

Responding to Criticism Against the 3 Hour Schedule

- 1. It flies in the face of Stockton tradition. At Stockton we believe that our 4-hour credit units allow us to have greater face-to-face time with students.*

Stockton tradition is not clear on this point at all. While we do have four-hour classes, a great premium was also placed upon Independent Studies, which have no class time, do not guarantee any amount of actual face-to-face time and provide, at best, an amount of face-to-face interaction between faculty and students that is a small fraction of three hours per week. Moreover, our four-credit system was founded more in workload issues of giving the faculty 3-3 teaching load, rather than on pedagogical grounds.

There is another Stockton tradition that points in a different direction entirely and is more worthy of continuance – the tradition of emphasizing learning rather than slavish adherence to rules.

- 2. It contravenes the system based on Carnegie Minutes.*

Most colleges do not stick to the Carnegie Minutes and almost no one adheres to them (in terms of scheduling) as rigidly or obsessively as Stockton. While we conform in terms of our schedule to between 98-100 percent of the prescribed amount other colleges are down in the 80s and TCNJ is at about 75 percent. Private colleges, which generally lead the way in pioneering new and more effective approaches to learning, are not concerned about Carnegie minutes.

But we don't really believe in them either, except in the way we schedule. We have a plethora of Independent Studies, distance courses, and Hybrid classes, all of which contravene the Carnegie system.

Further, the Carnegie Minute is out-dated and should have long ago been consigned to the pedagogical dustbin. It is based upon a need in education to determine learning output based on an assumption that the only way that this could be determined was in the high school fashion of looking at the number of minutes a student spends in the classroom. Clearly our notions of assessment are very different today, and we no longer assume that because someone is sitting in a classroom he or she is learning something. Carnegie minutes were pedagogically unsound even when they were created, founded in a numbers-crunching bureaucratic sensibility; now, in an age of on-line learning and where there is a deeper appreciation for the way our students learn, they are deeply problematic. If the Carnegie Minute is truly an essential element of Stockton's academic program, then that program is quite old-fashioned.

- 3. The new schedule would allow those people who are shirking their responsibilities now, using distance courses as a way of not really participating in college life, to get away with even more. And faculty who let out their classes early would just let them out even earlier.*

While it is clear that poor professional commitment and bad teaching are part of any educational landscape, it is sometimes the case that this judgment about colleagues is prompted by distrust with regard different pedagogical approaches; while these may differ from our own they may nonetheless be founded on sound pedagogical principles. For example, if a faculty member lets her or his class out early, another faculty person may believe that she or he is shirking their responsibilities to the students. But, if it is counterproductive to keep students in the classroom for the full four hours -- and many may believe that it would be better to substitute other things for some of this class time -- then keeping the class going makes no sense. If the main points have been learned by the three hour mark, a fourth hour may at best be tedious and at worst it undermines the learning that has occurred.

Where such shirking does exist, however, it will not be exacerbated by the new module system. In fact, the result will more likely be positive. Since the notion of the fourth-hour experience beyond the classroom will need to be articulated in the professor's syllabus, it is actually more likely to be the case that the so-called "shirkers," where they exist, will be held more accountable for their teaching methods. In short, while the suggested module system cannot contribute to a problem that already exists and make it any worse, it can significantly reinforce faculty innovation and best learning practices.

- 4. We will be making ourselves less competitive with those elite schools that we would like to be compared with.*

The colleges to which we would like to be compared do not keep their students chained to classroom desks. Indeed they keep their students in the classroom about one quarter less time than we do. Penn has 32-36 courses to graduate – these are 3-hour courses (except for laboratory, studio and introductory language courses); Bryn Mawr, Haverford, Swarthmore, have 32 courses and they are between 2.5 and 3 hours. Villanova and Colgate both have 32 courses (all three hours). Some schools in the CUNY system have four-hour modules; but they generally are more flexible in their usage of them and frequently only require 120 credits. Yale requires 36 three-hour courses over four years – i.e., the equivalent of 108 credits.

