

The Mechanics of Course Planning

Balanced Schedule Building Activity

Purpose

This activity is designed to help students understand the structure of a well-balanced schedule and how their individual academic paths fit into the larger journey of earning their degree. It reinforces the idea that while students may be at different levels in subjects like Math and English, they are all working toward the same goal—graduation and success in Mechanical Engineering.

By working together to build a complete schedule, students will:

- Learn how different courses balance each other in a semester.
- Understand how their recommended schedule was built.
- Develop confidence in creating their own schedule for future semesters.
- Recognize that academic progress is unique to each student, and that differences in course placement do not define their potential for success.

Activity Overview

1. Distributing Course Cards

- Each student receives a **course card** in their Red Folder, representing one of the following:
 - Math Course (varied levels)
 - English Course (varied levels)
 - Mechanical Engineering Course (ME 160L, ME 217, etc.)
 - General Education Language Course
 - General Education Humanities Course

2. Forming Balanced Schedules

- Students must **find four other students** with different course cards to create a complete schedule that includes:
 - 1 Math
 - 1 English
 - 1 ME Course or ME support course
 - 1 Gen Ed Language
 - 1 Gen Ed Humanities
- This represents the balanced schedule they might take in a semester.

3. Reflection Discussion

- Once groups are formed, discuss:
 - How they went about forming their “schedule.”
 - What challenges they faced in forming their group.
 - How their actual recommended schedule was structured similarly.

- How even though some students may be in different levels of Math or English, they are all progressing toward the same degree.
 - Why balance is important in scheduling (avoiding overload in technical courses, having a mix of STEM and Gen Ed, etc.).
 - How as they progress through the ME major, there will be less Gen Ed and more ME and ME support courses (Chemistry, Physics, etc.) and some may have more of that type of schedule now.
4. **Transition to the Next Activity**
- Each newly formed **schedule group** moves on to the next part of the orientation/workshop together.

Takeaways

- **"Your path is your own, and that's okay!"** Everyone starts at different points, but what matters is consistent effort and progress.
- **"Learning is a journey, not a race."** Whether a student starts in one Math or English course over another does not determine their ability or future success.
- **"Challenges are part of growth."** Finding a complete schedule was a challenge, just like scheduling can be, but through collaboration and perseverance, solutions emerge.

This activity will help students visualize their semester schedule, foster collaboration, and encourage a growth mindset toward their academic journey.