

DEPAUW STUDENT GOVERNMENT

WHITE PAPER NO. 5

A White Paper Concerning Student Frustration with the Class Scheduling System

As students at DePauw, we place a high value on the unique liberal arts education DePauw offers us. DePauw has tremendous faculty members committed to teaching a wide range of fascinating courses and fostering intellectual growth among their students. However, at each semesters end, the process of selecting, requesting, and scheduling classes for the next term becomes a source of widespread frustration among DePauw students. With tuition rates just around \$17,000 per semester, it is unacceptable that students are routinely excluded from classes they need for their major, pre-professional prerequisite, or minor. After eighty-one students completed a general survey on the system scheduling of classes, 70% of the students said they had to enroll in a class they did not have any interest in solely because they needed those credits for requirement, graduation, etc. Granted, simple math makes it impossible for *every* student to get *every* class they ask for *every* semester. However, the university should explore ways to improve the system and address the most common complaints. We understand that one of the goals of a liberal arts education is to encourage students to explore different areas of study, but shouldn't the administration place more faith in its' students rather than limiting their options? The following is a reflection on the issues and suggestions gathered by students:

Unequal Distribution of Timebanks

While students want to take a variety of courses and have freedom to choose the courses they take, their options are often restricted because too many classes are offered in the same time banks. As it stands now, the majority of classes offered are between 10:30 am and 1:30 pm and very few offered at 8:00 am and after 2:00 pm. In the past, departments were required to offer a certain percentage of their classes within each time bank. Over the years this requirement has been gradually loosened and now classes are far too condensed into certain time banks. As a result, students' course selection options are severely limited, preventing the type of cross-disciplinary academic experimentation DePauw prides itself on. One of the sources of this congestion is the emergence of 90-minute time banks offered during the peak demand hours on Monday and Wednesday, typically from 10:00 am-11:30 am and 12:30 pm to 2:00 pm. These courses have become popular among students and professors alike but have created far too much overlap with one hour classes taught during these times. In the past, DePauw offered these twice weekly 90 minute courses exclusively on Tuesday and Thursday, which opened up Monday, Wednesday, Friday, for a larger number of one hour time banks. If DePauw wants to give students a fighting chance of getting the classes they desire, there needs to be a more equal distribution of course offerings across the time banks. DePauw should return to its old ways and force departments to spread courses out, while reevaluating the success of the current time bank system as a whole. We recommend moving the 90 minute Monday and Wednesday classes outside of peak demand hours, such as 8:00 am to 9:30 am or after 2:00pm, or eliminating it all together.

Science students are at a special disadvantage when it comes to their restrictions based on time banks. Because many students are taking 1-2 labs per semester, that lab, even if it only meets once a week, prevents them from taking other courses to fulfill distribution requirements or other courses from the liberal arts curriculum that interest them. According to next semester's schedule of classes, the most

44 popular lab time is Thursday starting between 8 and 9am, and lasting up to three hours (31 labs offered),
45 which means that 81 classes are eliminated from student choices because of that lab. On Tuesdays, 16
46 labs are offered that begin between 8 and 9, also conflicting with those same 81 classes. All but three of
47 the remaining labs offered start between 12:40-1:40 on Tuesday/Thursday, again conflicting with popular
48 time banks. Because these lab courses are required to graduate with that major and difficult to get into,
49 this removes course options available to students.

50 Choosing a major should not be influenced by concern over which classes you can get into. We
51 recommend that department heads take a greater role in providing students with an equal distribution of
52 class times, perhaps even one class offered during every time slot from every department. If this
53 condition can be met, then students will be able to choose a variety of courses within their major while
54 still having the flexibility to take classes outside of their major. We understand a professor's desire to
55 select when they teach, but it must be balanced against the need to provide students with the best
56 educational opportunities possible. Because prerequisites are required for many upper level courses,
57 introductory courses and courses acting as prerequisites should be taught at less popular time slots.

58 *Meeting Student Demand*

59 Currently, academic departments are free to determine the maximum number of students in each
60 course. In some cases there are legitimate space constraints that simply cannot be avoided, such as a
61 limited number of computers in a Computer Science classroom. However, the registrar's office should do
62 a better job monitoring the courses with high demand and low max-enrollments and try to adjust class
63 sizes accordingly. Obviously we're not asking professors to jeopardize the intellectual integrity of small
64 classes (i.e. seminar style courses) but in some cases, small classes could easily be moved to larger rooms
65 and additional students enrolled. In classes with the highest demand/spots ratio, departments should
66 consider opening up additional sections of the course to accommodate high demand.

