

Faculty Council Ad Hoc Summer Session Committee Report for March 21 Faculty Council Meeting (Submitted 3/19/12)

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Introduction

On December 7, 2011, in response to a request by the University Budget Committee, Faculty Council voted to form an ad hoc committee “to review Summer Session and make policy recommendations in regard to scheduling; faculty compensation and incentives; tuition, fees, and discounts; and academic policies related to major, minor, concentration and core credit for courses taken by matriculated students at other institutions.” Elections were held at the start of this semester, and we were able to hold our initial meeting on February 13.

Since that time, we have solicited comments from all faculty, staff, and administrators (through an email from the Provost’s office) and made specific requests for comments to all academic departments and a number of administrative departments. Comparative institutional data on summer sessions is not easily available. For that reason, we have informally surveyed summer session information at a number of other institutions (local and AJCU) and attended the North Central Conference on Summer Sessions annual conference in Chicago. We thank all members of the John Carroll Community who have contributed comments.

The chair of Faculty Council has asked for a report at the March 21 meeting of Faculty Council. While this does not allow us time to prepare a comprehensive report and recommendations, we think it is appropriate at this time to report our findings and suggestions and possibly move some items for formal consideration to appropriate faculty committees or administrative offices.

Background

The problem we are addressing is well known, and we don’t think it needs a lot of explanation or documentation, although that could be provided if Faculty Council deems it necessary. Enrollments in summer sessions have been declining for a number of years. Lack of enrollment has resulted in course cancellations and reduced schedules, making the summer sessions less attractive to our own students as well as transient students. Net revenue to the university from summer sessions is significant, and the loss of that revenue is a matter of general concern. Faculty have fewer options for extra income, and students who need or want to take summer classes often must look to other schools to do so.

Scope of our inquiries

We have limited our inquiries and report to undergraduate summer classes. While there are a number of other important activities on campus during the summer months (graduate courses, special programs such as CMSETT, conferences and camps, study abroad, new student orientation), each of those activities have special concerns. We have understood our charge to be focused on the undergraduate summer session. We do not think that expanding enrollment in undergraduate summer sessions would have an adverse impact on any of these other important activities, but any expansion of offerings would need to consider the impact on other programs. This is one reason that we recommend establishing a formal Summer Session Coordinating Committee (see below).

Benefits of summer sessions—and concerns

We do believe that there are a number of clear benefits of summer sessions to the institution, the faculty, and students, and the comments we have received from the community support the importance of summer sessions. Most crassly, it produces revenue for the institution (with little additional direct overhead other than faculty compensation) and opportunities for additional income for faculty. Less crassly, it supports the institution's primary teaching mission and gives faculty opportunities to teach courses in alternative formats.

For students, there are a number of benefits to summer sessions. It allows students who are “behind” in their credit hours to “catch up” (this may happen for a number of reasons—they may register for a somewhat reduced load, they may have dropped a course, they may have had an internship or studied abroad for less than full transfer credit, etc.) It also allows students more flexibility in scheduling, which is of more importance now than in the past because of the variety of activities they engage in during the year (service, internships, jobs, sports, other student organizations and activities). Some students can also use summer sessions to graduate in three years. National data show summer sessions to be important in retention and four-year graduation rates, especially for non-traditional and at-risk students. National data also show that students majoring in health-related areas are most likely to enroll in summer sessions. Robust summer sessions could thus help contribute to making John Carroll more attractive to all entering students.

Some concerns have been expressed about the equivalency of summer courses to courses offered in the academic year. We do recognize these concerns, and think that faculty and departments need to make a determination as to whether it is academically feasible and pedagogically sound to offer a course in an alternative format in the summer. But if there is a demand for particular courses that is currently being met for our students by transfer credit from other institutions, we think it is to the benefit of our students and to the institution that we offer the course.

