Report of the Flexible Course Scheduling Work Group

January 15, 2015

Related Fiscal Sustainability Recommendation: UCFS Recommendation R9: Units should evaluate whether offering courses with a term length of other than 15 weeks will serve certain student groups (e.g., military or full-time workers) while maintaining appropriate academic standards.

Committee Membership:
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Charge to the Work Group:

- Identify best practices in course scheduling at peer institutions and other national public institutions.
- Identify current programs, majors at ECU that utilize some form of flexible course scheduling (other than summer terms)
- Determine how financial aid factors into the funds available to students enrolled in courses based on a non-traditional semester.
- Review both cohort-based and non-cohort based delivery systems.
- Determine processes, policies, and practices that hinder the implementation of flexible course delivery practices.
- Recommend an organizational structure that would provide the back-office support for flexible course models.
- Determine how delivery of courses via non-traditional course delivery would affect workload for faculty.
Findings:

1. East Carolina University already has courses that utilize a schedule that is different from the regular term calendar. These courses include:
   a. ACCT 6701, 6951, 6981
   b. BUSI 4200
   c. NURS 3330, 3331, 3370, 3371, 4210, 4211, 4511, 4902, 4903, 4907
   d. These courses vary in length from 3 weeks to 8 weeks during a regular fall or spring semester.

2. No current academic policy guidelines prohibit courses to be delivered for any prescribed length of term other than meeting the contact hours required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. The COC requires 750 minutes of contact per semester hour of credit.
   a. A seven week, f2f, three-credit course will require 1 hour and 15 minutes of instruction five days a week.
   b. A three week, f2f, three-credit course will require 2 hours and 30 minutes of instruction five days a week.

3. Flexible course schedules at peer institutions within the UNC system and among our national peers exist.

4. Most of the flexible course schedules are for courses offered online.

5. With regard to financial aid for federal loans and grants or state grants,
   a. Courses must have a structure such that classes start and end within a regular university term for example, have three 5-week consecutive sessions within a regular semester similar to the summer school offerings.
   b. The more structure, the easier to deal with financial aid matters.
   c. Title IV funds must be returned if 60% of the class is not attended whether by official or unofficial withdrawal. Determination of the date when withdrawal occurs must be per individual schedule.
   d. Students cannot receive Federal loan funds until starting to attend at least half-time (6 semester hours). Must be able to calculate enrollment (whether half-time, ¾ time, or full time) for Federal grants and for Student Clearing House.

6. Faculty workload issues will need to be addressed if flexible schedules would result in meeting term workloads by mid-semester or some other time other than the full weeks of the regular term. The expectation is that
most faculty workload issues will be handled through negotiation with the
department chairs as long as the course schedules do not run over the
normal semester time boundaries. Course loads must not run over the
standard semester timeline.

Recommendations:

1. Potential Student Groups
   a. Military (currently deployed, active duty on base,
      retired/discharged)
   b. Full-time workers (seeking new skill set, promotion, professional
devolution)
   c. Part-way home (re-enrolling, some college but no degree)
   d. Individuals in 2+2 programs at community college (seek continuous
      enrollment status and focus on feeder institutions such as Wake
      Tech, PCC, and CCs in neighboring counties)

2. Flexible Course Schedule Options
   a. Off-Model Option (use cohort approach whenever possible)
   b. Two 7 wk terms offered concurrently with traditional 15 wk term
   c. Four 4 wk terms offered concurrently with traditional 15 wk term
   d. Mini-semesters (3 weeks in length) offered concurrently with
      traditional 15 wk term
   e. Weekend classes during regular academic terms

3. Academic Course Offerings
   a. Offer courses online, hybrid, f2f or off-model
      i. Office of Continuing Studies will serve as the administrative
         structure for off-model courses
   b. Identify which Foundations Curriculum courses would be
      appropriate for instruction through flexible course scheduling.
   c. Consider which academic programs might be available to offer a
      flexible scheduling set of courses in a planned sequence.
   d. Look at offering weekend or other time period intensive programs
      for either military or working adult populations.
   e. Offer non-standard academic courses in a way that fully utilizes
      campus resources like faculty workload, classroom space,
      academic calendars, etc...

4. Establish a set of university standard operating procedures for application
   of non-standard courses.
   a. Academic Calendar: Maintain a schedule structure that can be
      managed campus wide. Define non-standard course dates that
      start and finish during the standard academic semester. Identify
add/drop deadlines and deadline to post grades. List these dates on the University Calendar in order to "standardize" them.

b. Registration: Non-standard courses that count toward Census headcounts must be registered before Official Census Day of the standard term. At present, students can register for the next course in sequence if they are registered for the prerequisite.

c. Grading: Investigate grading options/limitations in Banner. Grading in Banner is presently only available at the end of a standard academic term. This is partly due to SPOTS requirement and the Registrar's office cannot turn on grading until after the SPOTS have closed. The Registrar's office CAN TURN ON grading earlier in Banner if the non-standard courses are NOT subject to SPOTS. Review SPOTS requirements in accordance with policies/regulations/rules in the Faculty Manual. In addition, consider the submission of grades for veteran students who participate in GoArmyEd, MyCAA, Air Force and Navy portals. The Registrar's office must report grades to these sites within 30 days of the close of the standard term.

d. Classroom Space: Flag classroom spaces on campus that can be used for non-standard length courses. Obtain input from scheduling experts to determine how to best identify space. To fully report on actual classroom utilization, all non-standard courses will need to be registered by Census as that is the snapshot used to calculate actual classroom utilization.

5. No interruption of financial aid or VA benefits
   a. Students receiving GI Bill who enroll in non-standard courses will only receive the BAH (living stipend) for the time they are enrolled in classes. Student must maintain continuous enrollment to receive full BAH benefits.
   b. Eligibility for financial aid requires a student to be enrolled in a course that meets at minimum for 3 weeks.

6. Consider impact on faculty schedule and desire to participate in teaching non-standard courses
   a. Keep instructional time within the pre-defined term dates. Avoid any overlapping contracts.
   b. Identify faculty incentives – flexible teaching schedules shorter than traditional 15 wk term will offer extra time to conduct research/attend conferences to present

7. Take into account advising protocols and student support services
   a. Establish a system for evaluating part-way home transcripts.
b. Pinpoint resources needed to gear up for advising these students and ascertain the appropriate student services (career, registrar, admissions, tutoring, etc.).

8. Identify a point person from Academic Affairs (who will collaborate with the academic Deans and Department Chairs) to implement or “police” flexible course scheduling
   a. Monitor the volume and types of non-standard courses offered in a term. Specifically, keep an eye on the number of non-traditionally scheduled independent study courses offered each term.
   b. Seek guidance from the Registrar’s office as needed.
   c. Ensure flexible scheduling standard operating procedures are being followed by academic units.
   d. Clarify/solve questions and concerns regarding flexible scheduling options and requirements.
   e. Serve as the liaison from Academic Affairs who encourages the use of flexible scheduling.

9. It is recommended a working group be established to address the following actions:
   - Conduct a needs assessment of potential target groups and impact on faculty workload
   - Determine the types and schedules needed for courses onsite in local business and industries in order to determine needs of workers in regional businesses and industries.
   - Form partnership discussions with feeder community colleges around policies and processes for implementation
   - Identify/Recruit academic programs to offer flexible course schedules and flexible course degrees.
   - Determine resources available and resources needed to address the operational functions of offering flexible terms