

**Memo**

TO: Various Members

FROM: Ruth Watkins, Vice President for Academic Affairs

RE: Invitation to Join Working Group: Strategic Scheduling for Student Success (S<sup>4</sup>) Initiative

DATE: August 1, 2014

**Overview and Accomplishments to Date**

I am impressed with and grateful for the efforts I have seen from the campus community to increase undergraduate student success, from recruitment through retention and degree completion. Through reviewing literature, discussions with colleagues at peer institutions, and understanding best practices, our institution has already engaged in many new initiatives that will increase our retention and promote timely degree completion. From new learning community programs to increased academic advising and mentoring, the campus is leveraging resources for student success. As the campus welcomes new students for Fall 2014, we will reinforce our commitment to their success through the Plan to Finish Initiative. This comprehensive program offers students an opportunity to work with faculty, advisors, staff, and peers to develop a degree that is purposeful as well as accomplished in a timely manner. A central theme of the Plan to Finish initiative is that – from the start of their undergraduate studies to completion - every student builds and refines a plan for earning the degree.

**Last year a group of faculty, advisors and staff were involved in intensive dialogue about the processes that we have in place to offer classes and curricula. We called this the Strategic Scheduling Team, and I am very appreciative of the time and effort of this group.** We learned in these conversations that our campus processes for scheduling courses are complex, over lapping and often competing. Our commitment to student success and timely completion requires that we look more deeply at these processes and, in some instances, find different ways to do our work. Some of the changes that need to happen concern the budget paradigm and we have colleagues working to identify appropriate modifications to that process. Other changes concern course scheduling and use of teaching and learning spaces. This is a project that I am inviting you to join in 2014-15, perhaps continuing into 2015-16 for full implementation.

**Plan for 2014-15: Strategic Scheduling for Student Success (S<sup>3</sup>) Initiative**

The 2014 report from the process team, referenced above, noted significant challenges in our current system for scheduling classes and recommended specific actions for the future. A summary of that

report is attached. Strategic scheduling involves exploring questions about how course scheduling might be managed more effectively to both support student success and better manage institutional resources. Through a data-driven process looking at enrollment patterns and bottlenecks within and across related departments and programs, other institutions have been able to identify strategic scheduling processes that have demonstrated significant impact. I believe that the current work to make student success visible and high priority combined with the preliminary work already done to open conversations about courses scheduling positions us for a positive change in this area.

**I am inviting you to participate in the working group that will lead this change process for our campus.**

The “big picture” charge for this team is:

Develop an integrated, central scheduling plan for essential courses that form the gateway to many upper-division courses in majors across the campus (e.g., Writing, Math, Basic Science and Social Science courses). The goals of the effort are: (a) a schedule that connects core courses in a logical progression, to maximize efficiency for students and classroom space use, and (b) a predictable schedule that is known and publicized in multi-year planning blocks.

This project is an undertaking that will require time, energy, and expertise to deliver consistent scheduling options for student success. The initial focus of your work is likely to be current pressure points in scheduling, such as high enrollment courses and majors, with a particular emphasis on courses and sequences that make up a large portion of first and second-year enrollments. I have asked Ann Darling, Sr. Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies and Sharon Aiken-Wisniewski, Asst. Vice President for Academic Affairs, to co-chair and facilitate the strategic scheduling initiative committee. Time commitment is approximately 4 hrs./month for the next 2 years to allow for team meetings, reading, and research on campus opportunities.

I look forward to your response to participate on the Strategic Scheduling Initiative Committee. If you have questions, please contact Ann ([ann.darling@utah.edu](mailto:ann.darling@utah.edu)) or Sharon ([saiken@uc.utah.edu](mailto:saiken@uc.utah.edu)). Please indicate your willingness to participate to Bonnie Wiese ([bonnie.wiese@utah.edu](mailto:bonnie.wiese@utah.edu)) by August 15.

This is a truly important collaborative project for the campus. Thank you for your efforts to support our students and fulfill the mission of The University of Utah.

