

## Managing Department Teaching

The courses that your unit offers affect the success affect student and faculty success in your department and School. Each department and School schedules courses differently (for some you as the Chair, you will be in the details while for others there are Program Directors who do the main scheduling) so this FAQ is meant to be general. As Chair, an important role is to ensure that your unit routinely offers the courses needed by students and are taught by faculty members or qualified instructors. With a range of courses and competing demands from students, faculty members, and your School, managing your department's teaching can become unwieldy and a logistical nightmare. Planning and developing clear policies that are passed down transparently as Chairs change ensures that your unit consistently offers high quality courses that foster effective learning and positive experiences for your students and faculty members.<sup>i</sup>

*Let's review a few suggestions:*

1. **Clear Policies. Follow department policies and procedures specifically related to teaching assignments for faculty members and if your department does not have these, collaborate with colleagues in accordance with unit bylaws to create them.** If your department doesn't already have onboarding conversations for new Chairs, reach out to former Chairs to ask about how they managed this. While not possible for new Chairs to do right away, as you gain experience in the role, consider creating policies and procedures to hand down to your successor. These policies and procedures need to address how required, elective, special topic seminars, and new courses are assigned and matched to faculty members' interests and expertise.
2. **Rutgers uses the CourseAtlas system** <https://scheduling.rutgers.edu/courseatlas>. Chairs can help faculty think about how to put their time in CourseAtlas and support block out times for the department. In many departments it is staff members who understand and access CourseAtlas and provide necessary information to faculty. Collaborating with staff will be key.
  - *Learn about Course Atlas* – what it can and can't do, not necessarily how to do it. Then, identify who in the department (usually a staff member but not always) will be the expert who understands both what and how.
  - *When using Course Atlas*, check your work in Course Atlas, and then check it again. Consider having more than one person check. For example, some departments have a staff member input what the Chair or Program Director gives them, then Chair and/or Program Director check the input.



3. **Pay close attention to equitable assignments and the impact of the courses that you assign to your early career faculty members' overall load.** It is important that your policies do not overburden junior faculty members with too many course preparations. Programs, departments and Schools will differ in their culture about expectations for early career faculty. Make sure you are clear about expectations related to curriculum contributions and leadership for promotions for all types of faculty. Consider making some of this more transparent both to future Chairs but also for faculty related to promotion expectations. More broadly, you might think through a number of different issues related to teaching for NTT and for TT faculty including balancing faculty member expertise and strengths with workload distribution.
  
4. **Weigh the impact of offering topical seminars and special courses on your unit's teaching resources.** Your unit's priority should be to offer courses that allow students to fulfill their degree requirements and are taught by faculty members with expertise in those course topics. Assess the value of offering special courses against the real costs to your unit's resources (e.g., hiring TAs or additional instructors to cover required courses because your faculty members are assigned to teach special seminars/courses). Be sure you obtain "real" course numbers for special topics courses that are taught repeatedly. Students often run up against total credit hour limits on special topic courses that can be counted towards their program requirements. Recognize differences between undergraduate and graduate teaching needs and assignments.
  - *Understand what resources and how, when, and why to request more.* As a corollary to the section above: departments and Schools will vary in access to resources related to staffing courses. Learn about the constraints and possibilities by asking questions of former Chairs and your Dean. Also relevant here is taking into consideration issues of sabbatical leaves, retirement, family leaves, sudden health issues that affect faculty teaching.
  
5. **Create well-defined procedures related to assigning teaching assistants, hiring additional instructors, hiring graders, and allocating appropriate spaces for each course.** Your procedures may include specific considerations such as the required minimum and maximum number for enrollment before a teaching assistant is assigned to a course or the nature of the course when assigning specific spaces for class meetings (e.g., conference room, studios, etc.). This will also assist you in ensuring that your unit is maximizing the available teaching spaces within and across each day of the week. As an example, consider using a survey to find out what instructors use TAs for and whether some might be replaced

by graders with minimum impact to class. Relevant to this is considering the difference between TA/IAs and graders, including mentoring expectations that may go along with TAs as well as expectations in some departments that TA assignments align in part with doctoral students' professional pathways. Some faculty already in your department may have expertise that allows them to teach across departments and while moving outside department silos can be complicated, it may be possible in some cases.