Scheduling and formats of summer courses

To offer an attractive, balanced, and competitive schedule of courses we need to meet our students curriculum needs. That often has not been done at JCU or nationally—instead summer schedules have been rather haphazardly created from what faculty wanted to teach, and when they wanted to teach it. There are a number of ways to be more intentional in creating our schedule. We are happy to report that this summer's schedule has been formed more intentionally, based on an analysis of petitions filed

by students for summer transfer credits. We should also base summer course offerings on analysis of courses for which there is unmet demand during the year (those that closed early in the fall or spring registration cycles). If we don't offer the courses that students need, they will take them elsewhere and seek transfer credit.

Summer sessions nationally are driven by the schools' own students. Typically, 85 percent or more of enrollments are from their own matriculated students. For this reason, we don't think that we should be particularly concerned about scheduling courses in order to attract transient students, with two possible exceptions.

First, because health-related majors are the most likely to take summer classes, and because we have excellent pre-health programs and facilities, we might give some consideration to attracting pre-health students who attend schools outside the Cleveland area but live in Cleveland in the summer. Case presently does so with some success. Second, we might give consideration to giving specific attention to high school students entering college in the fall. It would be fairly easy to contact students coming to JCU in the fall as well as those students who applied to JCU, were accepted, but chose to go elsewhere. Penn State has been mentioned as having success with such students.

Nationally on-line courses are increasing enrollments, but it seems that this increase often is at the expense of a decline in traditional face-to-face course enrollments. While we think that on-line courses should be part of the mix of summer sessions, we recommend a thoughtful approach to their expansion. Student survey data indicates a preference for hybrid courses (combining some online instruction with face-to-face class meetings) over pure online. We think that faculty and departments should particularly consider online formats for more advanced major courses, as they could be taken by our students spending the summer outside of the Cleveland area who otherwise would need to take summer courses at another institution. They would also be students already known by faculty members in most cases. Nationally, juniors are the most likely students to take summer courses, and they could be well served by being able to take courses in their fields.

We currently have 5 summer terms (1, 2, 3, A, B). Faculty also have the option to craft schedules to suit particular needs (usually shorter terms). Courses are typically scheduled to meet for 42 hours, as in the academic year. We don't see a need to dramatically change the term schedule, as it is fairly typical of summer sessions and allows for flexibility, which is an important attribute of summer classes. Faculty and departments may need to give greater attention to scheduling details however; eg it is best to schedule classes needed by seniors to graduate in Summer 1; it is best to schedule classes in the morning or the evening for most students' schedules; it is best to schedule classes designed for teachers in Summer 2 or Summer 3 (but even Summer 3 is problematic as it extends past the time many teachers must return to school). As we take advantage of hybrid classes and more flexible schedule formats, we also need to be more flexible with contact hour requirements. Because of the complexity of summer scheduling, we think a Summer Session Coordinating Committee would be very helpful to departments in planning their schedules more intentionally and assuring that class schedules meet credit hour requirements in accordance with accrediting standards.

Faculty compensation and incentives

We currently compensate faculty at the rate of 2.5% of their annual base salary per credit hour (or 7.5% for a typical 3-credit course). From what we have learned, this seems to be on the low side—per course compensation equal to one month's annual salary (8.3%) seems to be the norm. Currently, the minimum number of students required for a course to run varies according to the instructor's salary (and a relatively small salary overhead charge). Compensation levels are such that many courses may now be allowed to run with 3-4 students, but other courses may require significantly more. It would seem reasonable to balance compensation and tuition such that courses would "break even" at about 6 students

We recommend that the Faculty Council Compensation Committee study the issue. It may make sense to move to a different salary model for summer courses, compensating at a flat rate per course. This could have the effect of raising summer compensation levels for most faculty and allow the setting of standard student minimums for all courses. The danger of changing compensation to a fixed rate is that some departments might have additional difficulty securing faculty to teach summer courses. Keeping the current model of basing the summer teaching stipend on a percent of the faculty's member annual contract, we could move to a more variable system, setting a base stipend with graduated increases up to the contract level, dependent on student enrollment, allowing a common minimum enrollment for all courses. The compensation model is a handbook issue, and would need to be approved by a majority of all faculty eligible to vote.

