

Academic Scheduling Committee

Discussion paper (revised)¹

prepared for

Chairs' Assembly

August 22, 2011

Background

The Mount Royal Faculty Association (MRFA) filed a policy grievance against POL 516-1 *Academic Scheduling* on December 23, 2010. The Provost & Vice-President, Academic mandated the Academic Scheduling Committee (ASC) with an augmented charter as a means of exploring a resolution to this situation. The committee met for an hour-and-a-half every fortnight from January 18, 2011 for a total of eight meetings. A summary of the items on which the committee achieved consensus and some planned initiatives for Fall 2012 are below.

1. Principle Issues.
2. Status of part-time faculty *vis à vis* the scheduling process.
3. New policy language for constraints.
4. New policy for forced classes.

Discussion has begun on the following items but the committee will need to continue its work.

5. Scheduling and faculty hiring timelines.
6. Anomalous scheduling outcomes.
7. Expectations for departmental staff in scheduling process.

It is clear there is much more discussion required to reach the common goal of a timetabling process that meets the needs of students and faculty in a way that is concurrent with administrative efficiency. Nevertheless, the working hypothesis of this discussion paper is that by focussing on the putative causes of unsatisfactory timetabling outcomes and making some immediate procedural changes for the Fall 2012 cycle, we can make some progress in achieving our goal.

While the committee has not completed its work as it relates to the MRFA policy grievance, we believe that we have made significant progress in addressing some of its primary concerns. This has been achieved through the constructive and critical examination of the issues by all members of the committee. The author extends his profound thanks for the quality of the discourse during the meetings.

¹ This report is based on the interim report submitted to the Provost & Vice President, Academic at the end of April 2011. Copies of that report are available from the Office of the Registrar upon request. The revisions to the original document presented to the Assembly correct the author's editorial oversights.

Interim recommendations specific to MRFA grievance²

The proposed recommendations below reflect the consensus of the committee and are directly tied to the main points presented in the MRFA grievance. They are intended to suggest particular courses of action and may, in some cases, be interpreted as a potential solution to the grievance issues. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that none of the issues presented in the grievance can be addressed without the full support of the MRFA and the Chairs' Assembly. Delay in achieving this support will only perpetuate the conditions that precipitated the grievance in the first place.

1. *Under the Collective Agreement, part-time faculty are not appointed until at least another four to six months after Infosilem has generated a Schedule of Classes.*
Further discussion is required on this item. However, it is highly unlikely that the scheduling process can be brought in line with the collective agreement. Currently, there are working solutions to this dilemma in place but it is not certain that these measures are the best ways to manage the situation.
2. *Requesting a part-time faculty member to provide instructor constraints a year in advance creates the sense that work is being promised when in fact reappointment has not yet happened.*
Further discussion is required on this item. Consistent with the previous point, the solution lies in finding ways to timetable a class without attaching a contract instructor's name.
3. *Full-time faculty members are not required by agreement to report their workloads for the following semester until week 8 of the Fall or Winter semester. In practice, however, they are being required to choose courses well before this.*
This specific item was not discussed in this round of meetings. Nevertheless, there is no requirement within the scheduling process that requires faculty members to report on their workload sooner than is stipulated in the Collective Agreement.
4. *Some Chairs have identified that the scheduling cycle is not aligned with the budget processes. For the Faculty of Arts and other areas implementing new degree programs, budget decisions about course offerings for 2011-2012 were not yet made when the scheduling processes began. The Dean of Arts has written a memo outlining these problems.*
Committee members have agreed that the scheduling cycle cannot be aligned to external requirements such as budget planning. Consequently, this item was deemed 'out of scope'.
5. *The Chairs' Assembly requests the employer clarify the conditions under which the Chair may approve specific teaching times and that this approval be harmonized with the timelines in the Collective Agreement.*

The committee has spent considerable time reworking Section G *Instructor Constraints* with this issue in mind. We are proposing four distinct areas of scheduling **restrictions** (cf. constraints) that are intended to give Chairs more guidance for making decisions on instructor requests. In addition, we are recommending that all requests for exceptions be received in writing and be subject to an annual validation process. There is strong support within the committee to establish an 'arm's length' approval body to review all requests for exceptions.