67 Although we value small class sizes and intimate interaction with professors, the University
68 should explore the option of adding a very select group of large lecture-style classes in courses with the
69 highest demand. For example, a high demand, pre-professional, introductory level class like Organic
70 Chemistry could easily be taught in this format to accommodate student interest. Students in the course
71 would all attend the same lecture times, but sign up for smaller lab sections according to their schedules.
72 Obviously this is not the only available solution, but it may be worth considering.

73 Since many of the introductory level classes are prioritized for the first year and sophomore
74 standings (i.e. Intro to Philosophy, Psychology, Religions, Photography, etc.), it becomes nearly
75 impossible for juniors and seniors to enroll in these courses. It also makes it harder for upperclassmen to
76 explore different subjects beyond the basic requirements, limiting opportunities that should be provided to
77 students as part of a liberal arts education. The necessity to fulfill pre-requisites for majors, minors, or
78 pre-professional requirements makes for a high demand of intro level classes. However, in departments
79 such as kinesiology where only three full-time professors are teaching, there are not enough classes to
80 meet these demands and thus have to compromise the amount of upper-level classes offered to majors.
81 We recognize that by putting more priorities on classes than there already are, may lead to a more
82 complex system, therefore, the way priorities are distributed and determined needs to be reanalyzed.

83 Additionally, an alternative system for registering for classes may solve many of these problems.
84 Some schools allow first and second year students to register only for courses rather than sections of
85 courses. For example, a student could say that s/he wants to take "Econ 100" but not that s/he wants to
86

87 take Section E of Econ 100 with Professor X. This gives the computer more flexibility in placing
88 students into their desired courses, but comes at the expense of giving students their desired times and
89 professors.
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91 *Course Request Process*

92 Furthermore, the gridded course request form on E-Services itself is a constant source of
93 confusion and frustration among students. The complex system of prioritized choices and multiple
94 alternates makes it very difficult for students to clearly request the courses they desire. As a result,
95 students may unknowingly enter requests in the wrong order and not receive any of their requests. First
96 Year students are particularly at risk to make this type of error, yet they receive little help from their
97 advisers, who themselves don't fully understand the system. The administration must fix this problem by
98 offering a more user-friendly course selection form that allows students to simply rank courses in the
99 order they want and let the system automatically fill in the appropriate alternates. The university should
100 explore course requests systems at other colleges and revamp the system accordingly. The registrar's
101 office has acknowledged the need to improve this system and Student Government is committed to
102 finding a more student friendly solution. An effective way to do this would be to collect alternative forms
103 and have students provide feedback as to which form is chosen. Once a new format is selected, the
104 administration must do a better job educating students and faculty advisers on the details of the new
105 system.
106

107 *First Year Advising*

108 One of the more common complaints among the first-year class points to the ambiguity and lack
109 of communication that plagues the class scheduling process. When incoming first-year students begin the
110 process of course scheduling, there is no explanation of how the system works. Students have no idea
111 what to expect when submitting their requests. Such lack of explanation results in proposed lists of
112 classes that simply sound interesting but take no account of what may be advantageous for the
113 individual's unique requirements. Students have no way of knowing what classes will be beneficial for
114 them to request or in what order they should request them. This creates problems for students who have
115 plans for future semesters or specific course requirements that need to be fulfilled for a program or major.

116 Furthermore, students are more or less on their own until they arrive on campus. There is no one
117 to answer questions that frequently arise regarding graduation requirements and the "typical" class
118 schedule of a first-year student. By the time first-year students meet their mentors and advisers, the time
119 for asking many of these questions has passed and students are fairly limited in what edits can be made to
120 their first semester schedules as classes have largely filled up.

121 Mentor and/or advisor contact information should be provided to incoming students during the
122 summer so that dialogue concerning the class scheduling system and graduation, program and major
123 requirements can be initiated earlier. During the on campus information sessions for incoming freshman,
124 an example or explanation of first year scheduling should be a part of the program in order to address
125 future questions and confusion that many first year students experience.

126 Advisers should coordinate with students to develop a tentative plan for at least the first year of
127 school, taking into account the student's interests, program requirements, and intended major
128 requirements. In doing so, students can at the very least begin to grasp what courses they may be required
129 to take and at what point in their four years they are most benefited by taking them.

