

Provide accountability for space usage with scheduling tool

With funds in short supply, it's more important than ever to account for every resource on your campus. That's especially true with space usage.

In North Carolina, where Western Carolina University is located, institutions are required to report their space utilization to the system's general administration. Public institutions in a number of states must do the same.

But even if you aren't required to do this by law, understanding how your institution uses space can help you use it more effectively.

Tools that can help your institution prove accountability for space usage — while you complete the critical task of room scheduling — are already in use at hundreds of institutions around the country.

CollegeNet's R25, S25 and X25 allow users to plan space allocation and to be transparent about their use of space.

Western Carolina University first used R25 to schedule classes for fall 2008, said university registrar Larry Hammer. Before that, he did room scheduling by hand and started by rolling classes forward, he said.

The tool has made scheduling much easier during building renovations, he said. WCU is renovating buildings in succession. That means that classes must be moved out of the buildings being updated.

With greater demands on space as buildings were taken offline, WCU's provost identified spreading classroom use throughout the day and across the days of the week as a strategy to use the space more effectively, Hammer said.

The provost gave academic departments targets for scheduling classes outside the 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. time frame.

To give the departments a snapshot of where they stood compared with their scheduling goals, Hammer created reports using X25 that let them see the ratios of classes scheduled in different times.

"The key is having comparative data," Hammer said. It takes a while to create that, he added. Since changes occur between the time the schedule is originally created and when classes start, he and the departments worked with university planning to determine when the snapshots should be taken.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

This regular feature offers tips, suggestions and guidance to help you manage your technology systems and staff.

Learn basics about CollegeNet's products

CollegeNet's Series 25 includes three primary products.

R25 is the database component of the system. More than 800 institutions across the country use it, said Julia Noonan, CollegeNet's vice president of sales. It is compatible with all student information systems that campuses use, whether they are commercial or homegrown.

S25 is the scheduling component, which includes an algorithm to optimize space usage, Noonan said. About 95 percent of R25 users also have S25.

X25 is a reporting and master planning tool that enables institutions to analyze the effectiveness of space usage and ensure they are making the best use of new construction or renovation funds. More than 125 institutions have adopted it, including more than 50 percent of new licenses, Noonan said. "It takes your scheduling to a whole new realm," she added.

Depending on how many people on campus participate in scheduling, institutions can assign one or more staff members access to the tools. The security protocols

are written so that each staff member can be limited to the area for which he has scheduling responsibilities, she said. The same is true of systems that use the tools — scheduling can be completed centrally or on individual campuses.

Also, within the last year, the Series 25 products became available through a hosted delivery method. At many institutions, software updates are installed by overworked IT departments, Noonan said. It may take them six to nine months to install the updates. But with hosted software, the user has full advantage of updates as soon as they come out, without the added work of installing them, Noonan said.

Although the hosted option is new for the scheduling tools, CollegeNet has years of experience hosting software because of its applications business, she added.

Costs for the Series 25 products are based on the institution's full-time enrollment, Noonan said.

To learn more, visit http://corp.collegenet.com/depts/higher_ed/series/Scheduling_Overview. Contact Julia Noonan at jnoonan@collegenet.com. ■

For example, a newly hired faculty member might necessitate schedule changes.

Now that the scheduling system is working well, departments build their own schedules using the student information system. They indicate if a class needs a certain type of classroom.

Once the schedules are determined, Hammer and his staff run them through the R25 system to assign rooms. It takes about half a day to run the schedules, he said.

The Series 25 products have allowed the institution to adjust to contingencies caused by the economic downturn, Hammer said.

Enrollment increased significantly this fall. And last spring, Hammer realized it would be difficult to offer the same number of sections of some classes since fewer adjuncts would be teaching.

He allowed classes to exceed their usual sizes by 10 percent. Many of the rooms were large enough for additional desks. The staff reviewed the assignments to make sure the rooms could accommodate the number of students enrolled in each class.

Hammer reminded faculty members of the larger numbers before the first day and asked them to contact him if their rooms were too small. A few adjustments had to be made, but most of the room assignments worked out.

Bigger rooms that would accommodate large chemistry and biology courses were the most difficult to schedule, so it took some planning to make the times work, Hammer said.

Once the scheduling work is done, X25 makes it possible for Hammer to share room utilization information with anyone who wants to see it. To see how each room at WCU is scheduled, visit http://r25web.wcu.edu/wv3/wv3_servlet/urd/run/wv_space.DayList?evdt=0,spfilter=105819,lbviewmode=grid.

E-mail Hammer at hammer@email.wcu.edu. ■

Planning before construction helps get the most of limited dollars

When Western Carolina University started planning a new health sciences building, officials wanted to make sure the classrooms would accommodate the necessary classes.

"We did an analysis of those classes to make a recommendation to the architect about how big those classrooms needed to be," said Larry Hammer, university registrar. He used CollegeNet's X25.

"It's imperative if you're not flush with cash but you have repair or renovation money, every dime counts," said Marcia Daniel, associate vice president for client development for CollegeNet.

Often, the most articulate people on campus get the best space, Daniel said. "When you have your utilization in front of you, it takes the politics out of space allocation on campus."

X25 can be used to look at the entire campus plan, she said. For example, it can create a visual display that shows which buildings are used most, for example, Daniel said.

And using X25 can help with planning in other ways also, Daniel said. When presidents or provosts hear, "I want to graduate but I can't get the classes I need," they may not know how to respond. But when they see the graphics X25 produces, they understand just what the problem is.

And the tool is useful across state systems for reviewing accountability measures such as room utilization, parking and academic scheduling. That data can make a powerful political argument, Daniel said.

To learn more about using Series 25 products in statewide systems, contact Marcia Daniel at mdaniel@collegenet.com. ■

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