



University
of Victoria
Social Sciences

Strategic Enrolment Management in the Social Sciences

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Presentation for Chairs and Directors Budget Retreat

May 30, 2012

Background and context

The Basic Framework:

Targets

Defined Teaching Capacity (DTC)

Workload Substitution Guidelines

Using DTC to manage teaching programs

Undergraduate Strategic Enrolment Plan 2010

Capacity analysis and planning for 2012-13 budget cuts

Quality concerns and *non-strategic* enrolment management:

Monitoring student outcomes

Maintaining academic standards

Raising admission GPAs

Background

- I am giving this presentation as a member of the working group Reeta established to consider Smart Growth – what we’ve been doing in Social Sciences has a lot in common with the strategies David Attis discussed during his talk in March, many of you were there
- Our methods constitute one set of tools for strategic enrolment management; this isn’t the only way to approach these issues, each unit needs to do it in a way that suits its own circumstances – on the other hand, we’ve been doing this for a few years now, and helped us increase enrolment and then deal with the call for budget cuts in 2012-13
- Other things we’ve learned: looking at the allocation of teaching resources in these ways helps us improve program quality *and* increase enrolment: they go together
- And it helps us deal with the inevitable ups and downs in provincial funding – one of the key systems we use (DTC) was developed in early 2000s, an earlier period of austerity that preceded the boom years of the late 2000s
- I hope this period of austerity will eventually end too, and having effective systems in place will help us use any additional resources wisely

Context

- SOSC has to meet high undergraduate enrolment targets with relatively small number of faculty (high student-faculty ratio)
- We’re always under pressure to maintain quality in face of large student numbers through careful allocation of teaching resources
- this meant “strategic enrolment management” was an issue for us long before budget cuts
- the normal teaching load in SOSC is four courses/year plus three graduate student supervisions, may be different in other Faculties
- widely varying circumstances of individual faculty members, plus pressure for course releases to accommodate research, service, and extraordinary graduate student supervision
- scale (3000+ undergraduate EETs, 400+ graduate FTEs, ~ 125 regular faculty) and complexity (seven units, many programs)

The basic framework: Targets, Defined Teaching Capacity (DTC), and Workload Substitution Guidelines

- I need to explain this first, then explain how we use the framework for strategic enrolment management

Targets

- annual undergraduate and graduate targets set by Provost
- Faculty made a strategic decision in 2004 to establish *internal* enrolment targets for each unit – set them ~ 5% above what's needed to achieve VPAC targets, since Faculty needs to meet VPAC targets even if some units miss their targets
- Units have primary responsibility for allocating teaching resources to ensure they meet targets and maintain quality
- Role of Deans office: sets basic framework and targets; exercises oversight; provides guidance, advice, identification of best practices, encouragement – and we do the kind of analysis I'll discussing today
- try to avoid micro-management except if we see problems

Defined Teaching Capacity (DTC)

- a key tool we use to manage allocation of faculty teaching resources to meet enrolment targets and ensure program quality – and to ensure fairness and transparency: these principles are key to getting faculty buy-in, especially when times are tough
- DTC records each faculty member's teaching responsibilities and workload substitutions – starting point is normal teaching load of four courses per year (plus graduate supervision) for tenure-track faculty, and eight courses per year for senior instructors – but lots of variation in response to individual circumstances
- DTC allows units and Dean's office to keep track of all special arrangements, to ensure transparency and fairness – “details” worksheet (not shown) explains each special arrangement
- We also use DTC to calculate how many sessional courses each unit can offer – the “defined teaching capacity” for the unit is based on the number of regular-faculty positions, plus a modest number linked to historical summer-session offerings
- we determine the number of sessional courses each unit can offer by totalling up the number of regular-faculty course releases that can be backfilled, plus the summer sessional allocation
- [we do this instead of linking each sessional appointment to a specific regular-faculty member's teaching releases – that would be way too complicated, and wouldn't account for regular faculty who carry forward teaching obligations or course releases from one academic year to the next]

- in addition to DTC, we have “enrolment management funds” to allow units to offer additional sections when they face strong student demand and long waitlists, and can find qualified sessionals (quality is key)
- graduate courses: when programs were small, not all units gave teaching credit for graduate courses because enrolments were too low – but graduate expansion means a significant part of our teaching capacity has been shifted to the graduate level – normally expect minimum enrolment of about five students in a grad course for it to count as part of the faculty member’s four-course obligation (otherwise offer as directed reading)

