

Memorandum

To: FAS Faculty
From: Jay M. Harris, Dean of Undergraduate Education
Re: Background for Scheduling Presentation

I am offering this memo to provide some background to the PowerPoint presentation on scheduling that I will present at the upcoming Faculty Meeting, which summarizes the work of the Scheduling Task Force, jointly chaired by me and Peggy Newell, Deputy Provost. Our goals in suggesting changes to our current scheduling practices are to emphasize the centrality of academics in Harvard College, to reduce scheduling conflicts as much as we can, to allow time for interactive pedagogy, and to allow all students to arrive and depart their classes—whether in Cambridge or in Allston—without missing instructional time. While the presentation will note what we consider the drivers of change, some of you may wish for more background on each of the issues noted in that presentation. It is my hope that this brief memo will help provide that for you.

Compression of the Instructional Day

On April 14, 1891 the FAS faculty voted “That the Secretary be directed to send a statement to each member of the Faculty regarding the plans of Professors Chaplin and Macvane asking each to express his choice between them; also that a final vote be taken at 5 p.m. on Tuesday next.” The recorded text of the motion went on to explain each plan, as follows: “Professor Macvane’s plan: 8:30-12:30 2-4 (sic) in open months, 9-1 1:30-4:30 in close months, Prayers at 8:15 in the first instance and at present in the second. Professor Chaplin’s plan: new groups come between 1 and 2 p.m.”

The following week, April 21, 1891, the Faculty voted, “Prayer 8:40-9 a.m., Lectures 9-1 p.m. and from 1:30-4:30 p.m. The hour from 1:30-2:30 p.m. on Saturday was included in the new plan, thus providing for two complete groups.”

Some of this remains cryptic, but it appears that our predecessors were debating when to begin and end the instructional day. Clearly there was a constituency in favor of beginning at 8:30, as a couple of months earlier the Faculty voted “At the request of the Committee on the Tabular View, that inquiry be made of the Preachers to the University whether the objections urged by them in 1889 against beginning College recitation at 8:30am seem to them as weighty now as they seemed then.” Despite Professor (Silas) Macvane’s efforts to begin at 8:30, the Faculty decided to continue to begin lectures at 9. The other concern, it seems, was to extend instruction more fully into the afternoon. Recall that, for the previous decade or so, many members of the Harvard faculty would teach (male) Harvard College students in the morning, spending the afternoons offering instruction at Radcliffe, then located on Appian Way. The result of these votes was to establish the

scheduling practices for lecture courses¹ that largely live on to this day. Such courses would meet for one hour/day, meeting on the hour in the morning, on the half-hour in the afternoon, three days/week (MWF, and TRS).

To be sure, there were some adjustments through time. On April 6, 1915 the faculty voted to eliminate the “suspension” of lectures between “1 o’clock and half-past one,” so that now all lecture courses began on the hour throughout the day; further adjustments to afternoon hours were made in 1923. Finally, in 1943, the Faculty voted “That during the war when emergency conditions dictate, and with the approval of the Dean of the Faculty in each case, classes may be scheduled at 8 A.M.”

As early as 1910, the FAS legislative record indicates that the Faculty struggled with the clustering of courses in the morning, specifically noting excessive use of the 10 and 11 o’clock hours. In that year, Prof. Macvane moved “that it was the sense of the Faculty that efforts be made to secure a more equal distribution of courses between morning and afternoon groups.” The minutes note that the motion carried. In 1916 the Faculty voted “That a committee be appointed to consider the possibility of a profitable rearrangement of the hours of College courses.” It is not clear what, if anything, that committee accomplished. The following year the Faculty voted “That Divisions and Departments be requested to seek a method of reducing the number of exercises held at 10 and 11 A.M.” That did not seem to work, as in 1922 the Faculty approved a motion “that the matter of the crowded condition of the lecture rooms, particularly in the morning hours, be referred to the Committee on Instruction to consider whether some relief could not be afforded by requiring instructors to hold more courses in the afternoon hours.” The legislative record contains no further mention of efforts to de-compress the day. This is understandable prior to 1943, as there were strong incentives for Harvard faculty to teach in the morning—namely, the opportunity to teach at Radcliffe for extra compensation in the afternoon.

By agreement between the leadership of the two institutions, beginning in 1943, while separate instruction continued for freshmen, Harvard College courses were open to men and upper-class women alike. Originally seen as a war-time measure, the agreement became permanent in 1947 (with increased compensation for the faculty), because, as President Conant noted, “...the professors like this too much.”² A few years later the last separate first-year courses also disappeared. Radcliffe College no longer offered separate instruction. This, however, did not lead to any changes in the College’s scheduling practices, not then, and not in the decades

¹ Throughout this document I use “lecture course” to mean any course that meets more than once a week, generally for a total of three academic hours, regardless of the actual teaching style.

