

Statement on University Free-Time

Faculty Senate Educational Policies Committee

Spring 2000

University faculty legislation mandates that certain hours be free of formal undergraduate classes and laboratory exercises; as a reminder, the wording of that legislation is attached.

Our committee believes having such free time is not only wise but also vital to the development of our students. These hours are used for extra-curricular activities, including performances and athletics, for work time, especially in the area of dining services, and for just "being", whether with friends or alone. Given the increasing number of evening classes and evening examinations, this free time is more important than ever.

Of course, not just the individual students benefit from knowing that these hours will be free of academic responsibilities. Teams and their coaches need to know who will be available for practice; conductors and directors need to be able to plan rehearsals; supervisors need to be able to organize work crews. Clearly the activities of the university as a whole, which certainly include more than just academics, need to have such free time clearly defined and rigorously maintained.

Therefore this committee wishes to remind all faculty, administration and staff that scheduling regular academic activities in these periods of free time must be avoided, unless special arrangements have been made, as detailed in the attached legislation.

On the "other side", is it important for those organizing extracurricular activities to recognize that the primary function of the university is education. Students should not be so burdened with non-academic commitments (such as to a team or club) in the early morning or in the late evening that they are unable to participate with their full attention and energy during the academic day. Further, scheduling such extra-curricular activities during the times reserved for classes often forces students to make difficult choices that may hinder their academic progress.

We wish to make a special note on review sessions. Given the number of evening classes and examinations, review sessions are not permitted after 4:30 PM, unless there are other such review opportunities at unrestricted times. We recognize that the well-designed review session can bring new insights and place the detailed work of a course in context. However, this must be balanced against (i) the erosion of free time, (ii) the tendency of students to forgo regularly scheduled classes to attend the review session, (iii) the effect of "cramming" and heightened tension they create for the actual examination and (iv) the added stress placed on students who cannot attend the review.

Finally we note that the proliferation of evening examinations is itself an infringement on the free time of the student. While we recognize the need for such exams in certain circumstances, their occurrence should be kept to a minimum. Further, these examinations should not be any longer than truly necessary to adequately evaluate the student's command of the material and/or techniques of the course.