² Individual points (in italics) are taken from an internal memorandum dated December 7, 2010 to the President, MRFA, copied to the Provost and Vice-President, Academic from the Speaker, Chairs Assembly.

6. *How fixed-term part-time appointed faculty fit into the scheduling process is unclear. Are they to be treated the same as full-time faculty, or separately, or as part-time faculty? Since the Chair assigns workloads, are Chairs bound to allow them the same constraints as full-time faculty? Or can fixed-term faculty still, as part-time faculty, continue to specify hours of availability?*

The committee's recommendation is related to the previous item but we have been unsuccessful in reaching a policy-based solution. Section G *Instructor Constraints* has been revised in a way that includes both permanent and contractual appointments (full- vs. part-time in the nomenclature of the Collective Agreement). However, the committee believes that a practical solution is available to departments within existing hiring processes.

Specific actions (proposed) / Fall 2012 Scheduling cycle

New policy language for constraints.

The following table illustrates the breakdown for individual instructors across faculties combined with the number and type of constraints applied to the timetabling process³. Committee members recognized that the fewer constraints the software application has to deal with, the more nimble it can be in producing a timetable. We would also anticipate a decrease in the extent of anomalous scheduling outcomes as a result. The group looked for principled ways to minimize the number of constraints available to faculty. The information in Table 1 clearly indicates that the combination of 'Family/Dependent Care', 'Professional Commitments' and 'PT Instructor Constraints' (as allowed by current policy) makes up close to 90% of the constraints that were built into the timetabling process.

Consensus within the committee suggested that constraints are actually *exceptions* to the norm (i.e., employees of the institution are normally expected to be available during a standard working day) and should be treated as such. This approach is in full recognition that most faculty members have other professional responsibilities that diminish a strict application of this notion.

The committee also looked for language that would help make a distinction between a *preference* for a particular timetabling configuration and a *requirement* for same. Although the group has not fully investigated the possibilities, the notion of an annual validation of constraints has strong support within the committee. There is no consensus that the Chair should undertake this task because there are examples of other institutions implementing an 'arm's length body' to take on this responsibility. There are compelling arguments for this approach so the committee recommends further study on this topic.

³ A departmental breakdown is provided in Appendix 1.

Table 1. Summary of instructors by faculty and constraint type⁴.

Faculty	College Committee	Family / Dependent Care	Medical	Professional Commitments	PT Instructor Constraint	Religious	Grand Total	% of Grand Total
Arts	6	40	1	12	65		124	43.4%
Bissett	4	37		21		1	63	22.0%
Communication Studies	1	1		1			3	1.0%
Health & CS	7	8		5	4		24	8.4%
Science & Technology	6	23	6	21	1	1	58	20.3%
Teaching & Learning	4	4			6		14	4.9%
Grand Total	28	113	7	60	76	2	286	
	10%	40%	2%	21%	27%	1%		

Current policy also distinguishes between full and part-time faculty. However, for a variety of reasons, the current wording in policy has created unacceptable inequities within and between departments. The committee considered various approaches to this conundrum but eventually agreed to develop three categories of constraints: (i) ‘Standard’ restrictions which restrict the amount of work (vs. workload) assigned to an individual and (ii) Discretionary restrictions that require approval of the Chair.

We propose to define the current categories of *family/dependent care* and *religious grounds*. This idea derives from the grievance brief which is asking for more clarity for Chairs’ decision making.

The following changes to POL 516-1 *Academic Scheduling* were discussed at length and represent a consensus within the committee. Where appropriate, commentary has been inserted into the proposed changes⁵.

Policy statement	Commentary
<p>G. SCHEDULING CONSTRAINTS RESTRICTIONS Scheduling constraints restrictions are necessary to implement the scheduling principles and facilitate the effectiveness of the scheduling process. They are also intended to protect faculty by ensuring that there are limits on how teaching assignments are timetabled within a department.</p>	<p>‘Constraint’ does not capture the revised intention of this section of policy. The committee has attempted to incorporate language that distinguishes between <i>necessity</i> and <i>preference</i>.</p> <p>The last sentence only applies to the first section on ‘Institutional limitations’. Leaving it in suggests that ‘individual exceptions’ are somehow required to set “...limits on how teaching assignments are timetabled...” In actual fact, these two sections are intended to support Chairs in making decisions about requests for special consideration thereby ‘loosening up’ the software’s ability to generate a more satisfactory timetable.</p>

The following sections depart from the original policy by separating out various categories of exceptions. These changes are an attempt to address three points that are part of the MRFA

⁴ Analysis conducted by Scheduling Services based on Fall 2010 information.