A related issue, which we also recommend that the Compensation Committee include in a study of summer compensation, is how faculty are compensated for students in course who are not paying because of family tuition benefits. Currently those students are not counted towards course minimums. If a course does not meet its minimum enrollment, faculty are offered a pro-rated stipend based on "paying students." We think this policy needs to be examined, as this has the effect of placing the burden for paying for a university benefit on individual faculty members.

In those departments where it has been more difficult to secure full-time faculty to teach in the summer we recommend that allowing faculty to teach a summer course (or courses) in place of an academic year course (or courses) be considered. As long as regular academic year responsibilities such as advising and committee work are maintained, we think that such arrangements can be made informally by chairs and deans, and do not require any formal change in policies. It could provide an incentive for faculty to consider teaching in the summer by allowing more time for research or other activities during the academic year. Additional incentives could also take the form of sharing increases in summer revenues with departments, allowing departments to augment the funds they have available to support faculty.

Course development grants could also serve as an additional incentive to more fully developing the summer curriculum. They should support the development of "summer versions" of course for which there is a documented student demand but that we are not currently offering, as well as the development (and redevelopment of existing courses) as online or hybrid courses. We recommend that the Faculty Council Committee on Research, Service, and Faculty Development examine how faculty development can better serve creating a more comprehensive summer course offering schedule.

Tuition, fees, and discounts

JCU summer tuition is \$700/credit hour (compared to \$980 during the academic year for part-time study). This amounts to \$2100 for a typical 3-credit hour course. Little financial assistance or aid is available for summer study (generally only those students who have unexpended aid from the academic year due to study abroad or a full-time internship have significant financial aid opportunities). The undergraduate “discount rate” for summer courses is 10%, compared to 50%+ during the academic year. Thus, through direct cash payments or loans, students taking summer classes are paying more for a summer course than for a course during the academic year (\$1900 compared to about \$1500 after accounting for discounts).

Students have opportunities to take summer courses at many nearby schools for significantly less money. Cuyahoga Community College and Lakeland Community College tuition and fees for a 3-credit course are \$355 for an Ohio resident. Cleveland State University is \$1,119. Kent State is \$1275 (incl. fees). Hiram College is \$390 per credit hour, or \$1170 for a 3-credit course.

While it is clear that we cannot come close to matching community college fees, that is not the case with state universities. It should not be an unreasonable goal to reduce the net costs to students to taking a course at JCU in the summer to an amount that is between the amount charged by state universities and that which students pay for academic year courses at JCU after discount rates are factored in (e.g. a target of \$1300). That could be accomplished in a number of different ways. One would be an additional general tuition discount (as CWRU has done). Another would be to give students full or partial summer credit for “unused” credit hours from their academic year tuition. Additional strategies that are being used at other schools include targeted scholarships (e.g. \$500 per course for students with a 3.0 or better GPA), “free” credit hours for students taking more than a certain number of credit hours (e.g. register for 6 credit hours but pay for 4, 12 credit hours for the price of 8). These latter strategies have the benefit of protecting base revenues. We might also consider giving summer tuition discounts to part-time employees and their families who currently receive no tuition benefits. Discounting summer tuition is not a new approach. We already offer a general discount of 30% on “sticker” price. CWRU offers summer tuition at a 50% discount. Fordham’s academic year credit-hour rate of \$1308 is discounted to \$760 in the summer.

One strategy that we have tried is to offer a reduced room rate to students taking summer courses. We are not convinced that this has been particularly effective, although it has offered some students benefits and has probably encouraged a few students to register for courses who have other primary reasons for being on campus during the summer. We don’t think it has been effective for several reasons. First, there are not many students who have taken advantage of it. Second, it is hard to enforce. We have heard anecdotal references to students living on campus in the summer but taking classes at other schools. Third, it’s not particularly directed at the students we should see as our prime market: our matriculated students whose home residences are nearby or who have made their own off-campus living arrangements. We recommend that provisions for affordable on-campus housing be maintained, but that discounts be redirected toward tuitions and fees. When a stronger student base is reestablished we might revisit the issue of housing and students services.

