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Standardized Time Blocks for Use in Course Scheduling

Abstract

Course availability has become a major impediment to our campus goal of increasing retention and graduation rates for our students. The use of standard time blocks in course scheduling can increase the efficient use of space, as well as minimize overlap between classes. SF State has no policy requiring the use of standard time blocks in course scheduling, although there are a set of recommended time blocks for 3- and 4-unit lecture courses. The lack of set time blocks for lab and activity components as well as the optional nature of the existing time blocks has resulted in a huge range of start and end times for classes, leading to unnecessary course overlaps and an inefficient use of scarce space on campus. This policy seeks to accommodate a much wider range of class types and times, limit course overlaps and maximize efficient use of space, while maintaining flexibility for departments scheduling courses.

Key Words

Standard time blocks, course scheduling, final exams

Author/Source

Academic Policies Committee

Responsible Unit(s)

Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs; Academic Resources will coordinate with the Division of Undergraduate Education and Academic Planning and College and Department schedulers to implement the policy.

History

Version Approved Revisions(s)

- Additional one day per week blocks added to the schedule to accommodate activities.
 - Alignment of MW with TR two-day a week schedules.
 - A separate Friday one day a week schedule.
 - Removal of the distinction between centrally and non-centrally scheduled classes.
 - Streamlining of exception process
 - Modifying availability of centrally controlled classroom for 3-hour blocks
- 2 12/06/2018
- 1 04/18/2017 Original

Rationale

In the years since SF State developed recommended standard time blocks for 3- and 4-unit lecture courses, enrollments have increased and the faculty have developed more courses in mixed formats (lecture, lab and activity) and 2-, 5- and even 6-unit courses. The lack of required time blocks for has led to inconsistent start times for courses as well as problems in scheduling final exams without conflicts. As an example, in Spring 2016 there were 28 different Monday start times between 8 am and 5 pm and 42 different end times. In contrast, this policy would allow only 12 different Monday start times between 8 am and 5 pm and 23 end times. This variety of start and end times has led to unnecessary course overlaps and an inefficient use of scarce space on campus. Given that students cannot register for courses that overlap, the chances that students will be able to get into the courses they need to graduate decreases.

The range of start and end times can also result in large time gaps between classes, which wastes space that could be used to offer more courses. In the most recent Senior Exit Survey of SF State graduates ([AIR, 2016](#)), 41% of students indicated that they did not graduate in the time they expected and partially attributed their delay to the lack of course availability. This policy seeks to accommodate a much wider range of class types and times, limit course overlaps and maximize efficient use of space, while maintaining flexibility for departments scheduling courses.

The time blocks have been set up in terms of class time (i.e., minutes) rather than units. For each unit of credit, lecture courses meet 50 minutes/week, activities meet 100 minute/week and labs meet 150 minutes/week. In the very common 3-unit lecture format, three 50-minute, two 75-minute and one 150-minute meeting per week are used. In the case of courses that meet 150 minutes in one session, there is a built-in 15-minute break for a total of 165 minutes. This policy has, therefore, set up 50-minute, 75-minute, 100-minute and 165-minute blocks, which is consistent with CSU Academic Senate directive EP&R 76-36 (Faculty Workload: Policies and Procedures).

While there are a wide variety of types of classes offered at SF State, most many can be broken down for scheduling into smaller components units. For example, a 4-unit course that consists of a 3-unit lecture (150 minutes per week) and a 1-unit activity (100 units per week), would be scheduled differently than a 4-unit course that consists of a 2-unit lecture (100-minutes) and a 2-unit lab (300 minutes). The intent of this policy is to view the scheduling of these components separately rather than the total course meeting time.

Standard time blocks

The standard class scheduling times in the table below must be used when scheduling courses in any space on the SF State main campus in the fall and spring terms. This applies to both university and college/department/program-controlled space. This policy does not apply to the University’s satellite campuses. Other exceptions, chiefly for pedagogical reasons, require approval from the home Department Chair and the Course Review Committee (CRC). Considerations in determining approval of such exceptions should include the pedagogical need for scheduling outside the time blocks, consistency between different sections of the course, accreditation requirements, degree of alignment with the policy, and an analysis of the benefits and costs to students enrolling in the non-standard course. Departments and programs are encouraged to schedule their classes throughout the day and to offer evening and Friday classes as much as possible, and Friday-only classes should be allowed additional flexibility in the exception process. Members of the campus are also strongly encouraged to schedule meetings involving faculty and/or students on Friday, when there is less student demand for courses. Exceptions that have been approved by CRC after this policy is implemented will maintain this status, unless any substantial element of the request deviates from the originally granted exception. Exceptions may be subject to review after five years.