⁵ A ‘clean’ version of the proposed changes is in Appendix 2.

grievance: (i) The lack of policy support for Chairs to make consistent and clear decisions about a faculty member's influence on his/her teaching timetable, (ii) Clarify how faculty members with permanent appointments and those on contracts are able to request exceptions; and (iii) Clarify the notions of religious accommodation and family/dependent care.

Policy statement	Commentary
<p>(1) Institutional limitations</p> <p>The following provisions apply to all faculty members. A faculty member who wishes to be exempt from any of these limitations can apply in writing to the Chair with accompanying rationale.</p> <p>(a) The teaching day shall not exceed eight (8) hours from the beginning of the first teaching hour to the end of the last teaching hour. Exceptions are experiential learning courses (e.g., clinical or practicum placements, directed field studies).</p> <p>(b) Teaching shall not exceed six (6) hours in any day.</p> <p>(c) The maximum number of consecutive teaching hours shall not exceed four (4).</p> <p>(d) The maximum number of 0800 classes is three (3), per week, per semester.</p> <p>(e) The maximum number of classes ending at 1800 is three (3), per week, per semester.</p> <p>(f) The minimum break between courses after the maximum number of consecutive hours taught shall be one (1) hour.</p> <p>(g) A minimum of twelve (12) hours shall elapse between the completion of teaching one day and the commencement of teaching the next day.</p> <p>(h) Weekly lecture classes broken into more than one delivery mode (e.g., a three-hour course with one 2-hour lecture and one 1-hour lecture/lab) will be normally be scheduled with at least one day between lectures. The weekend will be considered as providing for one day between lectures.</p>	<p>This section of the policy now refers exclusively to limits the institution must consider in developing a Schedule of Classes. As such, these provisions apply to all instructional staff regardless of employment status.</p>

The most substantive changes to this section of the policy are proposed below. The consensus of the committee is that a faculty member, as an employee of the institution, is normally expected to be available for work during normal business hours. This is in full recognition of the fact that a faculty appointment is inherently flexible. Nevertheless, the 'shift' in thinking is that deviation from a 'normal' work day must be treated as an exception rather than a privilege. Unless otherwise stated, these provisions apply to all faculty members regardless of employment status.

Policy statement	Commentary
<p>(2) Individual exceptions</p> <p>(a) Conditions</p> <p>(i) Applicants must provide written rationale for the <i>requirement</i> for any exception listed below. Applications based on <i>preference</i> will not be considered.</p> <p>(ii) An application for an exception must be accompanied by non-confidential details pertaining to the requirement and the relationship to specific time constraints.</p> <p>(iii) All individual exceptions are subject to annual validation.</p>	<p>These proposed statements are intended to establish clear accountability for a request for an exception by (i) establishing a requirement for documentation and (ii) setting an annual validation cycle.</p> <p>The suggestion for an 'arm's length' review body has received significant support within the committee. There are examples from other institutions who manage faculty requests in this manner.</p>

The following section captures the committee's deliberations on what exceptions an individual faculty member can invoke. To reiterate, an individual who applies for an exception under this section of the (proposed) policy must do so in writing and provide rationale that a Chair is able to evaluate.

