SU might return to 5-day week
Move may cut down on classroom crunch, Thursday partying, school officials say.

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Syracuse University officials are hoping a revised class schedule will take back Friday as a critical part of the academic week - and cut down on student partying on Thursday nights.

But some students are skeptical.

"I think people won't go to Friday classes. People have classes on Fridays now, and they don't go," said Kendall Holmes, an SU senior who is finishing his degree this summer. "I don't think much is going to change."

University officials are considering increasing the number of Friday classes in fall 2004 to make better use of classroom space. Some officials hope the move will deter students from starting their weekends early and cut down on the noise and rowdiness complaints from University-area residents.

"Students are viewing Thursday nights as part of their weekend socialization time, just like Friday and Saturday night," said Barry Wells, a senior vice president and dean of student affairs. "We do have an increase in the number of problems that we believe are substance abuse related, largely students using Thursday nights as part of their socialization time, partying and drinking a little bit too much." Some students and teachers now get a jump on their weekends because much
of the faculty opt to teach on a Monday-Wednesday or Tuesday-Thursday schedule.

At SU, the decrease in Friday classes increased over time. Gradually, faculty members moved toward offering classes Mondays and Wednesdays within 80-minute blocks instead of the traditional Monday, Wednesday and Friday 55-minute sessions, said Ronald Cavanagh, SU's vice president of undergraduate studies.

"As long as there were sufficient classrooms available, nobody raised any questions," Cavanagh said. "Then a couple more people starting doing it, and then a couple more, and then it started to be a real problem."

Scheduling the same number of classes across four days instead of five created a crunch in classroom space during prime teaching times, 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

And students complained they couldn't take the classes they wanted because too many courses were being offered at overlapping times. Staff said they had a hard time finding open classroom space to schedule courses.

Cavanagh chaired a university committee that has created a course schedule that aims to solve the problem. It calls for increasing the number of Friday class spots, increasing the number of 80-minute classes and starting classes at 8 a.m., a half hour earlier.

Under the new proposal, Cavanagh said, professors won't be able to deviate from the university schedule. In the past, professors could refashion their course schedules as long as their individual school or college agreed.

Town meetings are planned for fall, so people can comment on the proposal. For the new schedule to be in place by fall 2004, SU's University Senate would have to vote on the proposal in October. The chancellor will ultimately decide whether to go forward with the proposal, Cavanagh said.

Wells said in recent years the university's Department of Public Safety has seen an increase in the number of calls to public safety on Thursday nights. During the 2002 fall semester, public safety officers responded to a total of 241 calls in the early morning and evening hours on Thursdays.

That compares with an average of 153 calls they responded to during the same time periods each day Sunday through Wednesday.

"If we can have more balance during the five-day week, and certainly on Friday mornings, that, we believe, will take back Fridays and take back, hopefully, Thursday evenings, and students will start their activities and social events on Friday afternoons and Friday evenings as they traditionally have," Wells said. "So we're hoping that this will, in fact, improve the situation."

Lt. Joe Cecile, speaking for the Syracuse Police Department, said officers who patrol the university neighborhood have noticed an increase in students partying on Thursday nights.

"They have adapted their behavior and started to go out more, or have parties more, on Thursdays than they did before," Cecile said.

Complaints on Thursday nights about student noise have increased so much that a special neighborhood patrol may expand to that night during...
the next academic year, Cecile said. It now patrols only 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday to 3 a.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

Holmes, a film/drama major, said scheduling more classes on Fridays won't change students' social patterns. He said he intentionally scheduled his classes to have three-day weekends each semester.

"College kids are going to party. What are we supposed to do: Stay inside all the time? The bars aren't going to stop having specials on Thursday nights," said Holmes, 22, of Cincinnati.

City residents who share their neighborhoods with SU students are hoping Holmes is wrong.

"I have noticed in the last year or two years that parties start on Thursday, and so it's Thursday, Friday, Saturday nights that my sleep is disturbed routinely," said Laura Martin, a Lancaster Avenue resident of 18 years who says students partying often keeps her awake until 4 a.m.

Eric Schiff, chair of SU's Physics Department, said the proposed schedule changes could pose a problem for some faculty members who are involved in research projects, especially those based outside Syracuse.

"They tend to like to get their classes finished off in a few days a week, and then, if they need to, they fly away," Schiff said. "For the handful of faculty members with significant out-of-town research commitments, this could be a hit."

A shrinking academic week is an issue at many colleges and universities across the country. At Cornell University, students are taking fewer classes on Fridays, making the academic week shorter, said Bob Cooke, dean of faculty. But students are taking classes late into the night, causing university officials to be concerned students aren't getting enough sleep. Cornell officials are planning this fall to analyze the class schedule and poll students to see if change is needed.

The StateUniversity College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse isn't experiencing problems with classes overlapping or with students starting their weekends before Friday, said Raymond Blaskiewicz, SUNY ESF's registrar.

SUNY ESF accepts about 200 freshmen annually, Blaskiewicz said. Graduates students made up about one-third of the college's population of 2,027 full- and part-time students in fall 2002, according to the college. SU enrolled 17,900 full and part-time students last spring, including 5,721 graduate students, said David Smith, SU's vice president of enrollment management.

"The academic atmosphere is a lot more serious here than you'll find at some of these schools," Blaskiewicz said. "Our students are very serious about their academic pursuits. They didn't come here, so they could get three-day weekends every week."

Warren Howe, who will be a senior in political science at SU this fall, said he had Fridays off during the past spring semester, but he didn't schedule it that way on purpose. He said he used the extra day off to catch up and get ahead on his course work.

Holmes, who also said he used his extra day off to do class work, said going out on a weekend is typical for college students.

"So, what? We go out on Thursday nights," said Holmes.
"That doesn't mean our lives are ruined. That doesn't mean we're going to be raging alcoholics. That's just how the cookie crumbles."

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