² See Morton Keller and Phyllis Keller, *Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America’s University* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 55.

since,³ such that the compression of the instructional day has continued apace, and today, more than 80% of all lecture courses in the College are offered between the hours of 10 and 2.

As far as the afternoon goes, although the legislative record is silent on such matters, the Handbook notes that no classes longer than 60 minutes may meet before 1PM on Mondays and Wednesdays, and none longer than 90 minutes may meet before 1 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. There are, however, no other rules regarding the use of the afternoon, such that today, after 1PM we have classes of 60, 90, 120, 150, 180 minutes, starting at whatever time the instructor wishes (on the hour or half-hour), making it impossible to make optimal use of classrooms, and creating many more conflicts than is necessary.

Compression of the Instructional Week

Over the decades, Saturday instruction became less and less popular, even as, unlike the Business and Law Schools, the FAS never voted to end the practice. By the 1950s, most Harvard College lecture courses met on MWF and TR, with the last Saturday classes occurring at some time in the early 70s. As a result, starting in the 1950s, 90-minute classes were permitted on TR mornings to make up for the instructional time lost as Saturday classes disappeared. At the same time, the 60-minute classes in place since at least the 1890s remained, such that we now have overlapping 60- and 90-minute periods, greatly increasing the opportunity costs of choosing a class on TR mornings. In addition, there was no mechanism for a third hour for those TR classes that met for 60 minutes, considerably reducing instructional time in many courses. Inevitably, TR became quite popular for 60-minute classes, and this, perhaps, may be one factor in the increasing loss of F for courses formally scheduled for MWF. Either the Friday has disappeared entirely, or is bracketed, meaning will be used sparingly, or as a devoted section time. We thus find ourselves increasingly offering primary instruction on four days a week, where once there were six days of primary instruction, even as we continue to offer that instruction in a limited set of hours.

Pass Times

According the *FAS Information for Faculty* “[c]lasses ordinarily begin five minutes after the announced meeting time, e.g., at 9:05 or 11:35.” This interval was once all that was needed to get from one class to another. After all, most classes met in the Sever Quad or the Old Yard. But it has been many decades since five minutes of pass time has been adequate, leading to the so-called “seven minute rule,” that is not actually a rule. Increasingly, seven minutes is not adequate pass time either, as the

³ With one exception: 90 minute classes on TTH mornings were introduced in the 1950s, apparently to compensate for the dwindling of Saturday classes. See next section.

campus footprint has increased many times over in the last century. Many instructors report that they cannot start class with everyone there until 10 minutes or more past the announced start time. Some report students needing to leave early. Students report that the very existence of what they call “Harvard time” detracts from the sense of seriousness surrounding academics. Anecdotes aside, with a much larger campus it is simply unfeasible to continue with either the official five minutes of pass time or the unofficial seven minutes of pass time. When one adds the expansion of the FAS into Allston, the need for re-thinking pass times becomes indisputably necessary.

Looking to the Future

The proposal to be presented allows for de-compression of the instructional day and for adequate pass time between classes both within Cambridge and between Cambridge and Allston. The pass time within Cambridge will be 15 minutes, which should allow for all students to be in the classroom from the beginning of the class until the end. In addition, there will be no confusion as to when classes begin, as they will begin and end at the announced times (i.e., a class listed as 10:30-11:45 will actually begin at the 10:30 and end at 11:45). Pass time between Cambridge and Allston is more complicated; for now (pending better transportation possibilities), we propose a schedule that will have 60 minutes of pass time in each direction (all of this will become clear in the presentation). As the capacity of the Allston buildings, and their occupants, becomes clearer, we will need to consider whether it is best to block off certain time periods for the majority of lecture courses that will meet there, in order to limit the need for students to cross over more than once in a day, or whether it makes sense to schedule lecture courses throughout the day. The proposal we present allows for the latter possibility, even as that can be re-thought if needed.

The key to making the proposal work, though, is a proper regulatory regime that does away with “non-compliant times” and other endearing and unique features of “Harvard time.” Such a regime is presented in items 10 and 11 of the proposed legislation. It is only through such a regulatory regime that we will succeed in our goals of de-compressing the instructional day and week, and restoring academics as the central focus of our students’ experience of time. Indeed, it is only through such a regime that, a century after the Faculty expressed this aspiration, we might finally achieve “profitable rearrangement of the hours of College courses.”