

University of Washington
Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning

February 1st, 2018
10:30am – 12:00pm
Gerberding 142

Meeting Synopsis:

1. Call to Order
 2. Review of the Minutes from January 4th, 2018
 3. Announcements/events
 4. UW Final Exam Schedule and related topics – Matt Winslow (Senior Associate Registrar) & Phil Reid (Vice Provost for Academic and Students Affairs)
 5. Good of the order
 6. Adjourn
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1) Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m.

2) Review of the Minutes from January 4th, 2018

The minutes from January 4th, 2018 were approved as written.

3) Announcements/events

Christine Sugatan (Administrator-Program Operations, Center for Teaching and Learning) explained the call for proposals for the UW Teaching and Learning Symposium will sent out Monday, February 5. She noted the Symposium welcomes proposals from all UW campuses. The 2017-2018 Teaching and Learning Symposium will be held April 17, 2018 in the UW Seattle HUB Ballroom.

4) UW Final Exam Schedule and related topics – Matt Winslow (Senior Associate Registrar) & Phil Reid (Vice Provost for Academic and Students Affairs)

Phil Reid (Vice Provost, Academic and Student Affairs) and Matt Winslow (Senior Associate Registrar, Policy and Procedure, University Registrar) were present to discuss UW's final exam schedule in the context of recent discussions in the FCTL relating to potential changes, improvements, and known issues. A PowerPoint was shown with additional information (Exhibit 1). Halverson recalled the council discovered in the last meeting that some UW instructors had been unofficially (aka. not reported centrally) holding their final exams on Saturdays, a practice which could result in students having multiple final exams on a single day (an issue accounted for and avoided via central scheduling). He noted this is one related issue the council is hoping to gather more information on.

Altering the final exam schedule

Reid explained the idea of making changes to the UW final exam schedule arose roughly three years in the past at a time when instructional spaces were requested to be scheduled for courses, but were not (initially) able to be granted due to a shortage of rooms. He noted at this time, some instructors also expressed an interest in changing the date that their final exam was to be held on. He explained at the time – in the midst of already recommending widespread course/classroom scheduling changes – it was believed making additional changes to the final exam schedule represented too much Provost-mandated change at one point in time.

Winslow explained the way the current final exam schedule is structured means instructors teaching on “regular schedules” are rewarded with final exam dates held Monday-Wednesday, while erratic course schedules more often yield Thursday-Friday final dates.

Reid noted feedback gathered from students shows that they desire “schedule certainty” above all else, to reliably be able to plan for trips, holidays, vacations, and other considerations throughout the academic quarter and after.

A member asked if there is data relating to the question of if instructors choose certain class schedules to try and yield particular final days and/or times. Reid noted anecdotally, some faculty try to ascertain more regular course schedules so they may have an earlier final (as well as for other reasons). He explained faculty must confirm their final exam date/time centrally with the university, a practice which ties in with ensuring schedule certainty for students. It was noted despite this, some faculty do not confirm their final exam date, or alter the date without informing the university officially, which in turn may cause issues for students.

Winslow noted, in relation to the first bullet point of the PowerPoint and altering the final exam schedule to uncouple course meeting schedules with final exam dates, he may be able to assess if additional “front-loading” can be done to increase M-W final exam dates (Exhibit 1). However, he noted he did not believe much could be done to improve final exam schedules for faculty with less ideal class schedules, other than attempting to make it so faculty teaching at less ideal times may have more ideal final exam dates/times (in order to incentivize scheduling outside of peak times/spreading classroom usage). He noted he would look into these potential changes.

A member recommended an email be sent to UW faculty stating that if they do not opt out of or confirm their prescribed final exam time, it will be confirmed without their consent. Halverson explained if a faculty member does change their final exam date/time, it is crucial it be reported to the university for the sake of protecting students’ schedules. It was noted UW Scholastic Regulations states that an instructor must have dean’s approval for scheduling a final exam outside of the default schedule. The Policy also states that all students in the course must agree to the alternative final date/time.

Saturday finals

Halverson questioned what knowledge the university has relating to the Saturday final exam issue, especially relating to information on the severity of the issue and how it impacts students. Winslow explained during autumn quarter 2017, 115 sections at UW Seattle held a Saturday final, which affected

6,923 students. 952 students had two finals on one day, 96 students had three finals, and five students had four finals on one day.