Academic Resources shall communicate to the campus the guidelines used to schedule courses in centrally controlled spaces when there are competing requests. Some considerations in scheduling could include the size of the course, the availability of similar sized spaces elsewhere, bottleneck courses, high-demand courses, and classroom characteristics.

Table 1 Monday through Thursday Time Blocks

50-minute blocks		75-minute blocks	100-minute blocks	165-minute blocks
MW, MWF & TR	M-F & M,T,W, or R	MW ¹ & TR	MW & TR	M, T, W, or R
0800 – 0850	0800 – 0850	0800 – 0915	0800 – 0940	0900 – 1145 ²
0900 – 0950	0900 – 0950	0930 – 1045	1000 – 1140	0930 – 1215 ²
1000 – 1050	1000 – 1050	1100 – 1215	1200 – 1340	1230 – 1515 ²
1100 – 1150	1100 – 1150	1230 – 1345	1400 – 1540	1300 – 1545 ²
1200 – 1250	1200 – 1250	1400 – 1515	1600 – 1740	1530 – 1815 ²
1300 – 1350	1300 – 1350	1530 – 1645	1800 – 1940	1600 – 1845
1400 – 1450	1400 – 1450	1700 – 1815	2000 – 2140	1630 – 1915
1500 – 1550	1500 – 1550	1830 – 1945		1700 – 1945
1600 – 1650	1600 – 1650	2000 – 2115		1730 – 2015
1700 – 1750	1700 – 1750			1800 – 2045
1800 – 1850	1800 – 1850			1830 – 2115
1900 – 1950	1900 – 1950			1900 – 2145
2000 – 2050	2000 – 2050			
2100 – 2150	2100 – 2150			

¹ Academic Resources may choose to restrict the scheduling of MW 75-minute and all 165-minute blocks in large, centrally scheduled lecture halls. Exceptions may be granted for pedagogical reasons.

² Central scheduling of these time blocks is subject to classroom utilization constraints. Priority will be given to scheduling departmental requests that facilitate high classroom utilization, such as clusters of individual 165-minute courses during the same time block on multiple days. For example, a cluster of 4 course requests for 09:30-12:15 on MTWR would receive highest priority, followed by a cluster of 3 on MTW, TWR, MTR or MWR. Paired course requests on either MW or TR would be considered next. Individual 165-minute courses will be centrally scheduled only if they facilitate higher classroom utilization by matching up with complementary course requests.

Table 2 Friday only time blocks

50-minute blocks 100-minute blocks 165-minute blocks

0800 – 0850	0800 – 0940	0900 – 1145
0900 – 0950	1000 – 1140	0930 – 1215
1000 – 1050	1200 – 1340	1200 – 1445
1100 – 1150	1400 – 1540	1230 – 1515
1200 – 1250	1600 – 1740	1500 – 1745
1300 – 1350	1800 – 1940	1530 – 1815
1400 – 1450	2000 – 2140	
1500 – 1550		
1600 – 1650		

Implementation

This policy shall be in effect for courses offered no later than the Fall 2018 term. The Office of Academic Resources shall provide a report to the Academic Senate on the implementation of the policy as soon as is feasible and CRC will provide a summary of the requests for exceptions to the policy. This data shall be used by the Senate to review the effectiveness of the policy and modify it if necessary. The Senate encourages Academic Resources to work with Capital Planning to develop a mechanism by which non-centrally controlled space can be scheduled for courses offered outside the controlling body's unit, thereby expanding the number of classrooms available to the campus. To ensure attention to equity in space allocations, scheduling at satellite campuses and scheduling of weekend and summer classes, this policy will be reviewed every 3 years.

Signed Memo:

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