130

131 *Distribution of SPAC Codes*

132 With the past few registration periods, we have noticed inconsistencies and confusions among the
133 student body with regards to the distribution of Special Permission Access Codes (SPACs). As it
134 currently stands, each class for the schedule of courses is provided with ten SPAC codes. Instructors and
135 department chairs can view a list of these codes and distribute them as they wish. The inconsistency of
136 distributing these SPAC codes among the different departments and faculty is where the issue lies.
137 Currently, the only rule in place is that a SPAC can only be used once. Since students are confused on
138 how and when they should ask for and expect to receive a SPAC, implementing a consistent method of
139 distribution across all departments would help to clarify confusion and streamline the process of
140 distribution.

141 To avoid distributing all of the SPACs too soon, it would help if there was a date by which
142 students could make special requests, and then a date by which instructors were supposed to give out
143 SPAC codes. Right now, it is hard to know when it is "safe" to give out the codes, because you never
144 know when you are going to hear from another student in dire need with a "special request".

145 Additionally, faculty should print out their list of SPACs and keep a record of the students they
146 distribute them to. Nothing is recorded in the system when a SPAC is given out. When it's used, however,
147 the student's name appears next to the SPAC code on the instructor's list. This would help to solve the
148 issue of distributing SPACs that go to waste because students choose not to use them.

149 To solve the issue of students not using the SPACs during the course request period, it would be
150 advisable to have two types of SPACs, one that's good only during the course request period and the other
151 that works only during the registration adjustment period.

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153 *Email/Text Message Notifications*

154 As it stands now, during the scheduling and add/drop period, students must constantly comb
155 through the schedule of classes on their e-services account to see if a spot in a class has opened up. This
156 is a highly inconvenient system, and students often end up disappointed and frustrated. To alleviate this
157 frustration, the university could explore a technological solution that keeps students well informed about
158 openings in classes they want. For example, "GetThatClass.com" sends students e-mail and text message
159 notifications for classes they want to schedule. (example: "The class 'Ethical theory' is available! Add
160 SOC#1542 now! Sent by GetThatClass.com") The alerts are often sent within five minutes of a spot
161 becoming available, which would allow students to stay informed about what is going on during the
162 scheduling and add-drop period concerning class availability. The website is already being used by
163 schools such as Sonoma State University, Loyola Marymount University, and University of Oregon,
164 among others.

165 To use this service, The university must pass the following criteria:

166 1. Ability to access the class schedule from a public terminal, without logging into a university
167 account.

168 2. On the class schedule page, each class indicates whether it's open or closed.

169 As it stands now, the class scheduling system meets the second criteria, and has the ability to meet the
170 first. Setting up an account with "GetThatClass.com" is free, the information shared is confidential, and
171 participants will not be spammed. We would like the administration to take a closer look at the
172 possibility of using this service to create a more up-to-date and personal information flow within the

173 system so that students can make more informed and timely decisions during the scheduling and add/drop
174 period.

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176 *Public Wait Lists*

177 On the day students receive their schedules, there is always the invariable rush to email professors
178 and get on waiting lists for classes not received. According to university policy, professors are free to
179 keep or not keep their own waiting lists and distribute SPAC codes accordingly. While some professors
180 keep students informed and organized lists, other are unresponsive and most students are kept in the dark
181 about their position on the list or the manner in which students are being ranked. The lack of transparency
182 in the wait list process often leaves students ill-informed and ill-prepared to fill their schedules.

183 DePauw should consider creating public waiting lists on E-Services for every class with more
184 demand than available spots. Students could log on and check their rank on the wait list, which
185 automatically fills open spots based on the established order. Students could sign up for email updates as
186 they move up the list so they are constantly aware of their position while simultaneously trying to enroll
187 in other classes.

188
189 Clearly, students have many concerns about the current system of scheduling classes and the
190 persistence of this issue demonstrates that attention is required by the administration. We recognize that
191 there are many areas of improvement in this current system and have suggested several options that can
192 be considered in the process of reevaluation. However, we also recognize that DePauw is in the midst of
193 redefining itself intellectually. We have already moved away from an antiquated set of requirements and
194 have begun reshaping the DePauw education. It's only appropriate, therefore, for the administration to
195 redesign the *entire* system of scheduling classes to address chronic problems and meet future
196 expectations. DePauw Student Government will remain steadfastly committed to finding a workable
197 solution for students, faculty, and the administration and we encourage the administration to continue
198 soliciting student feedback on this matter.

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202 Motion by: Senator Chance

Seconded by: Senator Pierre

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204 Aye ___38___

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206 Nay ___1___

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208 Absent ___0___

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211 This **12th** day of **December, 2010.**

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Christine Walker, President

Attest:

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Tyler Hess, Secretary

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