Lately I have been fielding a lot of questions about the various metrics that the Provost’s Office uses to measure teaching efficiency. The Provost’s Office has a goal of 16:1 for the student-faculty ratio (SFR), which means that we should be devoting about 1 FTE faculty member to teaching 16 full-time equivalent students. The ratio is computed on the department level each semester. It would be possible to compute a SFR at some other level, but we hire at the department level, so the analysis of efficiency is usually at that level.

It’s important to realize that the goal of 16:1 is an all-college goal and not a department-by-department goal. Each department has its own unique set offerings and pedagogy that either allow it to be more “efficient” or require smaller class sizes. Actually, 16:1 is not the best goal for most departments, and such goal-setting is a cooperative exercise between the dean and the department. Since the current SFR for fall 2016 is 15.4:1, most departments need to increase their SFR, whatever it is, for the college to achieve its goal.

Some department chairs have heard that another metric, called 30-24-17, is sometimes used to measure a department’s efficiency. This metric is not meant to replace the SFR but supplements it by addressing the concern that the SFR does not account for the differences in mix of offerings by department. A 16:1 SFR corresponds to average class sizes of about 25, which might not be appropriate for an individual department.

Quite simply, 30-24-17 is a metric that measures the progress of a department in achieving average class sizes of 30 in 100-level courses, 24 in 200-level courses, and 17 in 300-level courses. These three numbers aren’t magic, just as 16:1 isn’t magic. They were simply chosen so that if we meet these averages on an all-college level, we will meet our SFR goal of 16:1. Nor are these numbers meant to make a claim about the ideal size of classes at each level—there are many 300-level classes with 25–30 students that are perfectly fine, just as there are some 100-level classes that need to be taught in sections of size 20–25. Also, there are 200-level courses in one department that might be considered a 300-level course in another department, so the use of course level itself is fraught with peril.

No metric is perfect, and no two departments are equal. By whatever measure, however, we need to teach fewer sections than at present if we are to be financially sustainable. The 16:1 goal has challenged us in many different ways, but we have made steady progress over the past few years (even increasing the SFR this year despite an unexpectedly small first-year class).

Michael Stob, dean for academic administration

From the Faculty Activity Reports

- Young Kim (History), “The Saints of Cyprus in Late Antiquity” (lecture, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, September 28, 2016).
- William Romanowski (Communication Arts and Sciences), “Death, Grief, and Romance in Mostly Martha and No Reservations: A Comparative Analysis of Film Structure and Theme” (session chair, Film and History Conference, Milwaukee, WI, October 28, 2016).

Be sure to fill out your Faculty Activity Reports regularly. If you have questions, see the FAQ page.
Faculty Member Awarded

Congratulations to Amy Wilstermann (Biology), who was recently recognized at the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference in Seattle, Washington. Prof. Wilstermann’s work in the Calvin College interim class “Cancer: A Multidisciplinary Examination of a Complex Disease” earned her the Innovations in Best Practices in Honors Award for Developing Honors Courses.

Coming Up on Campus (Check the campus calendar for a full list of events)

Monday, November 21
- Chapel. Shannon Jammal-Hollemans. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- UnLearn 365 13th showing and discussion. “The Prison Industrial Complex Dilemma in the United States.” 6:00 p.m., Commons Annex lecture hall
- Kuyers Institute lecture. Beth Green, “Educating to Love Your Neighbor.” Register here. 7:30 p.m., Commons Annex Alumni Board Room

Tuesday, November 22
- Chapel. “Come.” 10:00 a.m., Chapel

Wednesday–Friday, November 23–25
- Thanksgiving break (Wednesday: campus open, but no classes; Thursday–Friday: campus closed)

Monday, November 28
- Chapel. Michelle Loyd-Paige. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- Blood Drive. 12:00 noon–7:00 p.m., Chapel Undercroft

Tuesday, November 29
- Chapel. “A Thief in the Night.” 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- Blood Drive. 12:00 noon–7:00 p.m., Chapel Undercroft
- Nagel Institute lecture. Bungishabaku Katho (Shalom U), “Reading Jeremiah in Africa: Poverty and Knowledge of God.” 3:30 p.m., Calvin Seminary auditorium

Wednesday, November 30
- Chapel. Sounds of Korean worship. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- Open House. Farewell for Caroline Chadderdon. 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Provost’s Office
- Blood Drive. 12:00 noon–7:00 p.m., Chapel Undercroft
- Asian Studies lecture. Ruth Lemmen. “Persecuted or Flourishing: North American Myths of Christianity in China.” 3:30 p.m., Commons Annex lecture hall

Thursday, December 1
- Chapel. Jazz Prayers with Calvin Jazz combo. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- Blood Drive. 12:00 noon–7:00 p.m., Chapel Undercroft
- Chemistry seminar. David Ballou (U of Michigan), “Flavoprotein Hydroxylates: How Techniques Were Developed over Many Years to Characterize Intermediates.” 11:30 a.m., SB 010
- Mathematics and Statistics Colloquium. Sarah Klanderman. 3:40 p.m., NH 276

Friday, December 2
- Chapel. Sounds of African worship. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- Biology seminar. Daniel Sharda (Olivet Nazarene), “Conducting the Transcriptional Repressor Bach2 Tunes T Cells to Orchestrate Tumor Immunity.” 1:30 p.m., SB 010