Laura Brown and Mary-Lynn Cummings attended the Educational Policy Committee’s 18 November 2013 meeting and presented for discussion the current draft of a policy document addressing instructional-space scheduling. They summarized the rationale for the policy and some of its key points. Mary-Lynn reported that an outside consultant had determined a couple of years ago that Cornell under-utilizes its instructional space but that some of the data underlying the consultant’s analysis were flawed due to widespread departures from the standard meeting-time schedule. EPC members were surprised that so many faculty members failed to adhere to that schedule. Mary-Lynn and Laura indicated that while most classes start at standard times, many end later than the standard schedule dictates, making it difficult for students to assemble schedules with non-overlapping class meeting times.

EPC members agreed that these circumstances warrant stricter enforcement of the standard meeting-time schedule. Laura and Mary-Lynn pointed out that cleaning up the space-use data hinges on faculty adherence to that schedule. Some EPC members suggested that the university re-visit that schedule, which has been much the same for a half-century or so. For example, might it be possible to designate one or more additional Monday-Wednesday 75-minute lecture-pair slots or make better use of evening class times? Revising the standard schedule, according to Laura, is certainly a possibility but falls outside the space-scheduling committee’s charge.

EPC members raised a few additional questions. For example, the draft recommends that colleges target a specific distribution of course meeting times (e.g. to avoid having 73% of classes starting between 10 AM and 2 PM). EPC members wondered how far the current actual distribution of meeting times strayed from the proposed targets, and Mary-Lynn presented data that appeared to indicate that current distributions miss the target but not by much. One EPC member asked whether the space-scheduling committee had addressed room adequacy. Climate-control issues bedevil many classrooms. Classes sometimes end up assigned to classrooms far from instructors’ offices. Mary-Lynn acknowledged that lots of problem classrooms exist that would cost a lot of money to fix. Where, one might ask, will that money come from? Colleges?

At the end of the meeting, EPC members unanimously agreed to the following statement: the Educational Policy Committee has received and understood the draft policy document and supports the document’s being brought forward as part of the university’s ongoing space study for review by other interested parties.