Preparing for Shortened Academic Terms

A GUIDE

Achieving the Dream™

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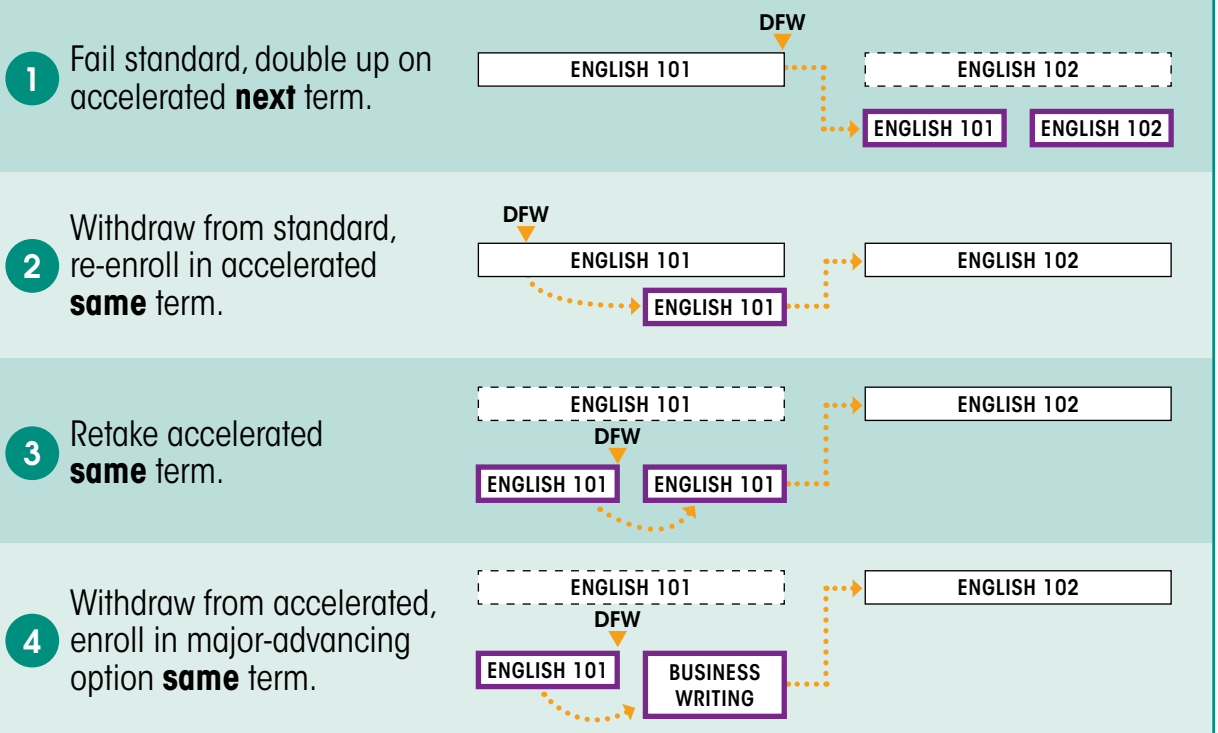
Introduction

AS COLLEGES FOCUS MORE on centering equity in their structures, processes, and policies on campus, they are re-examining operations inside and outside the classroom. They are looking to better serve and support traditional community college students in creative and innovative ways. Deconstructing the semester structure changes how classes are offered to students, giving them more flexibility and more continuous on-ramps. This helps support and accelerate students toward a credential of value. What ATD is seeing from colleges in the field is that there is nothing magical about offering 15 weeks of course delivery; providing flexibility with multiple on-ramps, and fewer courses for shorter periods of time, is helping colleges serve their students more equitably.

In a traditional semester format, if a student has a disruption at any point and cannot continue their courses, they lose all momentum—and credit—for that semester and must wait for the next semester to begin again. Shorter academic terms allow for more immediate credit recovery in the event of a disruption and allow students to get back on track faster.

