

Undergraduate Curriculum Planning Framework

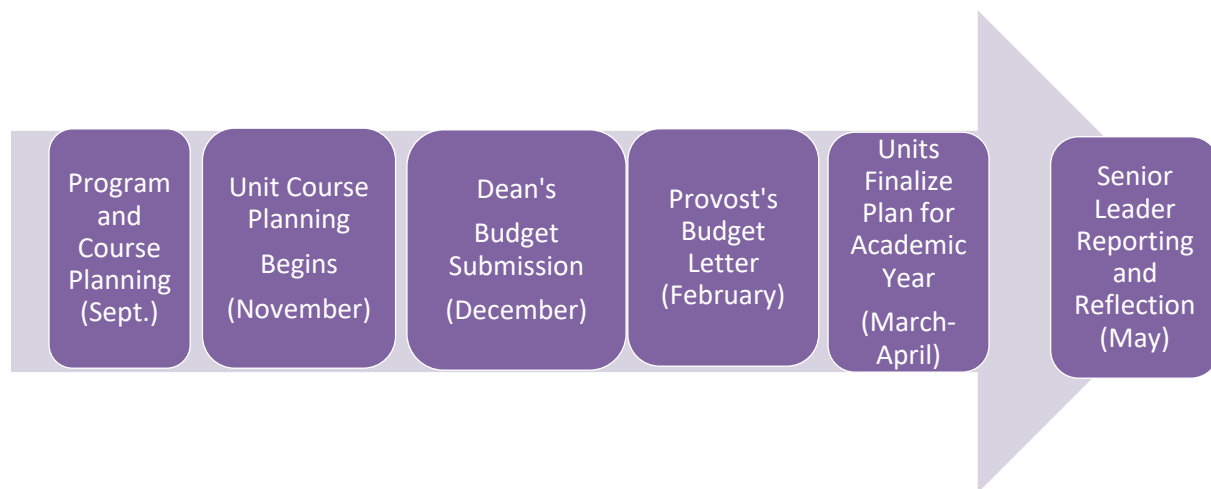
Introduction

Western prides itself on a transformative student experience. Our programs strive to be current, relevant and meaningful, evolving with the disciplines we teach. We will use our teaching resources in the most responsible way to ensure that we equip students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to advance meaningful careers and, at the same time, carve out resources for innovations in our fields. We carefully balance program requirements with encouraging student choice, and we build programs that combine prerequisites with open access to all students.

The Undergraduate Curriculum Planning Framework takes existing best practices in course planning from across the Faculties and makes them available to all academic leaders. Taken together, course planning is part of a broader strategy to examine curriculum and programs to ensure offerings remain compelling to students, relevant to employers, and financially sustainable.

The Program Planning and Resource Cycle

Course planning has always been a central part of our existing planning cycle.



Program and Course Planning (September)

Following our customary practices, Institutional Planning and Budgeting (IPB) collects data on class size, modules and enrolment, and retention and graduation rates. A review of this data is the basis for each Dean's annual budget submission in November and the Provost's budget recommendation in February. Data includes multi-year enrolment trends at the course and program levels. A review of this data informs teaching plans and course programming. Data-informed program and course planning is the norm across universities in the country, as institutions seek to make the best use of their resources and optimize student outcomes.

Unit Course Planning (begins in November)

Data on program and course enrolments and student retention and graduation can inform conversations around faculty member teaching and the development of a schedule of offerings for the coming summer and academic year. A review of enrolment trends can spark consideration of strategies for optimizing course enrolments. The goal is not to cancel classes, but to be proactive and plan course offerings so that we offer the appropriate number of courses for the students we have. This may entail offering courses in a cycle, every other year, or redesign to generate student demand. Programs may also need to consider course content/ title/market overlap if classes are under-enrolled: Are we offering too many course choices relative to student interest and module enrolment? The following strategies may be beneficial in maximizing student enrolment in courses. Drawn from long-standing and successful practices from large and small programs across the Faculties (not everything will be relevant to every discipline), this list serves as a reference and resource to schedule and communicate course offerings:

Program Considerations

- What is the core of what we want a student to know or be able to do when they graduate?

