

Review of course collection and scheduling practices
Administrative response and implementation plan
July 2024

With this document, we are pleased to present our response to the final report of the review of course collection and scheduling practices. The review was conducted by KPMG and took place between November 2023 and April 2024. The project was led by a joint steering committee that included the following members:

- Liz Clarke, Communication, Popular Culture and Film
- Naser Ezzati-Jivan, Computer Science
- Maureen Reedyk, Physics
- Brendan Barret, Office of the Registrar & Enrolment Services
- Nicholas Dion, Office of the Provost & Vice-President, Academic
- Tania Melnyk, Office of the Registrar and Enrolment Services

The process led by KPMG was closely guided by the Steering Committee. It included an environmental scan of comparator institutions, as well as exhaustive consultation with the University population, including:

- Faculty and instructors, including Unit Chairs and Directors
- BUFA Executive
- Students, BUSU and GSA
- Administrative Assistants and Academic Advisors
- Information and Technology Services
- Office of the Registrar and Enrolment Services
- Office of the Provost & Vice-President, Academic
- Members of the Strategic Academic Leadership Team

The University is supportive several of the recommendations emerging from the review, the details of which are provided in the report below. The primary factors to contend with in implementation will be the University's challenging financial situation, as well as limited staff resources available to focus on implementation. These factors will require implementation to be progressive, over the coming years. We also recognize that some recommendations may require changes to the existing language in the Collective Agreement, and thus negotiation in 2026.

Overall, the University is committed to progressive but meaningful changes to the scheduling and course collection processes, with many changes implemented before the next schedule is released in May 2025. Further details are provided below.

Summary of recommendations

1) Space constraints

- a. *Flexibility on scheduling departmentally managed classrooms*: Identify which departmentally managed classrooms can be scheduled centrally and develop a scheduling policy for departmentally managed spaces.
- b. *Space utilization and prioritization*: Increase room utilization from the current target of 70%.
- c. *Changes in course delivery*: Assess opportunities to deliver more courses online.

2) Course collection

- a. *Forecast student demand*: Define a consistent approach to department course collection, using common procedures and templates, and increase the use of historical data to inform scheduling.
- b. *Align course collection timelines*: Assess current workload, teaching preference and course collection timelines, and consider adjustments where appropriate to streamline the process.
- c. *Enhance the BrockDB course collection system*: Consider upgrading the current course collection system to eliminate manual entry and increase efficiency of the process.

3) Scheduling

- a. *Establish meeting patterns*: Standardize the days and times of the week in which classes occur.
- b. *Teaching preferences*: Assess the current teaching preference process to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
- c. *Standardize course durations*: Formalize standard durations for classes for all terms.

4) Process documentation

- a. *Consistency in understanding*: Mandate training and enhance communication for those involved in the scheduling and collection processes.
- b. *Enhance Scheduling Team process and control documentation*: Create documentation to ensure process consistency and knowledge transfer.

University Response and Implementation

1) Space constraints

a. Flexibility on scheduling departmentally managed classrooms

Since the implementation of the *Space Management Policy* in July 2023, which establishes that all University space is managed by the Provost in consultation with affected SAC members, consideration has been given to emphasizing the central management of space. Initial discussions have taken place with the Deans and this project is likely to begin in the coming months.

It is important to note that the central management of space through the Office of the Registrar and Enrolment Services (ORES) does not affect departmental priority usage of spaces and, as recommended by KPMG, would only apply to instructional spaces. However, central management improves institutional data and strengthens ORES' line of sight on space use, ensuring that spaces are occupied as much as possible. These changes would support campus-wide emergency management planning.

b. Space utilization and prioritization

While the University has typically targeted a space utilization rate that aligns with Council of Ontario Universities (COU) guidelines, it already typically exceeds this recommended rate by a significant amount at certain times of day (i.e., the peak times of 10 AM to 4 PM) and with certain classroom types (i.e., large classrooms). However, through the environmental scan it was established that other peer institutions make little or no effort to adhere to the COU guidelines.