Accelerated Courses Offer Four Ways to Get Back on Pace



Source: https://eab.com/insights/expert-insight/academic-affairs/how-to-transform-an-early-course-withdrawal-into-a-timely-catch-up-opportunity/

Some students have more complicated lives. Higher education leaders need to ask whether this traditional option is best for students with families and dependents, those who need to work while attending school, or students who have never been to college. Does the semester structure at two-year institutions represent a design that serves its students well? Or are community colleges applying traditional structures to students who have historically not been served well by higher education?

According to American Association of Community Colleges, in 2020 community colleges served a diverse body of students, with 46% identifying as white, 26% as Hispanic, 13% as Black, 6% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% as Native American, 4% as two or more races, 4% as other/unknown, and 2% as resident alien students. A majority of community college students, 64%, attended part-time. The average age of a community college student was 28, 29% of students were first generation, 15% were single parents, and 20% report living with a disability.[1] Enrollment intensity has an impact on completion for students who attend community college. A recent study from the National Student Clearinghouse indicates that students who attend part-time

1 https://www.aacc.nche.edu/research-trends/fastfacts/aacc-2020-fact-sheet/

for even one semester are less likely to complete a credential within six years.[2] Offering fewer courses for shorter periods of time combined with options for continuous enrollment can help community college students with complex lives stay enrolled, maintain momentum, and complete successfully.

Implementing classes in shorter academic terms is not a new concept in higher education. Almost all colleges offer classes in shorter terms during the summer, and many offer various parts of term courses for students who need to pick up an extra class or arrive at the college after the traditional (15- or 16-week) semester start. However, educators have recently been looking at deconstructing the traditional semester structure as an institutional strategy to more equitably serve students on their campuses. Deconstructing the semester structure to include two terms allows students at least five opportunities to enroll in courses over a calendar year, and to focus on fewer courses at a time for shorter periods of time. It provides flexibility for students to attend when they can, with continuous on-ramps to courses.

Reaching Full-Time in No More Than Two Courses Per Term

Sample Year-Round Schedule

FALL 1	**FALL 2**
Aug. 28 - Oct. 23 • 6 credits	Oct. 30 - Dec. 22 • 6 credits
SPRING 1	**SPRING 2**
Jan. 1 - Feb. 26 • 6 credits	Mar. 5 - Apr. 30 • 6 credits
SUMMER 1	**SUMMER 2**
May 7 - June 29 • 6 credits	July 9 - Aug. 27 • 6 credits

Source: https://eab.com/insights/expert-insight/community-college/reduce-time-to-degree-with-default-mini-mesters/

While shorter terms will not be the single solution to student success concerns, offering flexible options for students with busy lives is one way to contribute to a holistic design and an equitable approach to success and completion. Preparing the college to offer courses in shorter academic terms is transformative work that involves coordinated, collaborative efforts across the institution. Colleges with successful transitions to shorter terms designed systems that increased communication and collaboration across the organization. Successful colleges ensure that their policies and procedures collegewide do not create unintended barriers for students in this new shortened semester format. ATD sees this approach as one strategy in a college's wider strategic approach to student success. Delivery of courses in shorter terms should align with the college's overall philosophy on course and program delivery for its students.

A holistic approach to student success requires an intentional focus on the design, delivery, and connections of supports to students (HSS

2 https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SignatureReport14_Final.pdf

toolkit). Designing the student experience holistically ensures that all students have access to the supports and services they need when they need it. This approach should align with institutional goals, values, and other student success work. It requires that colleges understand the students they serve and reimagine policy and practice to support those students and to close existing opportunity gaps. Much of this work is guided by use of targeted institutional data to make strategic decisions in the best interests of the student.

> ATD believes that "Equity is grounded in the principle of fairness. In higher education, equity refers to ensuring that each student receives what they need to be successful through the intentional design of the college experience" (ATD Equity Statement).