6. **Send confirmation of faculty members' teaching assignments well in advance of registration.** Whether you are sending confirmation to faculty members teaching the course or to a staff assisting with putting the schedule in the campus system, always ask for an acknowledgement or reply to your confirmation message. This practice can help you avoid costly miscommunications. Make sure to include day, time, delivery mode (in-person, online, hybrid course) not just course name.
7. **Routinely review the overall distribution of course offerings in your unit.** It is important to take a bird's eye view of your course offerings every semester to ensure that students have adequate access to courses that enable them to maintain their full-time status and successfully complete their degrees in a timely manner. Pay attention to how your courses cycle across semesters and years. This has a direct impact on course enrollments if students, their advisors, and faculty members can rely on the predictability of course offerings across semesters and years. For Chairs who have a Program Director who does scheduling, have conversations with them to make sure they are doing the above and get feedback about their bigger view of course offerings. Academic Advisors in your School are also great to check in with. Advisors often get the best feedback about problems with scheduling because they hear from the students who are having problems.
  - ***Have a plan, and then have a backup plan.*** Avoid looking at teaching semester-by-semester or year-to-year (if you can) and instead as allocation of resources. Build in redundancy in your expertise so that you have the flexibility to offer a new elective in an emerging area or can handle a sabbatical, leave, or attrition without a huge domino effect. Think forward: who has not taken leave in many years? Who is potentially nearing retirement age? Identify gaps between your curriculum and expertise and consider using that to guide future hiring plans or changes in your curriculum. This is more of an ideal, and not always possible given resource constraints.
8. **Enrollments.** Watch for courses that may compete for enrollments with other courses. Do not schedule required courses at the same time slot or offered at opposite times of each

other. CourseAtlas handles some of this and it is a strength of this system. But it is helpful for Chairs to be aware and keep an eye on spreading your course offerings throughout the week and do not schedule all your departmental classes on Tuesdays-Thursdays only. Additionally, do not schedule courses that tend to be a big draw among students against similar courses. Consider also when graduate courses are offered to ensure your graduate students' availability to assist in teaching courses. One way to get started is to have in mind what you would like the enrollment to be in each of your courses, and work to plan the schedule to accomplish that by using Course Atlas. If you have restricted space that you control, use that to help control enrollments. Have policies to address minimum enrollment numbers and what happens when a course routinely (how would you define that?) is under-enrolled. Make notes of what you're not happy about in this semester's schedule and try to set up ways to avoid those issues next semester. It is easy to forget things as the semester gets rolling and other things get in front of you!

9. **Maintain a syllabus bank of courses.** Access to past and current syllabi on courses offered in your department benefits not only your junior faculty members, graduate students TAs, but also any of your faculty members who may be teaching a course for the first time or developing a new course. This can also help students who may require course information as they further their education elsewhere since they cannot count on a faculty member, they took a course with still being here. This may be handled at the School or department level. As Chair, you may have admin access to course canvas sites across your department but have a plan for archiving syllabi.
  
10. **Encourage faculty members to engage in course development or redesign.** Encourage faculty members to redesign existing courses or develop new courses that offer research or study abroad opportunities to students. Additionally, facilitate ways for your faculty members to design and deliver courses using online technology and offer courses at alternative times such as in the evenings, during winter session, or for half of a semester. Consider to what extent curriculum development and leadership is part of expectations for advancement. The NB **Institute for Teaching, Innovation and Inclusive Pedagogy (TIIP)** provides workshops for faculty related to course design and re-design <https://sites.rutgers.edu/itiip/>.

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<sup>1</sup> This document is adapted from work by the University of Illinois Provost's Office.