When our Philosophy and History Programs were being assessed by professors from Villanova and Swarthmore respectively, the consultants were startled to learn that our students were in class as much as they were, and one of them professed that they would be better served reading, instead of being in the class for that time.

Are we really so scintillating, and are the faculty members at all these other places so uncommitted to teaching, that we are doing it right and they are doing it wrong? If so,

shouldn't we be able to convince them of the error of their ways because of our great application pools and enrollments in comparison to them, and shouldn't we be able to get them to follow our model, with their attempts to get faculty to increase classroom time? No, the fact is that we are behind other colleges in still remaining tied to high-school pedagogical notions that assume our students are only capable of learning in the classroom with the professor providing step-by-step guidance for their thinking.

5. *Our students are really not up for this system and the reason we keep them in the class for four hours each week is because they aren't prepared as well as students who go to elite colleges.*

This argument is diametrically the opposite of the previous one. It suggests we should not be trying to compete with elite colleges and should not claim we are a very competitive college with good students; we should rather claim that we are the equivalent of a junior or community college, and our students need to be treated accordingly.

This argument, in fact, is the departure from Stockton tradition – that part of the tradition that suggested that Independent Study is appropriate – which is based in the assumption that our students, while they may not be as well heeled and prepared as some students, are nonetheless capable of exactly the same things that students are capable of elsewhere. And we have seen this time and again, in programs where they put greater emphasis on independent learning, great things are accomplished. We believe we expect great things and we repeat this rhetorically, but our module system is founded on the assumption that our students are not capable of working independently and need to be coddled all the way to their degrees.

6. *It will diminish student engagement. We would no longer see our students as they would still just come to class and leave, but they would be here even less than they are now.*

The colleges that have less classroom time seem to do better in the engagement scores. Our students are in class all the time that they are on campus; they rush from one class to the next, and they leave. There is no time for them to engage in other things – they need to get to their jobs. But if the time is converted to specific engagement purposes outside of the classroom, then they will cloak themselves more completely in the fabric of our academic programs and gain a fuller appreciation of approaches to learning that will engage them for the rest of their lives. Moreover, as the residential part of the college grows, creating more non-class time for those on the campus will really provide stronger involvement in the events that we create – brown-bag lunches, living-learning communities, cultural events and more.

If we give the students time to view the materials and explore different kinds of narratives beyond the classroom, then this will enrich the classroom experience. When we suggest (or require) them to attend events on campus, they will have the time to do so, and will not do so reluctantly. These things improve our classes significantly and give

the students the correct impression that we and they are engaged in our community. TCNJ, for example, when it created a system similar to the one we are contemplating actually recorded increased engagement among their students.

7. *In the shorter class times, I will no longer be able to show any movies or documentaries.*

These sources, which can be very important for bringing different voices and perspectives into the classroom, really represent the hybrid character of current teaching. Any new system needs to ensure that students get access to these sources. However, it is wasteful of classroom time to use it for such purposes. There are numerous advantages to be gained from having such video sources web-streamed to the students so that they can view the material prior to the class. They can rewind and repeat sections that they didn't understand; they can view it when it best fits their schedule, and when they are most alert; they can write responses to the movies outside of the classroom on Blackboard; and they can discuss them as well. Instead of showing the whole movie or documentary a professor may want to just pull up a section to discuss, but having the lights out for long periods of time would be unnecessary.

Almost all professors use movies and documentaries in their classes; if these are taken out of the classroom in conjunction with the reduction of the module time, then face-to-face interaction – instruction through lecturing and discussion – is not markedly reduced. And using Blackboard to discuss these things enables more of the class to engage in the discussion than is sometimes the case with a discussion immediately following a viewing of the video piece.

8. *I would no longer be able to set up my schedule so that there is a Monday and Wednesday class and the students can be sent to undertake research on the Friday, for example.*

This is not necessarily true, since learning time outside of the classroom will be built into each course. Furthermore, this very legitimate approach to pedagogy is a very wasteful use of the college resources when it is scheduled during classroom time, since it takes a classroom out of service when it might very well be utilized for a classroom activity of another course.

