

Challenges in Classroom Utilization

Dynamic Demand and Static Supply -- Classroom utilization in universities might well be described as the art of accommodating relatively dynamic demands and needs with relatively static classroom inventories.

1. UF's classroom inventory has been developed over a span of nearly a century. Each new facility, in its time, was designed to support student interests, faculty teaching styles, and professional association and accreditation requirements. But, over time, student demand, instructional pedagogies, and accreditation standards change. Accommodating the change is not always easily done with classrooms designed decades earlier. The average age of classrooms at UF is roughly 35 years. This is older than some of our SUS institutions.
2. Faculty must teach and students must take classes in classrooms that support disciplinary pedagogy. Here are some examples:
 - a. Chemistry/Physics/Engineering courses often require specially equipped facilities. Some rooms must have gas, water, and air at instructor's podium. Some must have a prep room to set up demonstrations and experiments. These are necessary types of classroom facilities and ones that cannot always be used for other teaching and instructional programs.
 - b. Occasionally, discipline or class-specific samples or materials are needed to properly teach a course and those materials should be readily available. Sometimes, this is accomplished by setting up the materials in the classroom for the entire semester (e.g., geology, zoology, physical sciences, anthropology, etc.). Physical anthropology, for example, may set up one room at the beginning of a term with hundreds of samples in custom-built displays. These materials are essential to the instruction of the course and must be accessible to students for hands-on work and analysis during the instructional sessions. To take down and rebuild the sample displays would take days on each end and would be totally impractical. Under this arrangement, even though the room is not used 12 periods a day (it may be used only 3 – 6 periods), it is necessary for the academic program and it would be impractical or impossible to use the classroom for other purposes while this set-up is

present. Courses like this are not taught every semester, so they do not warrant a permanently designated room or teaching lab.

- c. Foreign language courses generally require moveable seating. Science courses by contrast generally prefer or require fixed tables and seats. The point is that a single classroom cannot be used effectively by all disciplines.
- d. Even in fairly traditional classrooms, some disciplines have special needs. Math courses, for example, have minimum requirements for approximately 24 linear feet of blackboard space.
- e. Sometimes the use of a room creates special health, safety, or practical problems for other potential users. When specimens or samples are accessed or used in a room, there are few other compatible users. A room in which gross anatomy is taught is not very good to follow with a class on Chaucer.
- f. For all disciplines, the needs for intranet and Internet access, specialized equipment such as video projectors, visualizers, and real-time video recording capacity have increased. A Technology Fee would help all universities bring up to and maintain classrooms at appropriate technological levels.
- g. Demand for disciplines varies over time. But, for many disciplines, students at UF find movement issues between classrooms on a very large campus are difficult. And, this is an important detail in classroom utilization. Students must be allowed enough time to travel between classrooms and their complex schedules often move them from one end to the other over the course of a day. Our campus is spread over 2000 acres and classrooms and labs and faculty are spread over hundreds of buildings.
- h. Some courses and instructional situations have higher bars with respect to the need for all students to see instructor clearly (e.g., sign language courses, drama classes, etc.).

General issues not discipline specific:

- a. With a relatively static classroom inventory, some technology needs are met by the ability to transport mobile equipment to and from classrooms, including in inclement weather (ex: TV/VCR on cart).
 - b. Room scheduling also requires that faculty/students with disabilities must use ADA compliant rooms.
 - c. Large enrollment courses and assembly exam blocks create unique utilization challenges. As a matter of policy, no UF teaching auditoria are scheduled for classroom use during periods E2-3 (8:20 – 10:10 p.m.). This is because these rooms must be used for large section courses and assembly exams. Some courses have more than 2000 students registered for a single class. To have one exam for all students in a class, assembly exams may have to use up to eight different rooms across campus.
3. UF offers over 300 degree programs at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Many of these degree programs have accreditation standards and instruction and learning guidelines that limit the number and range of classroom types that can be used effectively.
 4. We have an aging campus. While this is not a bad thing in all regards, it does mean there is a large amount of maintenance work required. When maintenance is done on classrooms, it often requires taking them out of service for some period of time. Sometimes they are out for an entire term or, at least, for a period greater than the breaks we have between terms and/or the summer. Also, because we have an aging campus, major renovations are frequently required due to:
 - a. ADA compliance requirements
 - b. Outdated electrical systems, especially lighting
 - c. Outdated plumbing systems
 - d. Major structural issues such as new roofs
 5. UF's focus on graduate education requires a different mix of classrooms than the mix currently in the inventory. With more graduate students, smaller seminar style classrooms are more in demand.
 6. Division of Colleges and Universities classroom utilization data does not include the use of space for:

- a. During term assembly exams
 - b. Specialty academic programs
 - c. Extracurricular events
 - d. Faculty review sessions
 - e. Study sessions
 - f. Visiting scholar presentations
 - g. Non-course activity essential to the support of the university's academic and research mission
7. Division of Colleges and Universities classroom utilization data includes those classes, which have zero utilization because a classroom is out of service. For example, there were 21 classrooms out of service in the fall of 2003 but they were computed in the utilization data, thus artificially reducing the utilization statistics.
 8. Because of our size and pedagogy, large lecture halls are completely necessary. But it is not sound academic policy to use them every period. Many times, for example, when large auditoria or lecture halls are used in a course, the class meets there only once a week. These sections also include the use of multiple small rooms for breakout discussion sessions. The discussion sessions give individual students greater opportunity to participate actively and to ask questions.
 9. Special use facilities are also absolutely needed, but they sometimes cannot be fully utilized. For example, recital rooms are needed in music, special floors are needed for dance, vibration free rooms are needed for some physics experiments, rooms that can be completely darkened are needed for film studies, etc. Utilization of such rooms depends on the demand for the specialty during a particular time period and even a particular term.
 10. Graduate student teaching assistants are a significant part of the UF teaching program. Their own graduate classes are typically in the afternoons and evenings. When the graduate students are in their own classes (some portion of the regular teaching faculty is there too), they are not teaching undergraduates. Thus, the supply of instructors goes down in the afternoons and evenings. The time graduate student classes are offered could be moved of course. But doing so would not change our ability to utilize more classroom spaces during whatever period they are in classes. It would simply move the lower utilization rates to a different time of day.

11. We are a residential institution and a fundamental part of the residential campus experience is gained through extra-curricular activities. This requires some time in the week to allow extra-curricular activities such as student clubs (UF has nearly 800 of them), volunteering (encouraged by state government and national education policy councils and our students do hundreds of thousands of hours of it) and work (7000 students work on campus and many more work off campus).
12. Afternoons tend to be the time used for field trips, research, group projects, and travel supporting the curriculum interests for both faculty and students.

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