Policy statement	Commentary
<p>(2) Individual exceptions (cont'd)</p> <p>(b) Grounds for exceptions</p> <p>(i) Within the context of this policy, religious accommodation:</p> <p>(a) ensures that an individual's right to freedom from discrimination on religious grounds is maintained.</p> <p>(b) excludes single events during a semester.</p> <p>(c) is limited to participation in recurring religious activities.</p>	<p>The revised purpose of this section is self-evident. The <i>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms</i> protects freedom of religion and expression. The <i>Alberta Human Rights Act</i> prohibits discrimination on the basis of Religious belief defined as a system of belief, worship and conduct (including Native Spirituality).</p> <p>Religious holidays (as an example of a 'single event') do not need to be accommodated by the scheduling process as other means of accommodation are available.</p>
<p>(ii) Within the context of this policy, family care is assumed to be a dynamic condition and is interpreted to mean members of a faculty members immediate family (i.e., father, mother, brother, sister, son and/or daughter).</p>	<p>There was considerable discussion about how to establish reasonable thresholds for the age of dependents and under what conditions the care of those dependents would require an exception. In the end, the committee agreed that (i) there must be an annual evaluation of the need and (ii) it is not realistic to set limits on age or degree of need since these will be, <i>ipso facto</i>, situation specific.</p>
<p>(iii) The Scheduling Office will make all reasonable attempts to accommodate faculty requests based on the circumstances below. The authority for these decisions is indicated in brackets. The request for accommodation authorized by the indicated authorities below on the understanding that the request is communicated through the Chair.</p> <p>(a) Medical condition (Human Resources).</p>	<p>The only change to this section is to identify Human Resources as the administrative unit that is responsible for maintaining records of officially declared requirements for medical and/or disability accommodations. The change in wording is intended to clarify the process for requesting an accommodation.</p>

Policy statement	Commentary
(b) Accommodation for a disability (Human Resources). (c) University committees (identified by the Provost and Vice-President, Academic). (d) Community and professional commitments (approved by the Dean).	

The following section is intended to clarify under what conditions a faculty member can have non-instructional time (e.g., preparation, research) built into his/her timetable. This option is only available to those with permanent appointments. This proposed change addresses a specific concern from the MRFA grievance that permitted contractual staff to achieve 'better' schedules than permanent staff.

Policy statement	Commentary
(2) Individual exceptions (cont'd) (c) Non-instructional exceptions Upon receipt of a written request and rationale, the Chair may authorize the following options for faculty members with permanent appointments: (i) One full day or two, half-days of unspecified time shall be scheduled for instructional preparation or non-instructional work (e.g., service, research and scholarship) per week.	The committee could not achieve consensus about the need to schedule preparation and/or research. Some felt that this best fell to an individual to manage; others that unless the time was formally built into a timetable, it would not be possible to manage the instructional expectations. In the end, the proposed language represents a compromise in that if a faculty member requests that non-instructional time to be scheduled, policy would permit it.
(ii) A research day can be specified when one of the following conditions apply and upon verification by the Chair. (a) There is joint research with an MRU or external professor; or (b) The lab or research facility is only available at a certain time.	This proposed section acknowledges that there are circumstances that require a faculty member to identify a specific day that is allocated for research.

New policy language for forced classes.

During training sessions, departmental staff have been instructed not to force any configuration for a class. Despite this direction and in the absence of policy, some departments have seized upon the option to 'force' a particular configuration for a course or courses. Using the typology for instructional space in current policy, we have discovered that there is extensive forcing in the 'Open' and 'Open - Priority'⁶ group of spaces.

⁶ The 'Open' designation refers to space that is open to all departments and/or programs without scheduling restrictions. 'Open - Priority' refers to space that is designated to a specific program but can be made available to other departments when all activity from the specific program has been assigned.

As the summary data in Table 2 indicates, over 50% of all deliveries⁷ have at least one element of their timetable forced. An alarming number (39%) of all deliveries have forced day and time. Similar data is available for Fall 2011 but it does not differ materially from the information presented here. Complete data is not available for the Fall 2012 semester but early indications are that the incidence of forced classrooms has *increased*.

