to be scheduled according to the Registrar's standard class meeting periods and other Institute policies, so that students can optimize their course schedules that balances course selection with non-academic activities throughout their daily and weekly schedules.

7. to have expectations for the course, including pre-requisites, co-requisites, or other course requirements, made plainly visible in the schedule of classes and syllabi.

8. a registration process that utilizes current technology and other tools as well as employs procedures that take into consideration appropriate prioritization (for example, how close students are to progression to the next academic level and/or graduation)

9. that if they are serving in an official instructional role (such as Teaching Assistants and Graduate Student Instructors), their teaching responsibilities will be scheduled in a manner that does not impede their own ability to take required courses or satisfy other academic priorities as well as accommodates their work-life balance.

Institute Expectations of Students – The Institute (schools, departments) may reasonably expect …

1. that students will take advantage of academic advising and degree planning resources to plan their schedules for future terms as they progress towards degree completion.

2. that students will prioritize required and other key courses to enhance and ensure their academic progress and graduation in a timely manner.

3. that students are willing to take classes when offered, realizing that some classes may be offered at 8:00am, 4:00pm, or other less-popular times.

4. that students will utilize the registration process in the manner in which it was intended to be used and is fair and equitable to all students (for example, not holding class seats for other students)

5. students will arrive on time and stay throughout the entire class period

6. that students are familiar with the rights and responsibilities codified in the *General Catalog*.

Faculty/Instructor[2] Expectations of the Institute – Faculty members and Instructors may reasonably expect …

1. that, as enrollment in various majors grows (shrinks) over time, adequate resources will be provided to those units to meet their changing instructional and other needs (such as advising).

2. classroom assignments to be primarily driven by the pedagogical needs of courses and matched (in size and purpose) to the task at hand. Instructors should not be asked to change the course content and delivery method to fit scheduling needs unless there are no other alternatives.

3. centrally-scheduled classrooms will be assigned based on "goodness of fit" for projected enrollment, room capacity, accessibility, and specialized seating and equipment.

4. that scheduling processes will allow faculty and academic units to plan far in advance where and when high-enrollment classes are offered.

5. to be consulted well in advance about their teaching schedule; in cases of lab classes with multiple sections, to be consulted about the scheduled meeting times of each lab section.

6. that schedules are designed to support work-life balance of both faculty and students. For example, when possible, faculty with young children should be assigned teaching times that allow them to manage daycare and/or school schedules.   Similarly, an instructor should not be assigned to teach both early-morning and late-afternoon or evening classes on the same day, unless he/she has agreed to do so.

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[2] *In the context of this document, the term faculty is used broadly to include those members of the faculty as defined in Georgia Tech's faculty handbook; staff who serve in an instructional capacity; and/or academic units (schools, units, etc.) who are engaged in classroom scheduling.*

Institute Expectations of Faculty/Instructors[2]– The Institute may reasonably expect …

1. faculty to be available for teaching assignments during an appropriate number of hours per week consistent with their level of employment, other assigned duties, and applicable Institute policies (e.g., consulting hours). As such, faculty/instructors may be asked or assigned to teach at times other than their individual preferences.

2. faculty/instructors to teach during the assigned times and locations for their courses.

3. cooperation of faculty/instructors to switch rooms if actual enrollments differ significantly from expectations/predictions or to accommodate ADA needs.

4. faculty/instructors to minimize changes in room assignments after the first week of classes, except for accessibility and necessary teaching/learning equipment.

5. faculty/instructors to keep the Institute properly informed of classroom usage and to promptly report problems with a classroom.

6. that faculty/instructors/units will adhere to the Registrar's standard class meeting periods in planning schedules. If a non-standard class meeting time is requested and allowed, room assignment may occur later in the scheduling process and result in a less-desirable space.

7. that faculty/instructors/units will decide and communicate early in the scheduling process which courses will be offered and, of those, which courses will require distance learning (DL) or other specialized equipment or facilities included in their assigned instructional space.

8. that faculty/instructors/units will schedule Final Exams in accordance with the official Institute exam schedule and that all requests for exceptions will be coordinated well in advance with the central scheduling office.

The following items were initially suggested, but were deemed not to be primarily related to scheduling issues. Many of these would be more appropriately considered in the context of the student and faculty expectations for courses.

Student Expectations of the Institute

1. uniform absence policies.

2. faculty/instructors to provide out-of-class office hours to meet with students.

Institute Expectations of Students

1. proper classroom behavior, non-disruptive students, and a classroom atmosphere that encourages equitable participation.

2. academic integrity during exams and classroom exercises.

3. documented excuses for absences (medical, religious, institute supported events, etc.).

4. that students regularly participate in each of their classes. (This is a new federal regulation and faculty are expected to verify participation, but I don't believe that we clearly state to students that we expect it. Does participation mean class attendance?)

5. academic integrity in the posting of coursework to external venues, such as software repositories.

Faculty/Instructor Expectations of the Institute

1. established emergency protocols and communication methods.

Institute Expectations of Faculty/Instructors

1. faculty/instructors to arrive on-time for classes and office hours.

2. faculty/instructors to offer proper arrangements for students with disabilities.

3. faculty/instructors to be familiar with student and faculty rights and responsibilities, as listed in the *General Catalog* (and to design syllabi that make clear they are aware of key dates by which students should have information about grades, etc.).