Achieving the Dream developed this guide, accompanying workbook, and college spotlights to support the growing number of institutions across the country that are shifting to scheduling courses in shorter academic terms. This guide is shaped by the experiences of colleges that have made this transition. It is intended to be used with cross-functional college teams as they explore and plan for a transition to offering flexible term courses. The guide and workbook include tips and best practices from colleges as well as resources to help get institutional teams ready for this transition. The accompanying workbook divides the planning into five phases of work:

1. Decision Making
2. Purpose and Case Making
3. Strategy
4. Academic Planning
5. Support Planning

Each phase includes activities to help colleges address:

- key decisions
- required stakeholders
- important data and strategy questions
- communication planning
- required training/professional development
- planning for critical next steps

The workbook also walks colleges through key structural, process, and attitudinal changes that may need to occur during academic course redesign and student affairs changes that will support students in a transition to shorter academic terms.

PARTICIPATING COLLEGES

ATD interviewed six colleges in various stages of their planning and implementation work for this guide. The stories of their journeys along with how they launched, key decision points, and lessons learned along the way are included in each college spotlight that accompanies the guide and workbook.

Participating Colleges:

Amarillo College

Grayson College

Odessa College

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College

Trident Technical College

Waukesha County Technical College

The early data is promising from many of these colleges. In 2012, Trident Technical College made the decision to deconstruct their semester and saw their student course success rates increase from 63.2% to 75.3%, in the fall of 2017. During that same time frame, their withdrawal rates decreased from 15.8% to 9.4%, and their graduation rate increased by 8 percentage points. Odessa College also launched their 8-week courses in the 2014 academic year. Two years after introducing this deconstructed semester format, Odessa saw a 13% increase in enrollment and a 26% increase in their FTIC enrollment; their graduation rate doubled to 42% in 2014. Amarillo College began shortening terms in 2016 and their full-time enrollment has increased from 36% in 2016 to 46% in 2020. Success rates increased for their African American and Hispanic students, and both general education and developmental course success rates increased from the 2012 academic year to the 2017 academic year. Grayson College began their journey in fall 2017, and one year after launching saw an 11% increase in their conversion rate of students who attended part-time to students who attended full-time. Northeast Wisconsin Technical College has just launched their "8-Week Advantage" transformation and has seen modest improvements in both course success and withdrawal rates. Waukesha County Technical College has recently launched their shorter terms during the pandemic and is gathering initial data sets.

RESEARCH

Decades of research into the impact of shortened courses on student learning and outcomes shows great promise. Study after study shows the positive impact shorter semesters have on student learning.[3] More recent studies show improved student outcomes in terms lasting 8 weeks.[4] Finally, Logan and Geltner found that shorter terms not only improved student success via improved learning outcomes but also decreased the number of students withdrawing from courses, which led to improved completion.

Increased student success in a shortened term also holds true for various modalities and disciplines.[5] Studies have shown increases in student outcomes in shorter terms for courses in abnormal psychology in an online format,[6] in marketing,[7] accounting,[8] construction science,[9] and in computer information systems, history, and communication courses.[10]

These positive outcomes also hold true for graduate-level courses,[11] courses offered at four-year colleges and universities,[12] and community colleges.[13]

Achieving the Dream has worked with several colleges that have made the shift to shorter academic terms. These colleges have also reported an increase in student success, improved persistence, reduced number of students withdrawing from courses and an increase in credit accumulation per term which leads to more students enrolled full-time.

3 Carrington, L. G. (2010). The impact of course scheduling on student success in intermediate accounting. *American Journal of Business Education*. 3(4), 51–60; Austin, A.M., and Leland Gustafson. (2006) Impact of course length on student learning. *Journal of Economics and Finance Education*, 5(1): 26–37; and Ferguson, J. M., & DeFelice, A. E. (2010). Length of online course and student satisfaction, perceived learning, and academic performance. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 11(2), 73–84.

4 Shaw, et al. 2013. An evaluation of student outcomes by course duration in online higher education. *The Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 16(4), 1–9; Gamboa, B.R. (2013). Impact of course length on and subsequent use as a predictor of course success 2008–2009 through 2012–2013. Institutional Effectiveness Research and Planning report; and Sloan, Ron (November 2017). Improving student outcomes utilizing 8-week courses: Considering its feasibility for Ivy Tech Community College, DMA Version III.

5 Logan, R. & Geltner, P. (2000). The influence of session length on student success, RP Group Proceedings 2000: The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, April 26, 35–48.

