New Ways to Teach and Learn

Today's college students, or "millennials," as they are sometimes called, embrace technology and often favor nontraditional learning environments. A 2006 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* summarizes this demographic cluster as liking group work, experiential learning, and flexible study contexts. It was suggested that students engage in as much learning outside of the classroom as in it – if not more.[1] Not adapting to this current cohort of students and failing to incorporate new vehicles for instruction would therefore be a serious mistake. Not only would we be failing to reach many of our students in ways that they can learn most successfully, we would also be wasting the very limited resources the college has available. Pedagogy and fiscal responsibility can come together in a very real sense: that which represents best learning practice could also make available considerable amounts of space on campus. Moving to a new schedule based on four-credit courses meeting for three scheduled hours would both accommodate variability in teaching and learning *and* reduce the space congestion on campus. In addition, if faculty members opt to shift their students' learning experiences outside of class, they would reclaim up to three hours per week that could be redirected to additional areas of professional development.

The accompanying course schedule is a draft of one such way to lay out modules in accordance with this change. In this plan, each course would meet for three hours each week, unless the instructor decided that s/he wanted to retain the fourth meeting hour, in which case an hour would be made available on Wednesday for this purpose. Otherwise, faculty would articulate how students would utilize the fourth, out-of-class hour, thus preserving the four-credit system. The out-of-class hour is justified by the fact that so much of education, and so much of each course, occurs beyond the classroom itself. For instance, faculty members are now able to communicate with students through a number of different media that were not available when the college was founded, including on-line chat rooms and debate sites, email, podcasts, webcasts, and other such media. Similarly, students frequently engage in service learning to enhance their education. Furthermore, many faculty presently teach hybrid classes that take students beyond the classroom during their four-hour weekly experience. So to organize learning strictly around the time that students are in their classroom seats, as if these other things were not occurring, does not correspond to Stockton reality.

A. Advantages of Moving to the Proposed Schedule

In addition to the greater simplicity of this schedule, with starting and finishing times occurring either on the hour or the half-hour, the advantages of such a model would be:

1. Flexibility:

   a. Modules may be combined to make it possible to hold 3-hour seminars, and 3-hour labs and studios sessions in the sciences and arts.

b. On any evening graduate courses could be held in 3-hour classes that begin at either 5:30 or at 7:00, as opposed to only the 6-9 module in the current schedule.

c. All faculty would have the opportunity to teach on a two-day schedule, with optional fourth-hour classes, precepting, engagement projects, and other meetings occurring on Wednesdays. This would break down the feeling that we have a campus divided between those with the MWF schedule and those coming in on TR.

d. Non-class meeting times would be more flexible (both before lunch and in late-afternoon) on Wednesday.

e. There is a designated Wednesday lunch hour for brown bag series. It is hoped that these will be expanded to include occasional lunch-time PAC performances.

f. The alternate schedule would include an additional evening module, thus expanding evening offerings from two to three. This would afford daytime working students more options for evening classes.

g. The Saturday modules would begin later and end earlier.

2. Pedagogy and Engagement:

As noted, three-hour classes would better fit the direction of pedagogy in the 21st century. The amount of time devoted to learning and integrating the material into the course would not decrease. Supplementary materials, such as documentaries and movies could be shifted outside of class time, and such materials can be made available over the internet through web-streaming. In fact, this would be similar to what is evidenced in our widely-accepted hybrid format. We could shift class time to more dynamic pedagogical methods more in tune with the mindset of the students we are now teaching – students who do much of their learning from the web and other technologies, and who can easily access materials provided by delivery systems such as WebCT and other media.

In addition to the use of technology, there will also be new ways of using "the fourth hour" that faculty will be able to develop. Here are some examples of the kinds of options that would become available for a creative "fourth hour" to reinforce learning and foster engagement:

- Web discussion. Students take turns defining a theme for the week. Students participate in the discussion and journal their reaction to it. Alternatively, the faculty member might suggest a discussion theme and, if desired, even participate in the discussion.
- Application in current culture. Students seek weekly or bi-weekly examples of how the course material is addressed in current culture (movie, media presentation, theater attendance, etc.). They view/read the material, discuss in small groups and submit reactions. This option would also encourage attendance at PAC events.
- "If I were the instructor…" Students meet and discuss how they would help others learn, critically think about, and integrate the material.

