The Dean's Gotta Have a Plan (Why you really need a five year course scope and sequence)

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Willie Niegro was the shipping supervisor at the warehouse where I worked summers during high school. He'd been there over 20 years, overseeing the shipping of crates and pallets out the truck bays at the rear of the warehouse. He was a cheerful character and took pride in his work. I learned a lot from Willie Niegro. One of the things I most remember about Willie was his constant mantra: "You gotta have a plan." When things went awry and not according to schedule, Willie seemed always to get things back on track. On those occasions, there was a particular ring of satisfaction and twinkle in his eye when he'd say, "You gotta have a plan," with a not too subtle tone of "see, I told you so!" I am constantly surprised by how many theological schools do not have a five-year curriculum scope and sequence. Some schools seem to do well in managing to publish a one year course schedule about six months ahead of the start of the school year. Others struggle to get a schedule together a semester ahead of time! This is huge liability to the school, and a hindrance to the work of the dean. For some odd reason, when I encounter that situation, I always hear Willie's voice in my head saying, "You gotta have a plan."

GENERAL CENTRAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
M.Div., D.Min., and M.T.S. Programs Course Rotation Schedule

	Year 2 2009-2010	Year 3 2010-2011	Year 4 2011-2012	Year 1 2012-2013	Year 2 2013-2014	Year 3 2014-2015	Year 4 2015-2016
Summer	B1122 Hebrew	B1523 Greek		Hebrew I & II	Greek I & II	Hebrew I & II	Greek I & II
	DM5011	DM5011	DM5011	DM5011	DM5011	DM5011	DM5011
	DM5013	DM5013	DM5013	DM5013	DM5013	DM5013	DM5013
				M3206 Exploring	DM5014		
					DM5015		
					M3206 Exploring	M3206 Exploring	
FALL	B1070 Models	B1070 Models		B1070 Models		B1070 Models	
		MAB1070 Models		MAB1070 Models		MAB1070 Models	
	B1091/2 Interp	B1091/2 Interp	B1091/2 Interp	B1091/2 Interp	B1091/2 Interp	B1091/2 Interp	B1091/2 Interp
		MAB1091 Interp	MAB1091 Interp	MAB1091/2 Interp	MAB1091 Interp	MAB1091 Interp	MAB1091 Interp
	B1111 Intro OT I	B1111 Intro OT I	B1111 Intro OT I		B1111 Intro OT I	B1111 Intro OT I	B1111 Intro OT I
		MAB1111 Intro OT I	MAB1111 Intro OT I		MAB1111 Intro OT I	MAB1111 Intro OT I	MAB1111 Intro OT I
	B1121 Hebrew I	B1121 Hebrew I	B1121 Hebrew I		B1121 Hebrew I	B1121 Hebrew I	B1121 Hebrew I
		MAB1121 Hebrew I	MAB1121 Hebrew I	MAB1121 Hebrew I	MAB1121 Hebrew I	MAB1121 Hebrew I	MAB1121 Hebrew I
					B1141 Amos/Hosea		
					MAB1141 Amos/Hos		
	B1511 Intro NT I	B1511 Intro NT I	B1511 Intro NT I	B1511 Intro NT I	B1511 Intro NT I	B1511 Intro NT I	B1511 Intro NT I
	MAB1511 Intro NT I	MAB1511 Intro NT I	MAB1511 Intro NT I	MAB1511 Intro NT I	MAB1511 Intro NT I	MAB1511 Intro NT I	MAB1511 Intro NT I
	B1521 Greek I	B1521...	...NT I	1521 NT I	B15...	1521 Greek I	...k I

The curriculum is the engine that drives the economic profile of the school, as much as it is an interpretation of its educational mission. Wherever your school lands on the spectrum between being tuition-driven or endowment-dependent, your program of study, and the courses that interpret it, is the economic engine of your school. Developing a long range map and strategic understanding of your program of study helps you more accurately interpret the impact of your curriculum on Faculty, students, and budget. Developing a five-year scope and sequence will help you make better informed decisions about the educational activities of your school. Creating and maintaining a five year scope and sequence schedule can:

- Help you understand and interpret the scope of your curricular programs
- Help you interpret, manage, and design the sequencing of courses, and, avoid schedule conflicts
- Help you plan, budget, and recruit for Faculty sabbaticals
- Help your recruitment staff interpret the curriculum and its schedule to prospective students
- Help your current students plan their course schedules and map their course of study two to three years out (avoiding potential pitfalls)
- Help Faculty provide more effective student advising related to course scheduling
- Help you assess the viability of degree programs
- Help you plan for teach out strategies for programs you need to end
- Help you assess Faculty work load and distribution
- Help you assess and make decisions related to curriculum revisions
- Help you avoid proliferation of elective courses that are not sustainable or do not contribute to helping students make progress in their degree programs' course of study.
- Help you assess the impact of categories of courses on the curriculum (online, seminars, tutorials, adjunct-taught vs. Faculty-taught courses, etc.)
- Helps you avoid endless "tweeking" of the curriculum to the point of it becoming unmanageable.

Unless you have a comprehensive five-year scope and sequence, all of those important educational tasks become very difficult. Attached is a sample multi-year scope and sequence from the mythical General Central Theological Seminary. The schedule contains several elements that can help the dean interpret the curriculum to Faculty and administration:

Download CentralGeneralscopeseqsample

1. The courses are scheduled on a four year cycle (Year 1, Year 2, etc.). This helps accommodate the span of time completion for most students in a typical MDiv degree program (3 to 4 years).
2. The color coding helps make it easier to identify classifications of courses (core, elective, online, on hiatus, etc.).
3. The organization makes it easier to track when courses ceased to be offer, and when newly created courses will start.
4. The structure follows the major terms for this school (summer, fall, winter, spring, and a May term) which helps plan the distribution and pattern of courses by terms. For example, it helps plot when a core course may need to rotate between a long term (e.g., fall and spring), and short terms (winter, May).
5. The summary at the bottom of the chart helps quickly assess the balance of courses by several categories. For example, this school tracks the number of online courses offered over the course of three years based on internal metrics for online enrollment and to accommodate its distance education students and to monitor faculty teaching load.

Administrative Change vs. Cultural Change While your course scope and sequence schedule does not need to have all the elements on this sample, it should provide all the elements to make it a handy tool for course planning and analysis. Developing such an educational planning tool may require a dean to change the culture of her or his school. It appears too many schools are overly dependent on Faculty to provide the information needed to create a long range scope and sequence. Given the nature of a curriculum, this is unnecessary to a great extent. When, how often, and which courses are offered is a curricular issue, not one of personal predilection or convenience. One corrective to a culture that becomes a liability to responsible program planning is instilling the priority in values of "the curriculum first, the needs of the students, second, and personal predilections, preferences, and peccadilloes last." A curriculum scope and sequence does not ask, "What will the faculty members teach?" Rather, it demonstrates "What the Faculty needs to teach." Certainly faculty members need to have input on curricular matters, but the dean also has responsibility for the curricular programs and study, and in some matters, like planning, oversight, and ensuring effectiveness, more specifically so. They don't call you Chief Academic Officer for nothing. Remember what Willie Niegro said, "You gotta have a plan!"

https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2014/03/the-deans-gotta-have-a-plan-why-you-really-need-a-five-year-course-scope-and-sequence/