6 Shaw, 1–9.

7 Ho, W. L., & Polonsky, M. (2012, August). Marketing students' perception of traditional and intensive delivery: An exploratory study. In ANZMAC 2007: 3Rs, reputation responsibility relevance, 3268–3273.

8 Carrington, 51–60.

9 Choudhury, I. (2017). Influence of a compressed semester on student performance in a construction science course. American Society for Engineering Education Conference, Columbus, Ohio.

10 Gamboa.

11 Seamon, M. (2004). Short and long-term differences in instructional effectiveness between intensive and semester-length courses. *Teachers College Record*, 106(4), 852–874.

12 Chodhury, I. Lutes, L. & Davies, R. (2013). Comparing the rigor of compressed format courses to their regular semester counterparts. *Innovative Higher Education*, 38, 19–29, 2013; and Carrington, 51–60.

13 2010 Sheldon, C.Q., Durella, N.R. (2010). Success rates for students taking compressed and regular length developmental courses in the community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 34, 39–54; Shaw, 1–9; Sloan; and Logan and Geltner, 35–48.

Contributing Factors to Success

There are a number of reasons why a shortened term may contribute to student success. Logan and Geltner (2000) learned from faculty that shorter term courses create an opportunity for bonding between students and faculty members creating a "positive and unforgettable experience" that may explain the increased success. Shaw (2013) and Ho and Polonsky (2012) suggest that shorter terms lead to increased interaction, greater participation, and increased opportunities for engagement and deeper learning. Additionally, in a shortened term faculty feedback occurs faster and students are more connected with their progress in the course.

It's also been shown that in shorter academic terms, students can see and attain progress to degrees faster. This supports multiple pillars of the guided pathways framework adopted at hundreds of institutions and is critical to getting students to the finish line in a reasonable amount of time. Chodhury (2017) cites the opportunity that exists for greater social presence when students have more frequent interactions with instructors and peer learners. Finally, students in shorter terms have fewer classes to focus on at one time. This can allow students to be more efficient with their time and help them balance courses with competing commitments outside the classroom (Ho and Polonsky, 2012).

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE

Colleges often look to other peer institutions for guidance when making transformative change at their institutions. However, it is not enough that another college has successfully made this change in their unique context. Support for and commitment to the work at an institution will require the college to communicate effectively how the changes will benefit their unique students and impact those being asked to make changes. Using both quantitative and qualitative data can help tell the story; connect to institutional context, mission and strategy; and make a strong case for the move to shorter terms at the college. To get started on this journey. It is critical to outline the scope, timeline, goals, key stakeholders, rationale, and strategy for embarking on this journey. It is also critical to approach this work as whole-college, systems work. Taking a systems approach recognizes that different parts of the college are interrelated and contribute to systems within the larger college system. Transforming a college to offer courses in shorter terms requires all areas of the college to be aligned in structures and

processes, recognizing and anticipating that a change in one part of the college will affect other areas. For example, changing how courses are offered (both in schedule and modality) will impact advising, financial aid, finances, human resources, and the bookstore. These areas are interconnected and directly impact the student experience at an institution, so it is important that all areas are included as decisions are made. This comprehensive planning work will support efforts in implementing structural, process, and cultural change at the institution.

In the workbook use the planning tables in part 1, Early Decision Making, and find support defining the goals, scope of work, and timeline and identifying which key stakeholders will make up the team.

Leading the Work

As the college organizes to plan and implement this work, creation of a core leadership team and working groups will be critical. The core leadership team will set the vision and the strategy and should remain constant throughout planning and implementation. Core team composition should include leadership from all areas that will be impacted by the transition. The core leadership team can expand during different phases of the work to include subgroups working on different strategic areas of the planning and implementation. The working groups that are activated may change with the phase and focus of the work. It cannot be stressed enough the importance of engaging faculty from the very beginning of the planning process and including them on key leadership and working teams.

