



Classroom  
Optimization  
Group

## Final Report

December 18, 2015

### Committee Charge:

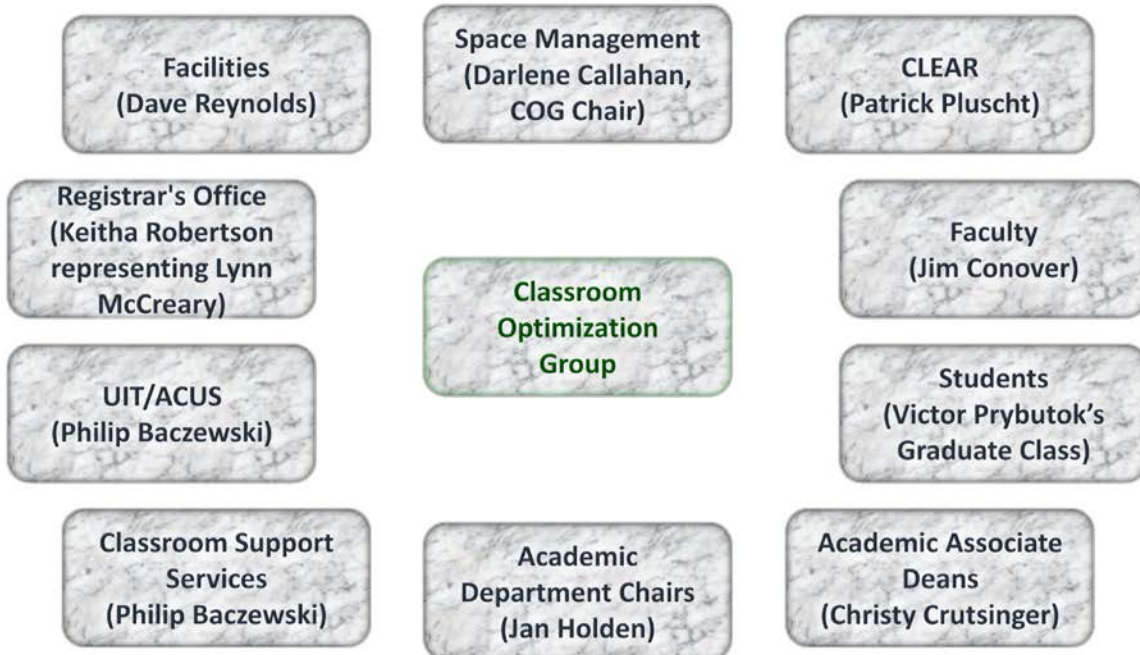
The Classroom Optimization Group (COG) is charged with coordinating communications and project activities to optimize the teaching and learning environments for faculty and students, evaluate classroom utilization, and to identify opportunities for improvement. The functional areas include, those dealing with the following aspects of classrooms: planning, funding, design, support, scheduling, technology integration, pedagogical applications, user experience, maintenance, space utilization, and governance.

**Executive Summary:**

The Classroom Optimization Group (COG), comprised of UNT classroom stakeholders representing numerous departments and divisions, met during the Fall 2015 semester to review UNT's 110-type general-use classrooms. At the request of the Faculty Senate and the Space Planning and Management Committee, classrooms were examined for shortfalls in the areas of utilization, size, technology, seating, flexibility, and classroom scheduling practices. Final recommendations from the COG include: the formation of policies to support data-driven classroom scheduling and to establish university classroom scheduling priorities; the finalization of classroom design standards for all 110-type classrooms that provide for variation in classroom seating, flooring, technology, and other room attributes based on teaching pedagogy; reduce the number of smaller and underutilized classrooms by re-purposing them for other needs such as teaching labs, active learning classrooms, graduate bullpens, etc.; and the establishment of this or a similar group as a standing committee that prioritizes goals, recommends strategies, oversees changes, and evaluates the success of projects related to classroom optimization.

**Background:**

At the request of the Faculty Senate and the Space Planning and Management Committee, the group was charged with identifying shortfalls of 110-type classrooms related to utilization, size, technology, seating, flexibility, and classroom scheduling practices. The Classroom Optimization Group (COG) is comprised of UNT stakeholders representing numerous departments and services – across Divisions – dedicated to improving and optimizing classrooms.



### Purpose and Scope:

The Classroom Optimization Group (COG) was charged with:

- Optimizing the teaching and learning environment for faculty and students
- Evaluating and improving classroom utilization

The functional areas represented on the COG include those dealing with the following aspects of classrooms: planning, funding, design, support, scheduling, technology integration, pedagogical applications, user experience, maintenance, space utilization, and governance.