We recommend that the ad hoc committee be maintained to work directly with the Provost and the Vice Presidents for Enrollment and Business to model alternative pricing strategies, with a goal of reaching a net cost to students of about \$1300 per course. Part of this modeling should include consultation with the Faculty Council Compensation Committee on compensation and minimum class size.

Academic policies related to transfer credit

There are many good reasons to accept courses for general elective, core, and major or minor credit from other colleges and universities. Students may be involved in study abroad programs, or they may choose to take course in a different university or city to broaden their educational experiences, or, most commonly, they may go home during the summer and want to take courses near their home. For these reasons, JCU has maintained relatively open transfer policies, accepting a variety of courses from a variety of institutions not only for general elective credit, but for core and specific program (ie majors, minors, concentrations) credit. The courses must be approved by department chairs and the Dean's office, who verify that the course is equivalent to a John Carroll course.

The problem is that many students are taking courses at other institutions in the Cleveland area during the summer and transferring the credit to their program requirements at JCU. An analysis of petitions filed by students for summer transfer credit shows that 74% were for courses at schools within Northeast Ohio, and that 56% were for courses comparable to those being offered at JCU in the same summer. There are a variety of reasons that contribute to this loss of our own students. One is that our offerings have often not included the courses the student most needed to take. A second is even if we have offered it, it may not be offered at a convenient time. A third is cost—as noted above there are a variety of lower-priced alternatives for students in the area.

We take it as a presumption that if a student could take a course at JCU in the summer (considering offerings, scheduling, and price), it would be better for the student as well as the institution. We think most students would agree as well. But until we institute changes in our summer sessions (offerings, scheduling, and price) such that JCU is a reasonable summer choice for most of our students, it will be difficult to make much headway into recapturing those students we are losing in the summer.

We do, however, recommend that the Faculty Council Committee on Academic Policies should begin a consideration of some general guidelines and criteria for accepting transfer credit for core and program requirement credit. We should consider requiring students to explain how a course taken at an institution other than John Carroll will benefit their program and why it should be accepted in place of a JCU course. This will easily allow approval of study abroad requests or requests made to accept credit from colleges and universities in other locations, as well as request to transfer credit from local institutions for courses which students are not able to take at John Carroll. We also think that the student's advisor should need to approve the petition, or at least indicate that the student has talked to the advisor, so that we have some assurance that alternative courses have been considered.

Summary

We think a more robust undergraduate summer session would serve the faculty, our students, and the institution well. To achieve this will require coordinated efforts aiming at providing the courses students need, making it more reasonable and affordable to expect our students to be able to take courses at JCU rather than other institutions, and significant marketing to our students as well as to potential transient students.

Recommendations

- 1. Create a Summer Session Coordinating Committee, chaired by the Director of Summer Sessions, with an elected faculty majority (one member from each division) and members from the Enrollment Division, Academic Administration, Student Affairs, and the Student Union. The Committee will be charged with developing and marketing the summer 2013 schedule.**
- 2. The Faculty Council Committee on Research, Service, and Faculty Development should examine how faculty development can better serve creating a more comprehensive summer course offering schedule.**
- 3. Faculty compensation issues related to summer should be referred to the Faculty Council Compensation Committee.**
- 4. The Ad Hoc committee should be maintained to work directly with the Provost and the Vice Presidents for Enrollment and Business to model alternative pricing strategies, with a goal of reaching a net cost to students of about \$1300 per course. Part of this modeling should include consultation with the Faculty Council Compensation Committee on compensation and minimum class size.**
- 5. The Faculty Council Committee on Academic Policies should begin a consideration of general guidelines and criteria for accepting transfer credit for core and program requirement credit.**