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‘Step Schedule’ Increases Classroom Utilization

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WESTERN KENTUCKY STATE COLLEGE has increased its classroom facilities by 57 per cent and has not spent a capital outlay dollar in bringing about this unusual transformation. We have a plan of better utilization, which we refer to as “step scheduling,” which has worked for us, and it is presented here in the hope that it may be of help to other colleges struggling with the problem of how to adjust to rising enrollment.

The enrollment at Western Kentucky State College has virtually doubled in the last six years, advancing from 1810 in the fall of 1954 to 3599 in the fall of 1960. Dr. Raymond L. Cravens, dean of the college since 1959, devised a plan, the sole purpose of which is better utilization of classrooms. And he executed the plan to full acceptance by both faculty and students.

One of the complicating factors in increasing utilization of classrooms is the traditional three-hour class which does not fit efficiently into a five-day week. As one solution to this problem, many colleges have for years scheduled classes on Saturday morning, but this solution was impractical at Western Kentucky since a large program for teachers had preempted a sizable number of rooms for extended periods on Saturday mornings.

As an alternative to the traditional Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday classes, the “step schedule” technic was developed during the 1959-60 school year. The idea was first tried in January 1960 on an experimental basis. The schedule was an immediate success and was formally adopted by the curriculum committee for institution-wide use beginning with the fall semester 1960.

This class schedule, which is illustrated in Chart 1, is premised on the assumption that “classes need not necessarily meet at the same hour every day.” Under this schedule plan, three-hour classes meet on Tuesday and Thursday at a regular hour but have a third irregularly scheduled meeting hour on another day. The present “step
Chart 1 illustrates the present "step schedule." "Step classes" are identified as A, B, C, and D and by shading. Chart 2 illustrates a possible "step schedule" with schedule," which contains four "step" periods, is considered to be a rather simple approach to the idea of irregularly scheduled class periods. Other arrangements are illustrated in Charts 2 and 3. Chart 2 shows a schedule with 14 class periods, and Chart 3 outlines a schedule with 15 possible class periods. Obviously many other schemes are possible.

The addition of the four "step" classes has in effect increased the classroom utilization at this college by 57 per cent, since the college had previously used only seven periods for its three-hour classes. Most of the Tuesday and Thursday periods were formerly used for two-hour classes and laboratories. The four "step" periods are now being used extensively in every department of the college.

In September 1960, Western was faced with the great challenge of a 24 per cent increase in enrollment. Despite the proportions of this problem, the college had very little difficulty through extensive use of the "step schedule" in absorbing this increased load on classroom facilities. The experience of the English department illustrates the fine utilization of classroom space made possible through the use of this "step schedule." Enrolling approximately 2500 students last fall, this department was able to schedule 66 class sections in six classrooms currently assigned to the department. Twenty-four of these sections were "step" classes. Only four English classes were scheduled for rooms other than the six assigned to the department. Other departments have achieved equally fine utilization.

The present "step schedule" places the irregular meeting hour for three of the "step" classes on Monday, as shown in Chart 1. It was felt that this would prevent confusion among the students and faculty since they could look forward to Monday as an irregular day. Very little confusion has been noted.

Some advantages of the "step schedule" are:

1. It facilitates the splitting of sections during registration by making it possible to schedule one regular and one "step" class at the same hour and in the same classroom.
2. It permits the utilization on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for laboratories, while at the same time permitting a student to take three-hour classes on the Tuesday and Thursday "step schedule."
3. It retains the three-hour per week student-teacher contact that some scheduling schemes do not permit.
4. It permits a more even distribution of the instructor's teaching load throughout the week.
5. It utilizes afternoons as well as mornings.
6. It is expansible, as shown in Charts 2 and 3.

At Western Kentucky State College, we have under construction a new science building that will greatly alleviate classroom shortage. We plan to break ground during the year for a combination classroom-gymnasium-auditorium building, which will provide us with 30 additional classrooms. Plans are being projected for the creation of new classroom facilities throughout the next decade. But no matter how fortunate this college may be in bringing new classroom facilities into existence, we are sure that Dean Craven's "step schedule" is here to stay. The college plans to open additional periods on the regular and on the "step schedule" with more complete use of the noon hour as the first planned expansion.

Our experience has proved the "step schedule" to be a workable solution to the problem of increasing the utilization of classroom facilities. We have found that the schedule has definite advantages, few disadvantages, and that it is popular with instructors and students alike. Refinement and expansion of this method of class scheduling is one of the college's important objectives, and we are confident that our "step schedule" will serve as one of our chief tools in meeting the challenge of the Sixties.