

How to Unlock the Hidden Capacity of Your Campus

Colleges and universities nationwide are struggling to balance enrollment growth, physical space limitations, and student success pressures. How can institutions manage fixed resources to address these challenges?

College is more accessible than ever before. Our industry has become very good at attracting, enrolling, and financing students with the aptitude and drive to pursue a degree. While economic recovery and demographic factors have slowed enrollment growth in the last few years, growth still exists. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, enrollments at public and private non-profit four-year colleges increased by 0.3 percent and 1.3 percent, respectively, this past year.

While the overall growth figures may not be a call to action, many regions and individual institutions are still seeing enrollment spikes. Additionally, many institutions feel they are understaffed

for existing enrollment levels. As a result, administrators nation-wide are searching for ways to meet the needs of their students with shrinking resources.

Faculty struggle to find appropriate rooms during prime teaching times that meet their changing pedagogical needs.

What can be done when it feels like there are too many students and not enough space or faculty resources?

Physical plant additions and upgrades are easy to suggest but are also difficult to get approved and funded. Full-time faculty lines, not growing on most campuses, are being replaced by adjunct instruction.



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Why Care About Academic Scheduling?

There are too many students vying for too few seats in required sections. This directly, negatively impacts degree completions, and there are other implications as well.

Oversubscribed and Cancelled Offerings Wreak Havoc on the Student Experience. These issues can create an impression that the school

doesn't care about its students. This negative student experience frequently spreads via social media and word-of-mouth.

Students Lose Interest, Fall Behind and Might Leave. If students don't have access to needed courses, they may reduce their overall course loads, and eventually fall behind. This may add semesters, or even years, to their graduation timelines. Some will even drop out.

Completion Has Gained Visibility and Created Accountability. For decades, students expected to navigate the tricky straits of schedules and degree planning on their own. Now families expect institutions to provide guidance and guarantees for timely completion.

The academic scheduling and the resource allocation challenge is more apparent than ever. In a highly competitive marketplace with rising demand, constrained budgets, and aging facilities, how can you do more with less?

The answer lies in smarter scheduling – it's that obvious and that elusive. Most institutions have unused faculty and classroom capacity. If you look closely, there are probably enough quality rooms, teaching timeslots, and faculty to meet student needs. The key is understanding those needs and allocating those resources accordingly.

Academic Scheduling Levers You Can Pull to Maximize Resources on Your Campus

While some strategic initiatives can be difficult to measure, data-driven academic scheduling shows institutions exactly where they stand and what they can do about it. Knowing, analyzing and discussing the data is an exercise in transparency that can lead to real change and increased scheduling capacity.

1. Introduce the Concept of "Institutional Space." Institutional space allows a campus to do the greatest good for the greatest number of students. Departments and instructors may have preferences and designated spaces, but the space utilization discussion should be framed by the impact it has on the students and families the campus serves. Develop a scheduling policy and a transparent process for using institutional space that ensures that quality and capacity are central priorities. Creating and monitoring schedules from an institutional perspective enables all stakeholders

to view room availability, mitigate conflicts, and equitably share prime rooms during prime times.

- 2. Align Classroom Size with Course Enrollments.** Capacity is wasted in a variety of ways. One of the most common is under-utilized space. When small classes are held in large classrooms, capacity is wasted. Simply matching room sizes with course enrollments will free up more space immediately and increase scheduling capacity.
- 3. Minimize Low Enrollment Sections.** If a section historically attracts only a small number of students, that could be an indication that too many seats are offered in that course or alternative courses. Removing sparsely populated sections to more efficiently use resources, frees up the room or instructor for another course that's in high demand. Ideally, enrollments for a course should fall between 70 and 95 percent of the seats offered. Analyzing historical enrollment data can help a campus determine if strategic changes should be made to the schedule.
- 4. Limit Primetime with Off-Grid Scheduling.** Instructors and students all want the most convenient times and rooms. However, schedule conflicts for both arise when too many sections are scheduled in primetime or off-grid slots. Spreading schedules across the week gives more students more options to get a full schedule and meet other obligations (like work). Off-grid scheduling wastes capacity and needlessly increases scheduling conflicts. Enforcing policies to limit both are highly effective ways to improve both efficiency and student time-to-completion.

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Eliminating Inefficiencies and Driving Completions

In the end, the academic scheduling process should feel less like roulette and more like chess – based on strategy, resource management and sound decision-making. Students and faculty deserve fair and balanced schedules that meet their needs and preferences. In return, improving the alignment of faculty to student needs enables campuses to save on instructional costs by reducing unnecessary sections.

Strategic scheduling is one of the best ways to counter flat budgets, enrollment fluctuations, and completion pressures. Institutions that do it effectively will create a better student experience and position themselves for long-term financial sustainability. Those that don't will be left behind.

Set your institution and your students up for success. Strategically allocate your faculty and space, and unlock the hidden capacity of your campus.

At Ad Astra Information Systems, we help higher education institutions think strategically about their academic schedules and create plans that optimize resources and design student-friendly course schedules. We work with institutions of all sizes, helping them achieve significant gains in scheduling efficiencies and cost savings. Find out more about Ad Astra Information Systems' scheduling solutions; visit us at AAIS.com or contact Cindy Sullivan at CSullivan@AAIS.com.