Workload Substitution Guidelines

- before showing how we use DTC to ensure enrolment targets are met and program quality is maintained, need to discuss WSG
- we needed a clear and transparent system for determining how to deal with a flood of requests for teaching releases justified in widely varying and creative ways – and also to deal with faculty members who aren’t very active in research, and need to substitute teaching for research
- basic principles: recognize that workload substitution is often justified and faculty members can contribute to the University mission in different ways; that the unit still needs to meet collective teaching obligations (targets and quality); we need to ensure fairness and transparency
- chair or director has authority to approve a first course release because they’re in the best position to assess relative workloads and the teaching needs of the unit – but any course release beyond that must be approved by the Dean – and Dean decides whether to backfill course releases that aren’t externally funded
- another important principle: workload substitution should not remove faculty members from teaching large enrolment and core courses; as a research university, we need to provide all students with exposure to research-active faculty
- WSG available at:
http://socialsciences.uvic.ca/faculty_resources/documents/WorkloadSubstitutionGuidelinesApril2006.pdf

Using DTC to manage teaching programs

- first, DTC allows us to figure out how many sessional courses each unit can offer within the budget set by the Provost – it gives us a basis for deciding how to respond to requests for sessional funding – otherwise could be a huge source of debate and strain on the Faculty’s budget

- DTC also lets Chairs, Director, and Dean's office quickly see whether unit is allocating resources in a fashion likely to meet enrolment targets and maintain quality – we look at things like:
 - What courses are regular faculty teaching? Should include 100 and 200 level courses, not just low-enrolment 400 level seminars and grad courses
 - Is unit offering a reasonable mix of large-enrolment courses and low-enrolment courses aimed at giving students high-quality experiences?
- We encourage Chairs and Director to use the DTC for their own planning, starting in early fall, before timetable submissions – and it changes often as plans change – we ask units to update their DTCs regularly and post each new version on a Sharepoint site so Dean's office can review (myself and our AO, Wendy Major, who plays a big role in the whole process)

Strategic Enrolment Plan 2010

- During late 2000s, enrolment in Social Sciences was slightly below target despite careful enrolment management
- This, plus changes in the BC post-secondary system, led the Faculty to develop an Undergraduate Strategic Enrolment Plan (USEP) – available on our website:
<http://www.socialsciences.uvic.ca/documents/SocialSciencesEnrolmentPlan2010-13.pdf>
- Drafted in 2009-10, in close consultation with units and the Registrar's Office – then-Associate Dean Margot Wilson took the lead (she's now Associate Dean in Grad Studies)
- Goal: improve recruitment and retention of outstanding undergraduate students in a rapidly changing competitive environment
- It highlighted high-quality academic programming and increased student engagement as the keys to meeting enrolment targets: quality and enrolment go together – high-quality programs will help us recruit and retain better students – I'll come back to this at the end
- The Strategic Enrolment Plan included a wide range of recommendations for the Faculty, for departments, and for UVic
- Some that have been implemented include:
 - Enhancing the first-year experience and first-year student engagement, by: creating tutorial sections for large classes (supported by increased TA funding that came with graduate expansion); and by

encouraging more of our leading researcher scholars to teach at the intro level

- Providing enriching educational experiences such as field schools, a new community-service learning course, and new interdisciplinary programs
 - Communicating more effectively with potential and current students, by means of improved websites and greater use of social media
 - Departments and the School really engaged with the issues, strongly encouraged by the Dean – they’ve been revising and renewing curriculum – and developing their own measures to maintain and improve the quality of their programs and engage more effectively with students
- Enrolment trends suggest these efforts have paid off: enrolments were slightly below the Provost’s target, are now 10% *above* target – perhaps too successful, challenge now is too many students (more on this success below)
 - We can also see quality improvement in some data Tony Eder provided to Deans: % of EETs taught by regular faculty increased from 50% in 2009 to 65% in 2011 – and the % of EETs taught by regular faculty is now higher than the % of sections, means our Chairs and Director have succeeded in persuading regular faculty to teach large lower-level classes
 - This is not meant to slight sessional instructors: many are very good teachers – but it’s a problem for overall program quality if students have to rely too heavily on sessional instructors: change from year-to-year, students are less likely to develop meaningful connections with research faculty, mentorship and letters of reference for careers and grad school (aside from issues of equity, small number of privileged research profs plus lots of sessionals doing all the teaching)

Basic point from all of the above: SOSC has been doing strategic enrolment management for years, and it works – brings us to present challenges

