Common Bell and Coordinated Scheduling Recommendations

In Fall 2018 the University launched an *Optimizing Learning Spaces and Student Success: Common Bell and Coordinated Scheduling* initiative. The initiative is focused on ensuring that our students can register for the courses they need, when they need them, and in high-quality spaces.

To move the conversation surrounding the development of a common bell schedule, course offering practices, and room scheduling procedures forward, a workgroup of 31 appointed representatives convened. The workgroup determined the first area of work was the development of a common bell course framework. Following nine months of development and consultation, a common bell course framework was adopted by the University in May 2019.

A second area of work launched in Fall 2019, with a focus on recommending actions for space management, room scheduling and course offerings in support of common bell and coordinated scheduling. The workgroup is now bringing forward recommendations for space management, room scheduling and course offerings for campus feedback and consultation.

To support feedback and consultation the following strategies and timeline are proposed:

- Information Sharing Strategies
  - Meet and Confer
  - Provost's Friday Newsletter
  - Department Chairs' and Program Directors' Breakfast
- Feedback Strategies
  - Meet and Confer
  - Budget, Planning and Assessment and Evaluation Sub-Meets
  - Department Chairs Session
  - Room/College Schedulers Sessions
- Timeline for Campus Feedback and Consultation
  - Meet and Confer information on Mar 5, 2020
  - Meet and Confer consultation on Apr 2, 2020
  - Meet and Confer consultation on May 7, 2020

Space Management Recommendations

The Space "Taskforce" was charged with advancing recommendations for adoption in the following areas:

- space classifications
- inventory of existing space
- parameters of use
- ongoing improvement of academic space

In what follows, recommendations are presented across four areas, beginning with the following recommendation, the implementation of which will support the recommendations in the four areas.

Communication, Consultation and Approval Improvement

Recommendation 1: Form a Space Review Team (SRT) to meet quarterly to coordinate space issues across campus. The membership of the SRT shall generally consist of Associate Vice President-level administrators or their designees from Academic Affairs (chair), Facilities, Registrar's Office, ITS and University Scheduling, as well as Faculty Association representation. The work of this group will largely be outlined in subsequent recommendations.

Rationale: Communicating across divisional lines is a critical component to the success of the processes outlined in the following recommendations. Regular meetings and communication will ensure adequate knowledge of room renovations, room capacity changes, software license changes, furniture and equipment upgrades, and other modifications that may affect classification (Recommendation 2), feature coding (Recommendation 3), prioritization (Recommendation 5) and/or the identification of needed room improvements (Recommendation 7).

Space Classifications

Recommendation 2: Classification of space will continue to be aligned with the *Postsecondary Education Facilities Inventory and Classification Manual (FICM)*. A streamlined version with classifications appropriate to general-use scheduled spaces is found in Appendix A.

Rationale: When developing a classification of instructional spaces, it is important to be mindful of the standards currently in place for collecting data and submitting the requisite reports to Minnesota State while accommodating sophisticated information needs and devising a relatively easy means by which to add, delete, or revise room descriptions. The Facilities Inventory and Classification Manual (FICM) is highly effective at classifying overall space purpose while features and parameters of use are best cataloged through the more flexible room codes of the Minnesota State Event Management System (EMS) (see Recommendation 3).

Recommendation 3: Room features and capabilities will be coded using both system and local predetermined code types within the EMS system. A preliminary list of recorded room features and a preliminary mapping of those features to system-level and local codes can be found in Appendix B.

Rationale: A recent Minnesota State System workgroup has developed a common set of codes/feature types to be used consistently throughout the system. Such features include technology capabilities (e.g. projectors, computers, etc.) as well as other attributes of importance to course needs and pedagogical approach (e.g. collaborative seating, fixed seating, etc.). Those features not covered by the system-level codes are able to be added and given *MNSU* specific designation within the EMS. In a current project with our IT Solutions staff and the system office, a sampling of which is shown in Appendix B, Minnesota State Mankato features are being mapped to system-level codes (highlighted in yellow) and local *MNSU* codes (highlighted in purple).

Inventory of Existing Space

Recommendation 4: Perform a space inventory during Summer 2020 to provide the initial classification, features and capabilities of each instructional space on campus as well as provide an initial designation for spaces as open, priority or exclusive use (see Recommendation 5). This process will begin with room schedulers (college/library schedulers) and be vetted through deans (in consultation with departments) for approval by the SRT.

