

Whereas the Dean of the School of Engineering, Science, and Technology has mandated that Departments within the school schedule at least 20% of their classes on Friday;

Whereas, a data-driven need for more Friday classes has not yet been established<sup>(1)</sup>; and

Whereas, the sudden readjustment of general education, service, and majors courses to Fridays may have unforeseen negative impact on student academic progress<sup>(2)</sup>;

Be it hereby resolved that the Faculty are opposed to this mandate to increase the number of Friday classes in the School of Engineering, Science, and Technology in particular and the University in general. Although we recognize a Dean's responsibility to work cooperatively with Department Chairs, we feel this mandate may negatively affect the academic success of students and is not based on data. The stated need by the administration for more Friday classes should be examined by the Faculty Senate where its academic impacts can be fully explored.

**Justification:**

**1) Comments: Where are the data that demonstrates a need for more Friday classes?**

In 2008, the Registrar and Provost Offices spearheaded a change to the course schedule at CCSU. Their model is still available on the Faculty Senate website (<http://web.ccsu.edu/facsenate/Reports20082009/RegistrarTimeBlocks.htm>). After the model was adopted by 2011, many Departments used Friday time blocks for majors-only courses (e.g. longer labs that do not fit into the new time blocks), research, mentoring undergraduates, field work, student teacher observations, meetings, etc.

From the CCSU Recorder in 2011 (<http://centralrecorder.com/2010/02/22/spring-2011-time-blocks/>)

Joseph Paige, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, and registrar Susan Petrosino are two key players in constructing the new time block schedule.

"We've done a lot of research on this, we've presented it to various committees, faculty senate. We've met with I can't even tell you, I'd say dozen of department chairs. Anyone who has raised a question, we've spoken to," said Paige.

Unfortunately since 2011, the administration grew increasingly concerned with the impacts from the plan they crafted. For example, the fifth-year interim NEASC report from 2013 stated:

“When CCSU experienced a sudden and unexpected 4.7% drop in first-year retention from the fall 2009 cohort to the fall 2010 cohort, a subgroup of the RGC, with the assistance of OIRA, investigated why this may have occurred. Although this research identified a wide range of factors influencing students’ decisions not to return, the reason most frequently cited was a failure to establish a connection to the University. Further analysis revealed that an unintended consequence of our new course scheduling blocks was a precipitous drop in the number of Friday courses, which had the domino effect of inducing more students to leave campus on Thursdays evening and decreasing student participation in weekend activities. These findings resulted in efforts to increase the number of Friday classes and to increase the amount of weekend programming for students—**both of which have resulted in an upsurge in student involvement in weekend activities.**” (page 10)

It appears from this report from 2013 that first-year retention was negatively affected by the shift in course offerings; however, since that 2013 report the administration indicates that the number of Friday courses has already been increased and the results have satisfied the problem seen at that time. It is unclear on whether or not the first-year retention since this report has been affected by the addition of more Friday courses or extra weekend activities.

### **So why the need for MORE Friday classes?**

If it is not based on fixing problems related to student success (as hinted in the NEASC report) since that has already been remedied, then it must be based upon financial arguments. In 2012, the UPBC reported that perhaps revenue was down due to a decrease in Friday classes.

([http://web.ccsu.edu/upbc/currentDocs/files/11-12/Annual\\_Report\\_11-12.pdf](http://web.ccsu.edu/upbc/currentDocs/files/11-12/Annual_Report_11-12.pdf))

From the 2012 UPBC report:

“While it is not statistically evident at this time, UPBC strongly believes, after reviewing the adoption of block scheduling in the spring of 2011, that there is a correlation between some if not most of our revenue downturn in housing and food service and our student retention numbers. Other mitigating factors may include the unprecedented weather incidents of fall 2011 (tropical storm Irene and the October snow storm) and their impact on the cohesiveness of our freshman class and the continued sour economic climate. Regardless of the reasons why, the fact remains that CCSU cannot continue on this downward track of having less campus life from Friday to Sunday each week.”

Perhaps the administration thought it prudent not to include the downturn in housing and food service information in the 2013 NEASC report (the quoted NEASC paragraph FWIW was in the “Strengthening the University’s capacity to collect, analyze, and use data in decision-making” section). Perhaps it was fixed between the 2012 UPBC report and the 2013 NEASC report. Perhaps the real motivation for more Friday classes still might be a desire to generate more revenue or place more students into on-campus housing. If there are external motivations from our administration to make students stay here on Fridays then the faculty should be made aware of them. To the best of our knowledge, no data exists so far that suggests that more Friday classes will increase food service revenue and if it does so at the expense of student satisfaction and retention then we may be cutting off our nose to spite our face. The NEASC and UPBC works seem to have been made without hard data. Where is the data that links the number of Friday classes to first-year retention? Might there be other factors such as student dissatisfaction with

their schedule that might also be a factor in the drop of first-year retention? Is the downturn in food service and housing revenue linked to Friday classes? Might the downturn in revenue reflect something else? Like a dissatisfaction in the food vendor? Clearly these questions need answers.

## **2) What are the impacts of mandating more Friday classes?**

The lack of impact studies on the administrative-led change to block scheduling should be apparent by now from the NEASC and UPBC reports mentioned in comment section 1. This mandate to increase Friday courses could make things worse for students trying to make timely progress through their major and make things worse for first-year retention. Ultimately, the willy-nilly increase Friday classes brings with it several potential problems:

i) First and foremost, it is a decision made without data. The NEASC and UPBC reports do not definitively pinpoint the cause for the problems seen yet attribute the problems to a lack of Friday classes. There is no data to support these claims. The need for more Friday classes seems to originate from wishful thinking (or worse, from block schedule change buyer's remorse). Other reasonable reasons for drops in first-year retention and revenue should be adequately explored before altering already restricted course offerings. For example, students may leave after the first year because they don't like their first year schedules made from the dregs of course offerings. The drop in food service revenue might be because students think the food sucks. There are other possible reasons that if found might actually remedy the problem instead of making things worse.

ii) Historically and without question, Friday classes are the last to fill (if they do). Therefore they will most likely be populated by those who are last or late to register. So assuming the class goes, the student is stuck with a horrible schedule. If it is cancelled, then their frustration grows exponentially. If retention rate is linked to student satisfaction then you are looking at a lot of potentially unsatisfied customers. First year students and at-risk students who are late to register are vulnerable to this administrative snap decision to give them more Friday options.

iii) In addition to potentially frustrating students, Friday classes that are cancelled require a reallocation of Department resources in terms of full-time and part-time member course assignments. Cancelling classes at the last minute may end up costing the University money instead of saving it since part-time members deserve reimbursement for these classes cancelled at the last minute. As mentioned previously, many full-time members (and part-time members) use Fridays for majors-only courses, research, mentoring undergraduates, field work, student teacher observations, meetings, etc.

iv) Without proper planning, moving existing classes to Friday may upset symbiotic relationships between linked courses that are dependent on each other. IOW, if you move a calculus class to Fridays then the physics or chemistry majors who needs that class might be negatively affected because they may already have an existing class at that time.

Finally, the Dean's request seems hasty and rushed. It will potentially create issues- many of them academic in nature. If the new block schedules were passed through the shared governance channels to hammer out potential academic problems then why hasn't this mandate?