Planning and Adjusting Course Offerings

Planning for the following academic year begins quite early:

Before end-September: Chairs and directors should consult with their faculty early in the academic year — before the end of September — in order to meet the required deadlines; one or more September departmental meetings are typically devoted to discussion of course offerings for the following academic year. These discussions should use the department's updated academic self-study document as their guiding framework; in other words, year-to-year planning should be anchored in the faculty's collective, up-to-date assessment of which courses and how many should be offered at each level, and in each area, of the curriculum. Meeting the department's full set of obligations to students in the best way possible, including avoidance of scheduling and classroom conflicts, must take precedence over individual faculty members' preferred teaching assignments and times.

Mid-October: Full information on the department or program's proposed class scheduling and teaching assignments for the following academic year is entered by a departmental staff administrator in the Academic Planning Database (APD).

October-December: The deans will review information in the APD for completeness and adherence to scheduling guidelines and may request modifications to your proposed course offerings and class schedule. Following a brief freeze for this initial review, the APD remains accessible to departmental schedulers for updating throughout the year, e.g., as faculty leaves or new courses are approved, unrealistically high or low enrollment limits are adjusted in light of predictive information, etc. Keeping the APD accurate and current is the best way to ensure assignment of appropriate classrooms.

January-early February: Each department puts finishing touches on its course schedule for the following fall and, as far as possible, spring. Your department's staff scheduler must finalize changes in early February in order for the correct fall schedule to appear online for advising and registration in March and April.

While it may seem ideal to offer every course every semester, practical issues (limited number of faculty, limited audience for many courses, etc.) make this scheduling pattern feasible and desirable only for courses with the highest enrollments. For courses with relatively low enrollments, multi-year cycles are often preferable (e.g. offering a particular graduate course once every two or even three years). The CAS/GRS guideline is that most faculty should teach a mix of smaller and larger courses, that undergraduate courses (numbered 0-499) should ordinarily enroll a minimum of 10 students (courses intended for delivery in lecture/discussion format should naturally be much larger), and that courses taken by graduate students (numbered 500 and above) should ordinarily enroll a minimum of 8. The department should monitor actual enrollments and contact the Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Enrollment to discuss appropriate action whenever a particular course appears unlikely to reach the threshold enrollment of 10 or 8. The department should offer courses with sufficient frequency that students are able to complete their degree requirements. But if the enrollments in particular courses tend to be low or lower than desirable, your department may need to examine the curriculum to determine whether there is a more efficient way to organize it.