Background

The University scheduling day currently runs from 08:30-17:30 and 19:00-22:00, Monday to Friday. Senate has previously approved the 17:30-19:00 time slot as “University Time”, a period normally free of all regular class meetings, labs, and seminars. However, due to pressures on classroom inventory in the 200+ seat range on the Guelph campus, the University has not been readily able to mount large classes in daytime slots, and seeks to review current practice. The problem is not extreme: of the over 2000 lecture sections scheduled in the past academic year, roughly 1% could not be accommodated in the regular daytime or evening slots.

Releasing the 17:30-19:00 time slot for regular class scheduling is considered an option that would relieve some of the pressure on the current inventory of classroom space, and use the University’s current physical estate more effectively. Thus in March 2012, the Board of Undergraduate Studies was asked by the AVP (Academic) to convene a working group to review the potential implications of releasing the 17:30-19:00 pm time slot from restricted course scheduling.

The working group was convened in April 2012 with a membership including: Prof. Ann Wilson, AD(A) COA; Brenda Whiteside, AVP (Student Affairs); Brian Pettigrew, AVP Institutional Planning and Registrar; Deaglan McManus, CSA-Academic Commissioner; Naythrah Thevathasan, BSc Student Senator; and Prof. Kerry Godfrey, Chair of BUGS and Chair of the Working Group, with Patricia Tersigni, Coordinator of Undergraduate Curriculum as a resource to the working group.

Consultation Process

The working group first met in late May 2012 to plan the consultation exercise with stakeholder groups across the University and to define the core questions for consideration. In seeking to avoid possible speculative responses, the working Group decided to focus on one core question. Each stakeholder group was asked and encouraged to focus their response, and to identify what they believed would be the implications for them or their direct constituents of having classes regularly scheduled in the 17:30-19:00 time slot.

Throughout the summer and fall of 2012, stakeholder consultations were held with: Athletics; Student Housing Services; Hospitality Services; Student Life, Physical Resources; the Library; the Council of Chairs, the CSA (student governance, clubs and associations via survey); the Council of Associate Deans Academic; Scheduling (Registrar’s Office); and with faculty currently teaching in the specified time slot. The working group appreciates the candour of the stakeholders with whom it consulted.

What emerged in the course of the consultations were two broad perspectives, each of which is valid: the University of Guelph has a long tradition of student engagement which is a key aspect of its identity. Having the 17:30 - 19:00 slot free from formally scheduled classes has been considered important in supporting student engagement by providing a timeframe during which regular and various co-curricular activities can take place. Concomitantly, the limited inventory of large classroom space on campus has made it difficult to schedule large classes, and deliver some courses in the manner desired: restricting potential opportunities where there is little prospect of new large classrooms being built in the foreseeable future.
Recommendations

The Working Group recognises there are competing pressures on both time and space for many activities on campus, but equally believes the principle of ‘University Time’ is very important to the culture of learning which exists at Guelph. With these key points in mind the Working Group makes the following recommendations that seek to strike a balance between these competing demands on form and function:

1. 'University Time' should continue as a period which shall normally be free of all regular class meetings, labs, and seminars.

2. When the use of the 17:30 -19:00 timeslot is necessary due to space constraints, it should be used prudently to schedule large courses based on the following guidelines:

   - Multi-section courses have the first priority for scheduling in the 17:30 - 19:00 time slot, wherein at least one section of the course will also be scheduled outside 17:30 - 19:00 slot, if possible. This proposal includes all multi-sectioned courses, regardless of the level of the offering;

   - Where there is a need to schedule courses during the 17:30 -19:00 time slot, elective courses not mandatory for the completion of a program should be scheduled in the 17:30 – 19:00 timeslot when possible.

Conclusion

The Working Group believes that with the above considerations, the University will be able to significantly uphold the principle of the 17:30-19:00 timeslot as ‘University Time’, while addressing the continued infrastructure constraints of a limited classroom inventory with a seating capacity of 200 or more.