Scheduling and Operations Considerations

- Identify courses that should not be scheduled in time conflict with other courses
- Consider student schedules and peak times for attracting students to your courses
- Avoid saturating elective offerings (offering the same elective from term to term, unless warranted by student demand)
- Indicate a realistic enrolment cap for the course
 - Students may perceive an under-enrolled course as unpopular and not register, creating a cycle of under-enrollment
- Offer a realistic number of electives relative to total module enrollees
- Offer both required and elective options every other year to ensure classes fill
- Combine sections or cross-list courses to offer courses in a sustainable way that reflects student demand

Communicating Course Offerings

- Review course outlines to ensure that all requirements are clearly stated for students
- Include key course information in program/department advertising of courses
- Specify course characteristics that will be helpful to students during registration
- Share course outlines with your advising teams

Budget Submission (December)

In preparation for their budget submissions, Deans review data on class sizes, course and modular enrolment, and student retention and graduation rates to support the Faculty's budget submission in December. The data facilitates decisions around the planned allocation of resources within a Faculty and any requests for additional resources to support areas of documented student demand and interest. As part of the budget submission, the narrative will provide an opportunity for reporting on action plans to address concerns raised in the review of data, such as historically under-enrolled courses or barriers to student progression.

Unit Review and Analysis for Department Chairs and Directors (April)

Many departments hold an annual retreat or meeting in the spring to reflect on and curate their programs and curriculum. This is an excellent opportunity to review curriculum, progression, and program data to inform potential changes requiring Senate approval. Here are questions that can inform reflection and planning:

- Based on modular enrolments, what revisions are necessary to make fourth-year capstone experiences meaningful and viable?
- Taking a student-centred approach, what is required to ensure our undergraduate students are well-rounded and can function in their chosen profession?
- What is the balance of required and elective courses in a module?
- How many courses are required for a module?
- Is there sufficient enrolment in required courses?
- Are there too many/too few required courses?
- Could these core courses be offered every other year?
- What is a prerequisite and why?
- How many students are in the module relative to the courses offered?
- Which parts of the program no longer attract students and should be withdrawn so we have room for innovation?
- What disciplinary developments and innovations should we introduce to keep programs current and relevant? What actions or proposals should be brought forward for Senate approval in the fall?

Guideline for Minimum Course Enrolment

Universities across Canada adopt various approaches to address class sizes in undergraduate courses. To maximize resources, peer institutions have established minimum class sizes and examined the cost of offering a course, while ensuring that students can access the courses they need to progress toward their degrees. For leaders, determining the minimum class size to justify offering a course involves a mix of financial, pedagogical, discipline-specific and institutional considerations. Factors include:

- Financial considerations: under the current external fiscal context and budget structure at Western, a direct-entry undergraduate course needs about 35 domestic tuition-paying students to be viable
- Program requirements and accreditation standards
- Pedagogical impact: the increased cost of offering smaller classes must be weighed against the benefits; the framework adopts a mix of class sizes, using large introductory courses and smaller upper-level courses for advanced or specialized topics

Under-enrolled courses make poor use of our resources and strain Faculty budgets; they can also impact the student experience. Normally, the following are the minimum direct-entry undergraduate class sizes to justify offering a course. Most programs will be operating overall with higher class sizes.

Course Level	Minimum Number of Students
1000 level	50
2000 level	40
3000 level	30
4000 level	15

Every effort should be made to use data and proactively make course and scheduling decisions to avoid cancelling under-enrolled classes. Course cancellations hurt Western's reputation, create undue stress for students and advisers and affect instructors. At the same time, it is paramount that we maximize our teaching-related resources.

Deans have the flexibility to make exceptions to these guidelines provided no more than 10% of undergraduate course offerings (in total) fall below these thresholds. Deans may consider overall Faculty/unit average class size in areas where a large enrolment course offsets a course that falls below class size guidelines and factors such as total students taught per instructor. Faculties may also establish minimums that are larger than those established for the university by this framework.

The above thresholds apply to direct-entry undergraduate courses. Deans are asked to carefully review second-entry undergraduate and graduate class sizes with the objective of optimizing class sizes in these two categories of courses.