Table 2. Summary of forced timetable outcomes (Winter 2011)⁸

All Deliveries	2265
Forced Day & Time	893
Forced Day, Time & Room	313
Forced Day	893
Forced Time	893
Forced Room Only	325

54% of all deliveries have either a forced day, time or room
39% of all deliveries have a forced day and time
14% of all deliveries have forced day, time and room
14% of all deliveries have forced room only - no force time or day

Forced Day & Time	893
Forced Room Only	+ 325
	1218

It is difficult to quantify the effect forcing has on a timetable. However, we do know that forcing creates an immovable 'object' within the system around which the software must manage all other non-forced requests⁹. While it is true that there are degrees of effect, given the extent to which departments are forcing outcomes, the committee feels that this is the most likely source of many anomalous scheduling outcomes. In some cases, departments have ignored Scheduling Service efforts to demonstrate how the current process can result in an acceptable timetable. When this occurs, forcing all of a department's classes creates a very large 'immovable object' within the system and affects numerous departments across the institution. Outside of a few obvious instances (e.g., Nursing, science labs), the committee believes that there must be strict restrictions on when instructional space can be forced. In other words, there are few defensible reasons for forcing a class. In fairness, it may be the case that mastering the 'machine language' is not a reasonable task for staff that have limited exposure to it with the resulting strategy of reverting to a more familiar process.

The following new policy statements are intended to severely limit a department's ability to force classes without compromising genuine requirements to do so.

⁷ 'Deliveries' refers to the number of times an instructor works with students for a particular course. For example, a 'standard' lecture format for GNE1401 will count as one delivery; a course with a lecture, lab and tutorial component will count as three deliveries.

⁸ Analysis provided by Scheduling Services.

⁹ An apt analogy is the effect a large rock has on a stream. Regardless of size, the rock always exerts an influence on the course of the stream; the larger the rock, the greater the influence on the stream.

Policy statement	Commentary
<p>(4) Restrictions on forcing classes</p> <p>(a) In the context of this policy, ‘forcing’ refers to a Chair’s request to timetable a specific configuration for time, day and/or room for a particular course section.</p> <p>(b) ‘Open’ or ‘Open – Priority’ instructional space cannot be forced if there are other available options. Preference for a particular space will not be considered.</p> <p>(c) Written rationale for forcing a course’s configuration must be based on program requirements and not individual preference.</p> <p>(d) The request for forcing a class must meet one of the following conditions:</p> <p>(i) The utilization of specialized instructional space is maximized; or</p> <p>(ii) Continuation or graduation requirements for an identifiable cohort of program students cannot be accommodated by other means.</p>	

Summary

There are many examples of timetabling outcomes that quite simply do not make sense. In addition to those brought forward in the context of the grievance, results from a SAMRU survey provide additional examples from their perspective. It is difficult to determine a systematic course of action while the apparent cause of the problem remains (i.e., extensive use of constraints and forced classes). The committee has yet to discuss solutions in detail but it is reasonable to suggest that we reassess the extent of anomalous outcomes *after* implementing some of the proposed policy changes related to instructor constraints and forced classes. Two specific actions are being proposed:

1. Formal introduction of policy changes to POL 516-1 *Academic Scheduling* (outlined above) to the approval process. The committee is seeking to determine the level of support for these changes, initially through a discussion at Chairs’ Assembly before scheduling departmental and/or faculty consultations.
2. Forced times/days/rooms have been removed from the Fall 2012 timetable. As a way of determining the scope of the practice of forcing, Chairs will be asked to explain the departmental need for forcing. The intention is not to insert an additional approval process. Given the extent of forcing, the committee needs information on the reasons for forcing in order to evaluate how this might be managed in the future.

NOTE: This action only applies to classrooms with an ‘Open’ designation. Dedicated classrooms, wet/dry/computer labs or specialized instructional space are not affected.

As a final point, staff training has been identified as an issue in the current scheduling process. As you know, training is currently provided by Scheduling Services at appropriate times in the cycle. However, this responsibility rests with one individual within Scheduling Services who is also responsible for other more technical aspects of the timetabling process. This situation is untenable as was evidenced when this individual was taken ill at a crucial time in the cycle. A sensible precaution would be to have backup within the department but the current staffing model within Scheduling Services makes that option difficult.

Creating a better timetable for students, faculty and administration can only be a shared responsibility between academic departments and Scheduling Services. A productive course of action will entail full engagement in training opportunities, timely and constructive criticism and a willingness to change departmental and institutional processes.

