

Another Modest Proposal

In 1729 Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* satirically suggested the Irish eat their children to help alleviate poverty. Swift's commentary is applicable to OSU nearly three centuries later; more and more our "children" are consuming us both body and soul. The children referred to are meetings.

From my perspective as an OSU faculty member there have been many changes to our campus—both positive and negative—over the past five years. The increasing centralization of administration, creation of campus-wide incentives and institutes, and a focus on excellence in research and teaching are changing the campus environment. As with any change there are both positive and negative impacts on organizations and individuals; this is expected. One offspring of this change, however, is the seemingly uncontrolled growth of meetings. Meetings are the unwanted children of change that consume the most valued of faculty resources- time. Specifically, the long periods of uninterrupted time needed to reflect, conduct research, or engage in other creative activities that are the engine that ultimately drives "greatness" or "excellence" for a university.

The analogy between meetings and children is apt. Both seem like a good idea at the time, start small, and tend to grow to demand an inordinate amount of time and resources. While both children and meetings can be highly rewarding at times they are mainly just unrewarded work. In the institutional quest for greatness it is past time for OSU to practice "safe sex". While from a faculty perspective an abstinence-based policy would be ideal, it would probably have a similar track record to abstinence-based efforts in other domains. Rather some form of birth control is needed to limit the uncontrolled growth of meetings.

What I propose is that OSU adopt an official policy of holding meetings only on Monday and Friday. Institute a complete and total ban on holding a formal meeting in the period from Tuesday through Thursday. Monday allows critical issues to be addressed at the start of a week while Friday is a good day to review ongoing projects. Meeting only at the start and end of a week gives faculty three uninterrupted days to focus on scholarship and teaching. There are many possible criticisms of this modest proposal. To the argument that two days are simply not enough time in which to schedule vital meetings note that: 1) these two days are 40% of the entire week, and 2) it will be much easier to schedule meetings if faculty and staff know they will occur only on Monday or Friday. Overall any disadvantages of a three day meeting ban are outweighed by the autere simplicity of this approach.

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