

Addendum to the Report on Course Registration: Data from SEAS concerning Enrollment Uncertainty and Instructional Support Staffing

In our main report, we discussed enrollment variation in the parts of the FAS where the allocation of instructional staff is administered directly by the Office of Undergraduate Education: the three divisions of Arts & Humanities, Natural Science, and Social Science as well as General Education (pp. 9ff in our original report). We can now supplement this discussion with analogous information from the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.¹

We call this information “analogous” since SEAS uses its own system of allocating sections. We begin with a review of the major differences between the situation in SEAS and areas we discussed in the main report.

Graduate students in SEAS are required to teach for only one term as part of their funding, with the standard teaching load being 1 section during that term. SEAS also relies significantly on undergraduate course assistants (“CAs”). SEAS is conservative with section pre-allocations and does not revoke allocations once they are granted even if enrollment is lower than predicted. Since graduate students are required to teach so little, it is usually completely unproblematic for a graduate student to find teaching. And the standard hiring procedure for undergraduate course assistants is for the course head to develop a pool of potential assistants, hiring most based on the pre-allocation and then hiring incrementally if additional sections are authorized after the registration deadline.

Allocations of sections before the course registration deadline are quite conservative, so it is extremely rare that a course ever loses an allocated section, and hence it is extremely rare for a graduate student who was assigned to a course prior to the registration deadline to lose that appointment and have to find a different one.

With this in mind, we can provide the following information for academic year 2018/19, the last year before the pandemic, and the same year for which we discussed data in the main report. As in the case of the numbers provided to us by OUE, changes in section allocations reflect the change from a course pre-allocation to the final TF allocation. The latter is based on enrollments taken after the registration deadline (“Study Card Day”).

The total number of courses with a section allocation change (gained or lost) for Fall is 31 and Spring is 45. If we exclude courses that added only 0.5 section allocation (a half of a regular TF section), the total for Fall is 18 and Spring is 37. In total for the academic year, 93 sections were added in SEAS.

For the year, the total number of courses with changes is 76 out of 159, or about 48%. Excluding courses that only added 0.5 TF, the totals are 55 out of 159, or about 34%.

¹ We are grateful to Dean Rebecca Nesson and her staff for providing us with this information.

<i>Changes in section allocations</i>	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Total
gained .5 sections	13	8	21
gained 1 section	9	21	30
gained 1.5 or 2 sections	4	12	16
gained 3+ sections	4	3	7
lost 1 section (note #4)	1	1	2
subtotal changes	31	45	76
zero changes	39	44	83
total number courses with TFs (note #5)	70	89	159

Notes

1. In some cases, the number of TFs hired was less than the final allocation.
2. The TF allocation is based on a 16 enrollment:1 TF ratio for undergraduate courses and a 20:1 ratio for graduate courses. Some courses have a lower ratio, e.g., 10:1, 12:1.
3. In 2018-19, SEAS allocated partial TFs (.5, 1.5, 2.5, etc.).
4. This list excludes two courses that have a separate allocation process.

SEAS is broadly in line with the rest of the FAS in the number of courses that see some degree of enrollment variability. In light of the specific situation of SEAS, it seems fair to say that SEAS does not see some of the worst effects of enrollment uncertainty.

Because graduate students have such a low teaching expectation, they tend not to experience the anxiety of uncertainty about whether or where to teach. Likewise, advisers need not worry about whether their graduate students find teaching.

Because undergraduate CAs can be used to cover instructional staffing needs, there is potentially a much larger pool of available students to cover these needs. It is thus a less stressful experience for course heads to find an adequate number of students to fill the required positions. This is not to say that the process is completely frictionless, since course heads still need to ensure that the potential CAs are well qualified and identifying and hiring additional TFs or CAs after the registration deadline can be difficult and interferes with training, preparation, and scheduling.