### Methodology:

The COG collected and analyzed data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Space Utilization Efficiency (SUE) scores, AdAstra class scheduling reports, classroom attributes list, and faculty, student, and department chair Qualtrics survey results. The COG met biweekly between August and December 2015 to discuss and review current processes, share divisional knowledge and resources, analyze and discuss findings, and develop recommendations.

### Data Results:

Data results include the THECB SUE scores (Appendix A) and survey results from the faculty and student surveys (appendices B & C). An additional department chair survey had similar questions as the faculty survey regarding room configuration and technology needs, but also included questions regarding classroom size based on enrollment and accrediting standards. Unfortunately, the initial response rate for the department chair survey was very low and the COG decided to reopen the survey through December 23, 2015. Survey results will be analyzed and disseminated in January 2016.

### Findings & Recommendations:

#### 1) Class Scheduling

##### a) Improve Classroom Utilization

- Findings: THECB SUE scores indicate UNT's excellence in the measurement categories of Facilities Demand and Percent Fill. However, improvement of the Utilization Rate measure is needed to bring the current score of 35 hours per week (per classroom) to the minimum performance measure of 38 hours per week. This shortfall appears to be caused by our current scheduling algorithm being configured to produce very high percent fill rates. The state sets the average percent fill rate at 65% to receive maximum weighting, but UNT's average was 81% for Fall 2015.
- Recommendation: The COG recommends that the VP for Enrollment formulate policies and procedures, with the THECB SUE metrics in mind, in order to support data-driven classroom scheduling that maximizes utilization, reduces overscheduling the THECB performance measure of 65% fill rate, and more evenly distributes classes among available classrooms.

b) Policy Implementation

- Findings: The Registrar currently utilizes "Guidelines" for classroom scheduling that appear to be inconsistently enforced.
- Recommendation: The COG recommends that the VP for Enrollment, or an appointed committee, create a scheduling policy in line with peer institutions to support a standardized classroom scheduling process for all university departments, with particular consideration and authority given to achieving university classroom scheduling priorities. The VP for Enrollment, or the appointed committee, should review each school/colleges' scheduling inputs prior to final loading in AdAstra to ensure compliance with the proposed policy.

2) Classroom Size

a) Reduce Number of Smaller Underutilized Classrooms

- Findings: Almost 35% of UNT's classrooms have a room cap of 29 or less (63 classrooms out of 184). Of those 63 classrooms, only 6 meet THECB utilization requirements.
- Recommendation: The COG recommends that the Space Management and Planning and AVP for Facilities identify which classrooms should be re-purposed for other needs such as teaching labs, active learning classrooms, graduate bullpens, meeting spaces, etc., and which adjacent smaller classrooms could be renovated to create larger classrooms.

3) Classroom Quality

a) Maintenance & Room Attributes

- Findings: Many classrooms are in need of general maintenance such as painting, repairing of window blinds, replacing old arm tablet chairs, chalk boards, etc.
- Recommendation: The COG recommends that Facilities, in consultation with CLEAR, Classroom Support, faculty, and students finalize the recently developed draft classroom design standards for all 110-type classrooms that provide for variation in classroom seating, flooring, technology, and other room attributes that support the teaching and learning needs of a diverse population. Further, Space Management and Planning should work with the Registrar's Office to develop a mechanism so that instructors can easily request rooms with certain attributes based on their preferred pedagogical needs and should publicize the mechanism to faculty and others in academic departments involved in classroom scheduling.

b) Technology

- Findings: Classroom technology is perceived as inconsistent across some of the 110-type classrooms. There is a request from the Faculty Senate that document cameras and second projector units be installed in additional classrooms.
- Recommendation: COG recommends that Classroom Support work closely with Faculty Senate, Facilities, CLEAR, and students to determine which classrooms should have additional technology resources installed and develop a plan to accomplish any needed changes.

- 4) Finally, the COG recommends that this committee (or one very similar in scope and membership) become a permanent group that prioritizes goals, recommends strategies, oversees changes, and evaluates the success of projects related to classroom optimization, and above all, ensures that areas that support classrooms and other key stakeholders maintain strong communication. We also recommend that we communicate with faculty and students about the changes that are being made to improve classrooms and that we continue to seek greater involvement of faculty and students on this committee (whether through surveys each semester, focus groups, or membership on the committee). It is recommended that the AVP for Information Services or the AVP for Facilities chair the committee and also recommends the appointment of additional representatives from enrollment and classroom support areas.