Some background was provided on the “Saturday final” phenomenon at the UW, which began as a practice in the Department of Mathematics roughly 12 years in the past as a way to hold “common finals” wherein mathematics students from various sections would come in and take a final exam at the same time (also helping to keep cheating to a minimum). It was noted the Foster School of Business began utilizing the practice thereafter, and more units (many with language courses) followed. It was noted the vast majority of Saturday finals are held by the Department of Mathematics and the Foster School of Business. Winslow explained his shop does not have any way to stop or regulate these finals in any way. He noted at a minimum, a schedule could be designed for the “common finals,” so that they are tracked centrally.

A member questioned what amount of Saturday or “common finals” are utilized to minimize academic misconduct versus to yield longer quarter-end vacations. The answer was not known, though it was explained academic misconduct is known to be alleviated through breaking down a course into two tests, and some faculty do not want to write more than one test.

A student member explained he had not had an exam at the UW during the proper “finals week” in a long time. He noted students probably do desire schedule certainty above everything else, including above having an earlier Saturday final. He noted students having several finals on one day, even if just a handful of students, is a large pedagogical issue.

It was clarified that for most of the sections in question, the Saturday final was highlighted during student registration for the course. Moreover, the final time is supposed to be approved by students, sometimes done via syllabi being provided with final exam information to students on the first day of the course.

It was noted the current system has negative impacts on a small amount of students, and the exam schedule needs more structure, as it is losing structure as time goes on and units operate without central sign-off/facilitation. Halverson explained FCTL serves students, and holding several finals on one day is impacting student academic success. A member asked if there is enough institutional data to inform a faculty member that a student in their course would be affected by their changing of a final exam date. The guests noted this may be possible within the existing data structure. It was noted this data could also be utilized by deans when signing off on alternative final exam dates/times (to weigh into the decision to grant).

Two recommendations came out of the discussion:

- I. The notion of having some sort of notification being sent to faculty stating when their final exam will be held, and if it not confirmed by the faculty member, then the default exam time must be used.
- II. The idea to remind students of their rights under UW Scholastic Regulations; that they should approach their instructor with concerns if they happen to have several final exams on the same day.

Reid explained he is able to do some more research in order to better understand the drivers of the problem, as this would be useful information for the FCTL. He noted he would work through this and report back to the council.

Conclusion

Halverson concluded the university must structure final exams to a greater degree. He explained dead week is supposed to be available to students for the purpose of studying. He noted the university must get out in front of the Saturday final issue and limit the degree to which it is sanctioning the practice.

5) Good of the order

Assessing diversity requirement for undergraduate students

Hornby noted the newly-developed UW 2017-2021 Diversity Blueprint calls for assessment of the diversity credit requirement for undergraduate students. She asked other members if anyone knew who was conducting this analysis or it was ongoing. Members did not know. It was noted these courses have learning objectives; and a member questioned how those are those being assessed in relation to student learning. Jason Johnson (Associate Vice Provost, Undergraduate Academic Affairs) explained there may be information on assessment of the courses enveloped in regular academic program review conducted by units; it was noted this information is available online to UW community members.

6) Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

Minutes by Joey Burgess, jmbg@uw.edu, council support analyst

Present: **Faculty:** Dan Turner, Thomas Halverson (chair), David Goldstein, Kimberlee Gillis-Bridges, Kathleen Peterson, Fred Bookstein, Laurianne Mullinax
Ex-officio reps: Amanda Hornby, Meixi Ng, Judith Howard
President’s designee: LeAnne Jones Wiles
Guests: Christine Sugatan, Jason Johnson, Matt Winslow, Phil Reid

Absent: **Faculty:** Timea Tihanyi, Amy Howells, David Masuda, Ellen McGough, Mark Zachry
Ex-officio reps: Navid Azodi, Maria Zontine

Exhibits

Exhibit 1 – Final Scheduling Questions.pdf

Final Scheduling Questions...

- **MPW: Rotate the Exam schedule.** If you look at the exam schedule you will see that it has not changed in decades. That is to say that if a class is taught M-W-F at 10:30 - the final is set for Monday at 8:30. Given that the University is trying to spread out courses throughout the day to **maximize classroom use**, one of the major drives of course time is the exam schedule. No one wants finals on Th or F so they avoid those class times. I suggest to rotate exam schedule by the academic year NOT by the quarter. I realize the current schedule has been set up to minimize the number of finals a student has on any one day. Therefore, the rotation would have to be done by row not column, i. e. 10:30 classes would swap with 11:30 classes.
- **SATURDAY FINALS:** Do we know the extent to which faculty are “going rogue” and scheduling finals on the Saturday following “dead week” (Is there data)? Is there a current UW policy that restricts or limits this practice? Is there a monitoring system in place to protect students from having 3 or 4 finals on a Saturday? Do we need one?
- What can FCT&L do to help better understand the problem, and/or support efforts to advocate and protect students?