

To: Arts Chairs, faculty, and Associate Deans; AFIW leadership  
From: Associate Deans Undergraduate, Arts (Martin Cooke and Katherine Acheson)  
Re: Centralized scheduling for Fall 2020  
Date: June 11, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

We have received messages from a few of you in response to the letter entitled "Faculties withholding centralized scheduling support from instructors" that went out to FAUW's membership on Monday.

Thanks to those who have written for your input and your questions about the decision not to ask the RO to schedule classes for Arts in Fall 2020, and the process by which that decision was made. We'll try to clarify those things here. Attachments to this message include a survey of Arts students conducted by IAP, the original Scheduling Cycle from the RO for Fall 2020, and the May 29 memo from us about this question.

Our primary concern with RO scheduled classes is that students will (rightly) feel that their presence is required at the scheduled times, as it is in an on-campus class with a scheduled meet time, and that significant graded activities could take place in those times. An RO-produced schedule under the current circumstances might have the effect of creating numerous conflicts for the students, even though most of the course activity would be asynchronous. This would not only be confusing for them and for advisors; it could lead to significantly-reduced enrolments across the board.

It may be helpful if we reiterate here the reasons why we need to limit synchronous activities in our remotely-delivered courses this Fall, reasons that have to do with equity for all our students. In a survey of all students conducted by IAP, 14.3% of respondents said that the internet at home was not good enough to take courses there, and 6.8% were unsure. More than 20% of Arts students who responded, then, do not have on-demand and consistent access to internet and will depend on propitious home and personal circumstances or being able to go outside the home to take classes. Internet issues aside, 65.0% of Arts students who responded to the survey (n=1183) said that the "ability to participate in the course on my own schedule" would improve the experience of remote learning for them. It is for these reasons that we recommended, in our May 29 memo, that synchronous activities scheduled by the instructor be limited to one hour a week, that they not include graded activities, and that the learning experience be available in asynchronous form as well.

Our secondary concern was for scheduling staff. The original Fall 2020 Scheduling Cycle was to begin in mid-February, and proceed with deadlines in March, April, May, June, July, and September. Scheduling work involves nearly 30 staff members in the Faculty, plus numerous staff in the Registrar's Office. The revised Fall 2020 Scheduling Cycle, released in May, began in May and continues through June, July, August and September. Staff would have had to work double-time to manage the information flows needed to schedule the more than 1000 courses that normally appear on the Fall schedule of classes for Arts. In addition to the burden on Arts staff, the RO staff has been very busy implementing the changes which happened in Winter and Spring terms, and preparing for the Fall. Preparation for the Fall includes producing timetables for all courses in one Faculty, and scheduling limited in-person classes and other educational activities with adequate social distancing, sanitation, and safe entrance and egress. Most of this is manual work that cannot be done using the usual, semi-automated, scheduling processes. It is some relief for RO staff that most classes in the Fall will not need actual rooms, but this factor makes little difference to Arts scheduling staff, as rooms are usually rolled over and they must still manage the

course caps.

With regard to decision-making and approval processes, scheduling is primarily operational rather than academic, and neither UGAG nor AFC normally consider it. The Arts Faculty Constitution says that AFC's scope is defined as the consideration and approval of "the general principles and standards with respect to the programs and courses of study in the Faculty," the consideration and approval of new academic programs and courses and changes to existing curriculum, and "such matters related to academics or scholarship affecting the Faculty as the Faculty Council may consider appropriate" (section 12 a-c). If AFC considers scheduling to be appropriate to its mandate, then questions can certainly be brought to it in future; this would, however, have to be a decision made by AFC.

However, even if it were the case that AFC would like to consider questions about scheduling, it should be recognized that decisions have been made in the present circumstances (COVID-19) so as to ensure student academic progression and graduation (as examples, the reduction in the number of co-op terms required, special coding and transcript language to apply to the CR/NCR option for Winter term, and admission to major in Arts for students who lack a numerical grade in the subject). All of those decisions have been *reported* to Senate, but they have not been approved by UGAG, AFC, or Senate itself.

It is too late to initiate a schedule of classes through the RO for Fall 2020. The question may arise again in the future, and perhaps it would be good to have a wider discussion – including faculty, staff, and students – about scheduling synchronous activities for remote or online courses. Perhaps the Dean will lead us in such a discussion, so that the Faculty can indicate its will and ensure that the ADUs are better-informed should the need arise again to make such a decision.

Sincerely, Kathy and Marty