Rationale: While it is the case that spaces on campus currently carry a classification in alignment with the FICM, many appropriate classifications of the FICM are perhaps underutilized and, according to many college schedulers, many rooms are miscategorized. Similarly, many listed features and capabilities of spaces are out-of-date.

Parameters of Use

Recommendation 5: Each instructional space will be given a designation for its parameters of use as **open, priority,** or **exclusive.** Such designation may be given for select times of day. The determination of the designation will be proposed by room schedulers and be vetted through deans (in consultation with departments) for approval by the SRT.

Rationale: Rooms with specialized supplies or equipment, site-based software licenses, hazardous materials or other safety concerns, or other reasonable considerations may need to be designated as exclusive use to a course, program, department or area. Other rationale may support a need for a room to have priority use but remain open to other units when the area in question is not in need of the space. Courses simply requiring certain features covered by the EMS coding should be encouraged to receive that accommodation through the scheduling process instead of the priority use designation of a particular room. Whenever possible, areas should be designated open use.

Recommendation 6: IT Solutions will perform audits on a 4-year basis on each classroom/lab with computers. Audits will be shared with the SRT to inform any changes to categorization, features and/or parameters of use. Additionally, unless granted an exception, open computer lab hours in such rooms shall avoid the 11 am - 2 pm (Monday through Friday) time period.

Rationale: Many computer labs/classrooms on campus have needed, and will continue to need, to be classified as priority or exclusive use, largely to allow for open lab times for students outside of class time. Limited site-licenses, high-end capabilities of the computers of that lab and other factors provide this justification. However, as capabilities improve for standard-level computers and with the increase of cloud-based or university-wide licenses for much of our software, such needs may adapt or be eliminated over time. For example, open lab times for software may be able to be accommodated in a general use computer lab (such as the ACC). As such, a reassessment of the computer classroom/lab and potential re-designation of priority/exclusive use is appropriate on a 4-year cycle.

Ongoing Improvements

Recommendation 7: The SRT will make recommendations for ongoing improvements. Further, the SRT will develop a procedure for proposing room improvements, room renovations, changes to classroom capacity, and functionality changes, as well as develop a funding procedure for such changes. The resulting *Upgrade Request Process* will be delivered to the Planning Sub-Meet, while the *Funding Procedure* will be delivered to the Budget Sub-Meet.

Rationale: Space improvements on campus are currently decided upon and funded by a variety of mechanisms, including department/college processes, the Institutional Equipment Process, the University Repair and Replacement Process, and other methods. In order to fulfill the goals of the Coordinated Scheduling and better align our teaching and research mission and student needs with our facilities planning and budgetary/fiduciary responsibilities, a coordinated approach to decision on our spaces is critical.

Room Scheduling Recommendations

The Room Scheduling Workgroup was charged with advancing recommendations for adoption in the following areas:

- parameters for student enrollment and space assignment, space type to instructional pedagogy and room change/holding allowances
- course-based student focused method for course room assignment

The workgroup is advancing four recommendations supporting room scheduling:

Parameters for Room Scheduling

Recommendation 8: Room schedulers continue to have a key role in the scheduling of courses, maintaining active knowledge of instructional spaces, and facilitating the assignment of classes to spaces.

- Room schedulers will work closely with department administrative assistants and department chairs to determine class space requirements and preferred features and capabilities.
- Room schedulers will maintain active knowledge and expertise in instructional space classifications, features and capabilities.
- Campus buildings will be identified as scheduling zones and room schedulers and department administrative assistants will work to select a preferred room zone for each class being assigned. Efforts will be made to assign a class to a room within the preferred zone whenever possible.

Rationale: A key strength of the current room scheduling process used today is the ability of room schedulers to attend to the specialized needs of classes in considering the features and capabilities of instructional spaces.

Recommendation 9: Course scheduling parameters will be consistently upheld across campus by room schedulers, department chairs, deans, Provost and Registrar's Office.

- Coordination of and adherence to scheduling deadlines will be required to enable effective and efficient room assignment.
- After a class is assigned to a room, extenuating circumstances will be required for a room change to occur.
- After the class schedule is published and viewable by students, extenuating circumstances will be required for changes to course meeting dates, times and rooms.
- New courses and additional course sections approved after scheduling deadlines have passed may be added to the schedule as needed. However, this should be done in a timeframe which allows students reasonable time for course planning and registration.