To make this work successful, leadership will be required at all levels of the organization. Senior leadership must lead the way by setting the vision, emphasizing the importance of this work, aligning it with other student success efforts at the college, and continuing to keep this work as a top priority despite competing initiatives. It is also critical that senior leadership resource the transition by providing time, professional development, and opportunities to engage and collaborate with peers within and across institutions. For example, senior leadership at Ivy Tech and Trident Technical College set aside significant resources for professional learning for both faculty and staff as they explored ways to implement changes in and across program areas.

Deans and unit leaders will need to listen and provide flexibility to develop, empower, support, and encourage all front-line faculty and staff to change structures and processes that move the college to shortened terms while keeping efforts centered on the student experience. Academic deans will need to help faculty focus on instructional

redesign centered on student learning outcomes, engaging pedagogy, and innovative formative and summative assessment. Both Student Affairs and academic leaders can create opportunities for collaboration by creating cross-discipline teams to innovate process redesign.

Finally, front-line faculty and staff will need to use their leadership to champion the work with peers, aid and support where possible, and use their expertise to change structures and processes in a way that will support students in their learning journey, both in and out of the classroom, in shorter academic terms.

Key Stakeholders

All parts of the planning work require colleges to identify key stakeholders who will need to be involved in this project for both direct work and/or endorsement or governance. Possible key stakeholders include senior administration, faculty and staff, academic governance leaders, students (current and incoming), community leaders and workforce. It is critical that planning and implementation teams include representation from both academic affairs, student affairs, institutional research, human resources, and operations such as the communications and marketing, the bookstore, and the finance offices. Waukesha County Technical College credits part of their success to the inclusive approach to planning between academic affairs and student affairs.

Not all stakeholders will need to be engaged at the beginning and for the entire duration. As mentioned earlier, the core team will expand and adjust depending on skillset required for the phase of the work. For example, some stakeholders may be needed in a long-term planning capacity while others may only be required for consultation at a particular critical juncture. To help colleges build strong teams in all phases of this work a team charter can help explicitly identify mission, goals, roles, values and norms.
Team Charter Template

Helpful questions to ask when including stakeholders are:

- Who is accountable for the success of this work?
- Who will be responsible for the day-to-day implementation of this work?
- Who needs to be consulted before decisions are made or tasks are completed?
- Who needs to be periodically informed of progress?
- Does the team reflect the skillset required to achieve the goals of the team?
- Is the team strength sufficient to achieve the work and meet the deadlines?

Purpose and Case Making

AUTHOR AND SPEAKER SIMON Sinek states that "people don't buy WHAT you do, they buy WHY you do it."[14] As transformational change is rolled out at a college, it is important to have a strong purpose, or "why," that works within a unique institutional context. Most colleges choose to deconstruct their semester structure to offer either increased flexibility or additional opportunities for success to their students. For example, colleges leveraged their shorter term offerings during the pandemic to help students reduce the academic burden but still maintain momentum toward their goals. Students had the option to enroll late and still take a few classes. If they needed to disenroll due to work or lack of childcare, they lost fewer courses. Colleges like Trident Technical College found their "why" in 12 years of declining student success rates in their full-semester 16-week courses. They looked at their data for courses offered in all lengths of term and saw that overall, student success increased in courses offered in shorter terms. Motivated by the impact of the data, senior leadership began to share this data across the college to make the case for a shift to offering courses in a 7-week format. Similarly, faculty at Odessa College looked at their student-level data and recognized that fatigue and momentum were real barriers in 16-week formats despite having good programming in place. Colleges may find the need to tailor their "why" messages to directly address the concerns and interests of different stakeholders. One common thread is the desire to help