The University will trial an increase of the target utilization rate from 70% to 85%, noting that a side effect will be a reduction in the University's flexibility to accommodate last-minute room change requests. We are open to the possibility of further increases in the target utilization rate pending the outcome of the trial.

c. Changes in course delivery

The University is open to an increase in online, hybrid, and Hyflex course delivery in situations where this is appropriate for the course material and aligns with the pedagogy of the course. This has been a topic of discussions with the Deans, but decisions regarding mode of delivery largely rest with the collegial decision-making processes of departments.

We are open to further discussions with the Deans and with BUFA to encourage a growth in online, hybrid, and hyflex learning.

2) Course collection

a. Forecast student demand

The University will discuss with the Deans, ORES and the Institutional Planning, Analysis & Performance Office to understand what kind of data might be helpful and what can be provided to support the course collection and scheduling process.

We will also consider whether the previous year's timetable can be rolled forward to constitute the starting point for the next year's timetable, noting that this is a limitation of the scheduling software Brock currently uses and will only be possible with additional software investment.

b. Align course collection timelines

The University will pilot a new course collection timeline that allows more time for the process, as follows:

- July
 - Host sessions for Chairs/Directors outlining the scheduling process and the steps involved, as well as the Chair's/Director's role in scheduling
 - Host separate sessions for Deans and Associate Deans covering the same content

- August
 - Host Faculty-specific sessions to address common questions and concerns
 - Discuss strategies for submitting course collection requests
 - Share documents to assist in the course collection process

- September-November
 - Host weekly drop-in sessions for those involved in course collection to answer questions supporting the process
 - Explore the potential use of Microsoft Forms to create a template for units to use and to provide further guidance about the course collection process and facilitate the collection of consistent information across departments and Faculties

In order to adhere more closely to the prescribed schedule, we will be required to hold more firmly to submission timelines as advertised than we have in the past.

c. Enhance the BrockDB course collection system

The Provost's Office will discuss with ITS the possibility of upgrading our current scheduling software as part of the broader steps being taken to prepare the road for a new Student Information System. There would be additional software licensing costs associated with any updates.

3) Scheduling

a. Establish meeting patterns

We note that while teaching patterns are largely a question of convention and/or of department request, some of the matters in the recommendation – such as those relating to the times delimiting the teaching day – overlap with Collective Agreement language and would have to be addressed in 2026.

We are open to further discussions regarding changes to or increased standardization in teaching patterns, noting that the current variety largely results from attempts to accommodate faculty member or Department requests.

b. Teaching preferences

We note with interest from the environmental scan that Brock's processes regarding teaching preferences and accommodations seem to be more permissive and more formal than those at many of our peer institutions.

We intend to change the workflow for the approval of teaching preferences and accommodations within ORES, moving from a process based on web forms to one built in Microsoft Forms. This will expedite the process within ORES, allowing for greater responsiveness and enhanced ability to stream requests.

As part of this, we will enhance the information on the scheduling SharePoint site regarding forms and processes. This information will be updated and moved from SharePoint to a new Scheduling section on the ORES website, enhancing visibility and ease of access.

c. Standardize course durations

The standardization of course durations in the Spring/Summer term is already underway as part of the response to the OSAP audit. We have already discussed these changes with BUFA. We view the standardization of durations as a progressive, multi-year process.

We take this recommendation to apply specifically to the Spring/Summer term, and we don't anticipate any changes to the existing policy with respect to durations in the Fall and Winter terms.

4) Process documentation

a. Consistency in understanding

The Provost's Office will work with ORES to explore opportunities to collaborate on communications at key moments in course collection and scheduling, as well as for the dissemination of educational materials about the processes to Faculty Deans and Department/Centre Chairs/Directors.

We anticipate challenges in implementing mandatory training for unionized employees, be they Department/Centre Chairs/Directors (BUFA) or unit-level administrative staff (often OSSTF). However, we believe that more could be done to create awareness about the many training opportunities related to course collection and scheduling – which are often undersubscribed – available through ORES.

b. Enhance Scheduling Team process and control documentation

The Scheduling Team in ORES commits to formalizing documentation supporting the course collection and scheduling processes over the course of the next year, recognizing the benefits of this as well in the case of turnover.