Rationale: As the room assignment method will span departments and colleges across campus, the assigning of rooms will be completed in a specified sequence (see Recommendation 11). Classes that are not available or properly identified with requirements, features and capabilities when the room scheduling process occurs will be disadvantaged in acquiring preferred instructional space.

Recommendation 10: The assignment of classes to instructional spaces will reasonably maximize the utilization of the space.

- Fill rates for each room will be identified and entered into EMS. For example, if a room has 60 seats and a minimum fill rate for the space is set at 75%, a class with a maximum enrollment of less than 45 seats would not be scheduled in the room.
- Room schedulers will work to assign classes to rooms based upon class space requirements and room features and capabilities. If an instructional space is not available at the desired time with the desired room features and capabilities, room schedulers will work closely with Department Chairs and the Registrar's Office to refine the request to allow for space to be assigned.

Rationale: As the amount of instructional space decreases on campus, there will be an increased need to optimize the utilization of space.

Course-Based Room Assignment Method

Recommendation 11: Classes will be assigned to space using the following sequence and criteria:

1. Exclusive Use Spaces will be scheduled with classes that require access to exclusive use spaces by room schedulers.
2. Priority Use Spaces will be scheduled with classes that require access to priority use spaces by room schedulers.
3. Open Use Spaces and Priority Use Spaces (following step 2) will be scheduled with classes in the following format:
    a. ADA Accessibility – if an instructor has a documented disability with Human Resources outlining specific space needs, classes will be assigned to spaces that meet the required needs.

b. Common Bell Course Framework – classes that are scheduled in alignment with the Common Bell Course Framework will be assigned into spaces prior to courses that do not conform to the Common Bell Course Framework.
c. Class Size – classes with maximum enrollments greater than 50 students will be assigned into spaces prior to courses with maximum enrollments less than 50 students.
d. Course Lengths – classes that meet a greater number of times during the week will be assigned before classes that meet fewer times. For example, a course meeting 5 days a week will be assigned before a course meeting 1 day a week.

Rationale: The process of room assignments flows from most restrictive requirements and least available spaces (e.g. large classrooms) to less restrictive, as well as prioritizing those that are least disruptive to other courses being scheduled.

Course Offering Recommendations

The Course Offering Workgroup was charged with advancing recommendations for the adoption of practices and tools to support efficient and effective determination of course offerings. Three recommendations are advanced by the Workgroup for consideration:

Recommendation 12: Develop, deploy and provide professional development for online tools to assist Deans, Department Chairs, Program Coordinators and faculty in identifying opportunities to make course offerings more efficient. For example, establish dynamic refreshable reports highlighting:

- Historic course enrollment and fill rates with daily updates
- Course sequencing/pre-requisite modeling for efficiency

Rationale: Currently an evaluation of course offerings is a manual process that requires Deans and Department Chairs to bring data together from multiple sources. This is not efficient or effective.

Recommendation 13: Review general education course offerings that are required across programs and identify opportunities to streamline/merge general education course offerings across programs. Attention should be given, in particular, to programs with high rates of within university student transfer.

Rationale: Reducing duplication within general education course offerings could reduce the number of courses that need to be offered. Streamlining courses around areas of high student transfer between programs would assist in student timely degree completion.

Recommendation 14: Pursue implementation of the Minnesota State Grad Planner tool.

Rationale: A grad planner tool is of benefit to both the University and students. For students the tool supports degree planning and timely degree completion. For the University it provides insight into future course demand.

Implementation Recommendations

Space Management Implementation

1) March/April – ITS works with system office on finalization of feature codes
2) Spring 2020 - Formation of SRT
3) May/June 2020 – Room Schedulers propose initial categorization and features (using new codes)
4) June/July 2020 – Deans and SRT finalize categorizations and features
5) July-September 2020 – University Scheduling enters codes in EMS
6) September 2020 – Room Schedulers and Deans propose parameters of usage
7) October 2020 – SRT makes final determination on parameters of usage of current inventory of rooms

Room Scheduling Implementation

1) June/July 2020 – Training with department administrative assistants and room schedulers on room classification, features and capability coding in EMS
2) November 2020 – Class schedule in ISRS rolls forward from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021 for editing
3) November-December 2020 – Department administrative assistants and room schedulers complete class set-ups.
4) February 2021 – Run the optimization scenarios in the colleges in August 2020 to allow ample time to ensure their accuracy and allow for other rooms to be assigned as needed.
5) March 2021 – Publish Fall 2021 class schedule