Number of individual instructors by department & type of constraint

Dept	College Committee	Family / Dependent Care	Medical	Professional Commitments	PT Instructor Constraint	Religious	Grand Total	% of Grand Total
ADMN	4	37		21		1	63	22.0%
AIRF							0	0.0%
ASHS							0	0.0%
CE							0	0.0%
CHBI		8	2	3		1	14	4.9%
CHYS	1				2		3	1.0%
COMM	1	1		1			3	1.0%
EASC	1	2	3	15			21	7.3%
EDUC		4			5		9	3.1%
ENGL	4	14		1	22		41	14.3%
ENVS	1						1	0.3%
GNEB	4				1		5	1.7%
HUMN		6			3		9	3.1%
IENP							0	0.0%
INDS		3			11		14	4.9%
ISCS	1	5			1		7	2.4%
JUST	2	4					6	2.1%
LANG		1			13		14	4.9%
MPEN	3	8	1	3			15	5.2%
MUSC							0	0.0%
NURS							0	0.0%
PERS	1	4		3	2		10	3.5%
POST		6		2	8		16	5.6%
PSYC		8		9	1		18	6.3%
SLAN	2	2	1		7		12	4.2%
SWDS	3			2			5	1.7%
THEA							0	0.0%
Grand Total	28	113	7	60	76	2	286	
	10%	40%	2%	21%	27%	1%		

Proposed changes to POL 516-1 *Academic Scheduling*

G. SCHEDULING RESTRICTIONS

Scheduling restrictions are necessary to implement the scheduling principles and facilitate the effectiveness of the scheduling process.

(1) Institutional limitations

The following provisions apply to all faculty members. A faculty member who wishes to be exempt from any of these limitations can apply in writing to the Chair with accompanying rationale.

- (a) The teaching day shall not exceed eight (8) hours from the beginning of the first teaching hour to the end of the last teaching hour. Exceptions are experiential learning courses (e.g., clinical or practicum placements, directed field studies).
- (b) Teaching shall not exceed six (6) hours in any day.
- (c) The maximum number of consecutive teaching hours shall not exceed four (4).
- (d) The maximum number of 0800 classes is three (3), per week, per semester.
- (e) The maximum number of classes ending at 1800 is three (3), per week, per semester.
- (f) The minimum break between courses after the maximum number of consecutive hours taught shall be one (1) hour.
- (g) A minimum of twelve (12) hours shall elapse between the completion of teaching one day and the commencement of teaching the next day.
- (h) Weekly lecture classes broken into more than one delivery mode (e.g., a three-hour course with one 2-hour lecture and one 1-hour lecture/lab) will be normally be scheduled with at least one day between lectures. The weekend will be considered as providing for one day between lectures.

(2) Individual exceptions

- (a) Conditions
 - (i) Applicants must provide written rationale for the *requirement* for any exception listed below. Applications based on *preference* will not be considered.
 - (ii) An application for an exception must be accompanied by non-confidential details pertaining to the requirement and the relationship to specific time constraints.
 - (iii) All individual exceptions are subject to annual validation.
- (b) Grounds for exceptions
 - (i) Within the context of this policy, **religious accommodation**:

- (a) ensures that an individual's right to freedom from discrimination on religious grounds is maintained.
 - (b) excludes single events during a semester.
 - (c) is limited to participation in recurring religious activities.
- (ii) Within the context of this policy, **family care** is assumed to be a dynamic condition and is interpreted to mean members of a faculty members immediate family (i.e., father, mother, brother, sister, son and/or daughter).
 - (iii) The Scheduling Office will make all reasonable attempts to accommodate faculty requests based on the circumstances below. The authority for these decisions is indicated in brackets. The request for accommodation is communicated through the Chair.
 - (a) Medical condition (Human Resources).
 - (b) Accommodation for a disability (Human Resources).
 - (c) University committees (identified by the Provost and Vice-President, Academic).
 - (d) Community and professional commitments (approved by the Dean).
- (c) Non-instructional exceptions

Upon receipt of a written request and rationale, the Chair may authorize the following options for faculty members with permanent appointments:

- (i) One full day or two, half-days of unspecified time shall be scheduled for instructional preparation or non-instructional work (e.g., service, research and scholarship) per week.
- (ii) A research day can be specified when one of the following conditions apply and upon verification by the Chair.
 - (a) There is joint research with an MRU or external professor; or
 - (b) The lab or research facility is only available at a certain time.