Capacity analysis and planning for 2012-13 budget cuts, 1.5% across-the-board

- Not many options for a Dean when have to cut budget, especially in a Faculty in which most money is spent on faculty and staff salaries
- basically only three: give up regular-faculty positions when people leave or retire; lay off support staff; cut the sessional budget
- In Social Sciences, the Dean, Chairs, and Director, decided we couldn’t afford to cut regular-faculty positions because student-faculty ratios were

already high, and we couldn't afford to cut support staff (already badly stretched)

- Instead, we decided to absorb 1.5% budget cut in the form of reduced funding for sessionals and EMF – traditional practice had been to fully backfill study leaves; instead, we would now backfill only 50% – would mean cutting approximately 50 sections out of a total of approximately 610
- This was a potentially risky move that could have a big impact on students and enrolments, we wanted to know what would happen – DTC and related systems enabled us to do so
- Key thing we needed to know: did we have enough existing unfilled capacity to absorb the reduced number of sessional offerings without hurting students? – looked at “capacity utilization”, which is how close actual enrolments are to the maximum capacity set for the course (the maximum capacity is set by the unit offering the course, based on pedagogical and workload issues)
- Examining capacity utilization would let us know how many courses had room for more students – we also wanted to know how many low-enrolment classes we offer, and whether they are necessary to meet program needs
- We had to make sure students could meet their program requirements, and we wanted to maintain enough high-impact but expensive courses to ensure a high-quality educational experience – eg, field schools and capstone seminars
- These are the kinds of questions David Attis raised when he was here in March, really resonated with what we were trying to do, and emphasized the need for information systems that would give us the information we needed to make smart choices
- Capacity analysis showed we were already running a pretty tight ship; in most units, average capacity utilization in SOSC units was 80-85% in 2011-12, very few low-enrolment undergraduate classes (less than 15-20)
- Initial comparison of enrolment data for 2011-12 with planned course offerings for 2012-13 suggested enrolment would decline, though the Faculty likely would still meet its target – because we had a cushion: actual enrolments in 2011-12 were 10% above target – meant we could cut capacity and still meet target – but then UVic wouldn't meet its target, because other Faculties are below-target
- That scenario was averted with infusion of one-time funds from Provost to permit the Faculty to maintain capacity at roughly the 2011-12 level

- But the effort revealed a problem: the information we needed is located in separate databases and takes a great deal of effort to compile, with lots of risk of error and missing data
- If anyone is interested in doing this, I can show you how we did it
- I've shared what we learned with Tony, and Institutional Planning and Analysis is developing new reports that will give everyone access to this kind of data – eventually you won't have to calculate capacity utilization and make enrolment projections yourself, though if you want to examine capacity utilization now you will have to do it yourself

Conclusions: We can't avoid managing enrolment, have to be strategic in how we do it – if we don't manage enrolment strategically, it will be managed for us: UVic will have to set lower admission standards to meet its provincial targets – brings us to my final comments:

Quality problems associated with *non-strategic* enrolment management

- First, we need to pay close attention to measures of student experience and outcomes – things like CES scores, National Survey of Student Engagement, Student Outcomes surveys conducted by BC government – keep track, ensure student experience is improving (I've checked NSSE and Student Outcomes, but Strategic Enrolment Plan is too recent to have affected them)
- Grading standards – a big concern of mine, given what I've seen happening in some parts of University – we need to maintain quality and level of academic challenge, and to prevent units from trying to meet enrolment targets by eroding standards
- An example: profs from another Faculty who came to my 100-level class to advertise their courses: watch popular movies, no prerequisites, no term paper, no final exam – in an upper-level class! – film studies can be useful, but lack of requirements showed this was intended as an enrolment booster
- students know which courses are “GPA boosters”, typically upper-level service classes units offer to students enrolled in other programs – the credibility of our degrees means we have to monitor this closely, especially at level of Deans – strong students want to be challenged and the level of academic challenge is a key factor in their decisions about what university to attend – means strict standards are necessary to attract strong students
- I want to emphasize: a strategic focus on quality will help us avoid the alternative of relaxed admission standards to meet provincial government targets

- Unlike the professional Faculties, SOSC, Humanities, and Science do not control their admissions cut-offs, which are decided centrally
 - In recent years, UVic has had to reduce the high-school GPA cut-off to meet provincial targets in the face of competition from more and more universities in BC
 - SOSC wants to work with other Faculties to improve recruitment and retention, so admission standards go up for everyone – our faculty members are frustrated their efforts to maintain and enhance quality haven't led to higher admission standards and they have to deal with so many weak students
 - The ability to attract stronger students and raise admission standards is a key incentive we can offer faculty to buy-in to strategic enrolment management – though it's a collective action problem, we all have to work together so we can all benefit from having better-qualified students in our classes
- Reiterate: Strategic enrolment management and quality go together