- <u>Peer teaching/TA model</u>. An advanced student receives independent study credit for leading small group discussions of the material outside of class.
- <u>Informal meeting with the professor</u>. Students could discuss issues with the professor outside of class over coffee, etc.
- <u>Class trips</u>. Faculty would be encouraged to take trips that relate to and enhance course material.
- <u>Service learning</u>. This would provide an opportunity to expand our offerings in this area.
- <u>Webstreamed movies and documentaries</u>. Movies and documentaries could be assigned (which would normally be seen during class time) and response papers could be written – or web discussion could be framed around them.
- <u>Webstreamed PowerPoints</u>. Additional lectures and short instructional pieces could be made available on webstreamed PowerPoints. Lectures based around the writing of formulas and providing mathematical solutions and proofs could be done visually via Chalkboard (which would enable students to go back over them repeatedly).
- <u>Field trips or field research</u>. Students are assigned to observe the application of their course learning at relevant sites, or to collect samples for analysis and discussion.
- <u>Case studies</u>. Students identify or develop case studies that illustrate issues raised in the course and analyze these practical situations in relation to the theoretical content of the course.
- <u>Group meetings</u>. Groups could meet on projects to prepare class presentations.
- <u>Role playing</u>. Students in courses that involve interpersonal communications, i.e., management, psychology, sociology, etc., meet in pairs or teams to role play as appropriate. For example, a business course in management skills might encourage students to role play as interviewer and interviewee.

Besides these ideas (and the many others that might be developed), it would also be possible for a collective approach to be taken to the fourth hour. There could be coordinated or articulated courses that meet separately for three hours per week, and then come together for a community hour. Or perhaps a portion of the time might be allocated to the program to work with majors collectively (e.g., through clubs and reading groups), or even to divisions (e.g., to increase attendance at divisional events, or to provide time for testing). Just as with ULTRA, points could be allocated to ensure that students meet such program or division requirements (should the faculty in the programs and divisions pursue this option).

It should be noted that TCNJ, which has just instituted an approach to teaching similar to the one proposed here, attributes a significant amount of its improvement in the engagement of its student body (as reflected in its NSSE results and self-devised tests) to this new approach. By building a module system clearly articulated around a day of engagement, and reframing courses so that they accentuate this (in their in-class and non-class fourth-hour experience) Stockton could have a similar effect on our students' sense of engagement.

3. Space and Finance:

The old system has 14 modules during the week; this alternate model has 20. This represents a more than 40% increase in number of modules. Therefore, this plan could relieve current areas of congestion and better accommodate the goal of controlled enrollment growth over the years.

4. Workload:

Stockton faculty members are expected to publish and produce in order to secure tenure and promotion. The current 12-hour teaching load is heavier than at other colleges where the research expectations are comparable to Stockton's. Reducing the classroom time from 12 hours per week to 9 would be more realistic for the faculty and might improve our standing in relation to other colleges. The TCH load itself would not be decreased (as the fourth hour would be deployed outside the classroom), but the increased flexibility could ease pressure on faculty members' schedules and free up time for other forms of student contact and work related to additional areas of professional development. The three-hour schedule would also make us more attractive to the best candidates applying for positions at the college, and would help us recruit adjuncts who may be able to fit three structured hours into their schedules better than four.

B. Assessment and Accountability

In order to build accountability and assessment into this plan for a transformation of the schedule, certain mechanisms would need to be put in place.

1. Transparency and Assessment of Student Learning:

Each instructor would need to place in her/his syllabus a description of how the fourth hour would be incorporated into the semester and how this work would be evaluated. For example, if the faculty member planned to webstream documentaries, the expectation is that the students would be responding in some form of review or response paper as part of their grades. If, instead, work in the fourth hour encompassed input on WebCT, this would be mentioned in the syllabus and its incorporation into the grading system would be made clear. In transferring from 4-hour meetings per week to 3-hour meetings we would only need to ensure that the fourth hour is accounted for in the syllabus (as all aspects of the course ought to be) for it to be possible to assess whether or not the fourth hour has been used by both professors and students to enhance the learning experience.

As Fiddler, Marienau, and Whitaker (2006) suggest, "Experience is an input; learning is an outcome; credit is for learning."[2] Colleges, therefore, should not be endeavoring to build their curricula and schedules around a single form of educational experience, the period of time in which a student is seated in the classroom. With this in mind, at Stockton we need to give students their four credits for each course when they have completed the discrete requirements deemed necessary by the different kinds of disciplines in which they are engaged. We need to be encouraging more

learning beyond the confines of the classroom itself, crediting students for such learning, and assessing the learning outcomes.

While some classes would require more structured classroom time along with lab or studio time, others might not. Instructors who teach courses in the latter category would need to articulate their expectations for out-of-class learning. Any perceived difference between in-class and out-of-class hours should disappear if all faculty members clearly specify course goals, learning outcomes, and how students will be evaluated for their work.

2. Accountability:

There will need to be some assurance that all faculty members who include the fourth credit out-of-classroom experience, build it into their syllabi. This can occur within programs, at divisional levels, or in a college-wide curriculum committee if faculty prefer. Programs would need to discuss the way that their courses are meeting this requirement, and in order to ensure that each faculty member explains how this "fourth" hour will be used, there could be divisional, or committee, oversight.

Notes:

[1] "The Campus of the Future," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 21, 2006.
[2] Morry Fiddler, Catherine Marienau, and Urban Whitaker, *Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures* (Chicago: Kendall/Hunt, 2006), p. 15.