Tech Snacks: Conversation with the Provost

Faculty are being asked to submit their course schedule to reflect what it would look like with zero overload for the coming semesters. There has been a lot of confusion from faculty about what this means for their programs, many of which rely heavily on faculty teaching in overload. This conversation with the Provost provided faculty with an opportunity to ask questions regarding this initiative, other course-related concerns, and address any other academic questions they may have.

What is the purpose of zero overload?

This initiative is the first step in trying to develop a more efficient process for course scheduling. Currently, the campus culture regarding course load shows that faculty are often defaulting to teach in overload because the courses are needed for their programs and students. This can cause the following:

- **Offering thousands more seats than needed:** MSUN is currently offering thousands more seats than our current student population is filling.
- **Low-Enrollment across sections:** With more courses offered, some sections may have low-enrollment. This causes students to be spread out across multiple course sections rather than fuller classes.
- **Courses get cut at the last minute:** When courses have low-enrollment, they are more likely to get cut, sometimes later than desired for faculty and students.
- **Students scramble for a new course:** When courses are cut at the last minute, students are often left with a need to find a new course, which can cause stress for them for multiple reasons, including staying on-track for degree completion and financial aid.
- **Faculty teaching in overload becomes the "norm":** When faculty are accustomed to teaching in overload, it becomes normal for them. This can help "hide" the need for more faculty lines in certain programs.

What are the next steps?

This zero overload initiative is the first step in a new approach to building the course schedule. After focusing on zero overload, the idea is that the schedule will be built based on additional need for students and programs. This approach will provide the several opportunities for faculty and students:

- **Highlight areas where additional faculty are needed:** If a particular subject area is constantly needing to teach in overload, it makes it clearer that an additional faculty line is needed.
- **Provide fuller class sizes:** Rather than having several courses offered with lower enrollment, providing less sections initially will help bring the course enrollment up, making the experience more well-rounded.
- **Build a culture of less courses being cut:** Right now, students and faculty often wait in limbo to see if their courses will run. This approach will (hopefully) start to build a culture that a class being offered is a class that will run.

General Faculty Questions & Concerns

What happens when a course isn't offered, but a program needs it?
A discussion took place regarding how faculty advisors can establish a more robust communication plan to ensure the courses that are needed will be offered. For example, the Gen Ed faculty will need to know which Gen Eds are actually required for a degree program. Some ideas include:

- **Having faculty advisors reach out and ask if a course can be added before sending a student to enroll at a different university.**
- **After building a robust, efficient schedule, keep the baseline every year and adjust as needed.**

What happens when a course is full, but a student needs it for graduation?
There were some concerns about what a schedule with less sections would mean for students who register after the course cap is reached. What will the process look like for adding additional sections? The idea is to reflect based on student need, which would rely heavily on the waitlists.

- **Encourage students to get on the waitlist to indicate demand for an additional section.**
- **There will hopefully be a cutoff deadline, which allows students to know if an additional section will be added or if additional arrangements should be made.**