

MEMO

September 30, 2010

From: Mark Hewitt, University Registrar
Mick Watson, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
To: Members of the Block Committee
Re: Reasons for the new block proposal

We are proposing a revised version of the block system that the committee originally proposed. (Please see the attached document for the actual proposal.) The new proposal is more conservative in its changes while still increasing the options for having two-day-a-week classes.

After consulting with Tren Dolbear and with the Provost and Dean, we decided that our original proposal of starting the block system at 7:30am was untenable. We had proposed that change to create additional blocks for IBS, but the feeling was that such blocks would not be used at that early hour, hence we have reverted to an 8am start time. We have created two additional 2-day-a-week blocks (Bx and A2) that IBS will certainly use, and which other departments may make use of as well. In addition, we have pushed the starting time of the Tues/Fri blocks back to 9:30am, which will also make those blocks more attractive.

We have kept our current Mon/Wed/Thurs pattern for 3-day-a-week blocks because the results of our survey were not strongly in favor of a Mon/Wed/Fri pattern. Most respondents felt their 3-day-a-week courses could go either way, and those who preferred the current pattern (MWR) were quite adamant in their preference and out-numbered those who preferred M/W/F. Also, adopting a M/W/F pattern would have significant impact on language instruction as those courses that meet 4-hours-per-week would always include both a Monday and a Friday meeting. Our proposal does not preclude shifting entirely or partially to a M/W/F pattern in the future, as there are natural block groupings that we could swap between Thursday and Friday (e.g., blocks D/E/F and H/J).

After we had made our original proposal, the Graduate Professional Studies division of the Rabb School announced that they would be phasing out on-campus courses for the vast majority of their degree programs and instead would go online. That change meant that we no longer had the same pressure for a 6pm start to the evening blocks because we can accommodate the few on-campus courses that GPS will have while maintaining our current start time of 6:30pm. This change has the afternoon blocks (M/W and T/R) align at 2pm and enables us to leave the Heller seminar blocks in their current configuration.

The advantage in having a M/W and T/R schedule in the afternoon (essentially swapping Thursday and Friday in the current system) is that the T/R versions of N and P blocks will be fully useful to all departments. Currently P and N blocks are under-utilized, and

many departments are reluctant to schedule courses then, so the new proposal will increase the usability of those blocks.

While the new proposal is a less radical change from what the committee originally considered, we believe it still takes a number of steps in the right direction without being overly disruptive to current practices. The number of courses that would switch from 3-day-a-week to 2-day-a-week was surprisingly small in the survey (37 out of 400+ courses); so we think it would be risky to reduce the overall number of 3-day-a-week blocks. We will make an effort to schedule more UWS courses in the early morning blocks, which are under-utilized. (These are required courses that students take only once.) This change will increase the available classrooms in the afternoon, as many UWS courses are currently scheduled in the afternoon, and it will be an advantage for first-year students, as such courses will conflict with fewer non-UWS classes. (It should also be helpful for athletes who find early morning classes an easier fit with travel and practice schedules.)

We still recommend “swapping” Thursday afternoons for Friday afternoons to utilize more of our time and classrooms and avoid the problem of under-utilized Friday afternoons and conflicts with religious practices. We also continue to recommend beginning all classes on the hour or half hour to bring the entire campus in line on standard starting times of classes and meetings.

Please share any comments with us.