The same can be said of hybrid classes. If the schedule is a good one, then our hybrid classes should provide savings for us, by opening up space. But what occurs in our curriculum is that the hybrid class is plugged into a module and that module cannot be used for that classroom even when the classroom is not being used. What the 3-hour module system does is recognize the essential hybridity of all classes in the educational landscape, and it schedules accordingly.

9. *If I needed the extra hour of face to face time, I would suffer, and so would my students.*

If we had a schedule based upon 3 hours instead of four, there would be so much more space available (up to 40 percent) and so much more flexibility, that if a faculty member or those in a particular discipline needed more class time for their students they could be provided with it. TCNJ schedules around 25 percent of its classes with the fourth hour in-class. We could easily do the same.

10. *If we have three-hour modules instead of four, then I will not be able to cover as much material during the semester.*

There are two responses to this criticism. The first is to say that it isn't entirely true – that we will be reorganizing how we deliver the course, not reducing its content. But, as noted previously, if there is a course where a specific amount of material needs to be covered – perhaps a lower-level course on which upper-level courses depend (perhaps, for the sake of an example, a math course), then the fourth hour would still be available.

The other response, though, focuses on questions of pedagogical approaches. At colleges, we want to train people to be critical thinkers and life-long learners. We are not specifically or predominantly in the delivery business of imparting information and covering specific topics. Almost any course can provide more and cover more, but would this achieve the goal we have in mind of developing these critical thinkers and life-long learners? If we leave our students wanting more, if we can make them excited about what they are studying, and can give them the tools to pursue these things beyond the classroom, then we are more likely to approach that goal than we will if we keep them in their chairs until all the energy has escaped from the room.

11. *This is just an administration ploy to get more modules and so make more money from classroom usage, while shortchanging the students.*

Clearly, from the foregoing, it is evident that this approach to teaching and learning is designed to fit the way “Millennial students” learn, so this criticism is invalid. It is also not administration driven. It comes from the faculty and it is kept going by many faculty asking about when such a plan can go into effect. But, even if it were designed to simply to create modules and so allow us to use our space more economically and wisely, the implications would be beneficial for the students. Creating more modules would mean that we would have space for more offices for faculty, so we could improve the faculty-student ratio by hiring more faculty (tenure-track, not adjuncts); it would give us space for a Hughes Center, for reading rooms for Centers and program seminar rooms, for language labs, and on and on, while allowing us to teach more classes. All these things could be achieved, without waiting for the new buildings to come on line.

12. This is just an effort of some faculty to free up their time so that they can undertake more research. We are not a Research 1 university, so we shouldn't try to act like one.

As has been suggested throughout the preceding points, the new module system will not free faculty members from teaching to give them more time to publish – it would just give them flexibility and freedom to organize our schedules better (we can teach three-hour seminars at the upper level, for example). It will provide a schedule that no longer requires us to reconfigure the same course for two different module lengths. It will also mean that we can find time to meet as groups, to have times when we aren't all teaching, so that all faculty and students will be able to go to papers being presented, and on and on.

13. If it ain't broke, why fix it? The current module system has served us well, and we are used to it. Why bother with the hassle of changing it?

The current system is broke and it desperately needs fixing. It has been for a while, and even the new building and the swimming pool renovations coming on line will not fix it. We do not have enough classrooms and we do not have enough offices for our faculty. The reality is, however, that we have always had enough space we just have never used it efficiently – or as efficiently as other colleges. With a 3-hour schedule we would have enough classroom space available NOW, so that we could even convert some classrooms to create offices for those faculty who now share.

And with a 3-hour schedule in place, we could move forward planning for new kinds of space that would help engagement, rather than trying simply to build more classrooms and offices.

Moreover, the change would complement shifts that are already occurring; it would only accelerate and not impede them (as the present system does).