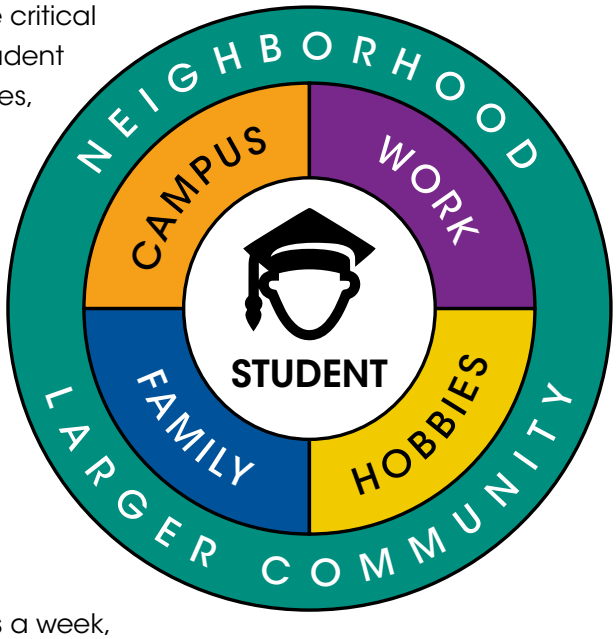
"Colleges may find the need to tailor their "why" messages to directly address the concerns and interests of different stakeholders. One common thread is the desire to help every student succeed, which is often a good starting place for your messaging.

14 https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?utm_campaign=tedspread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

every student succeed, which is often a good starting place for your messaging.

WHO ARE YOUR STUDENTS?

David Ebenbach, professor at Georgetown University, posits, "Students bring their full selves with them wherever they go on campus. Their academic work informs their personhood, and vice-versa."[15] Achieving the Dream has championed the inclusion of the whole student in its reform efforts, emphasizing the urgency of knowing your students. Our teaching and learning, holistic student supports, equity, and guided pathways efforts emphasize the centrality of the students lived experiences in redesign efforts. ATD highlights the critical need to intentionally design all aspects of the student experience, and thus all college structures, policies, processes, and culture around the reality of the students they serve.



This means going beyond basic demographic information to understand the intersectional identities of your students, their experiences and needs, and their challenges or responsibilities. Armed with this knowledge, the redesign team can make decisions that will increase the success of the redesign in raising student outcomes and will close opportunity gaps.

If an institution has a high number of parenting students registered part-time who work 20+ hours a week, designing course offerings that allow a student to take a few classes each term and stay continuously enrolled may improve their ability to stay on track, reach key early momentum metrics, and complete in a timely manner. Waukesha County Technical College looked at their attendance patterns and saw that roughly 85% of their students attended part-time, and the average credit load per semester was six. They also discovered that fewer than 6% of their students would complete 30 credits in an academic year, an important early momentum metric to completion. They realized that by changing their academic semesters they could work to keep students continuously enrolled, accommodate their attendance needs, and help them complete in a timely manner.

15 Ebenbach, D. (2017, December 14). Crossing the divide. *Inside Higher Ed.* https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2017/12/14/collaborations-between-faculty-and-staff-improve-student-well-being-opinion

Gaining a deeper understanding of students requires analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data; colleges should resist the temptation to rely on anecdotal information even if some data is challenging to collect (Student Needs Assessment). Some of the data needed to understand students is already gathered by the institution through existing processes and technologies, while other data may need to have new processes created. This requires close collaboration between those leading the redesign effort and their institutional research and technology departments to identify what is needed, what is already collected, and what needs to be collected.

When aggregated, these metrics and indicators can complement other institutional data that colleges collect—such as when students are on campus for their classes, what supports are underused compared to reported need, or when during the semester different supports are used most. This information can be used to inform course length, modality, and pedagogy. In addition, this data can also be used to design courses that deliver supports in an integrated manner.

See Appendix A: Examples of Data to Help Colleges Know Their Students

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

Transforming an institution requires more than just isolated changes in one particular area. Moving the needle to improve outcomes will require changes to structures, processes, and attitudes across the college.

Structural Change	Occurs when policies, structures, and procedures create a framework for new behaviors that improve the student experience throughout the institution.
Process Change	Alters how people do their job and is transformative when enough individuals change their practices to ensure that large numbers of students encounter new student support interactions.
Attitudinal Change	Occurs when individuals understand their work and view work processes in new ways.

Attitudinal change occurs when employees understand their work processes in different ways. Attitudinal change brings about cultural change and understanding the culture of a college is also an important part of laying the foundation for transformation. Amarillo College embraces the ability to bring about transformative change quickly at their institution. The "Amarillo Way" enables quick pivots in the best interests of the student in as little as four to six months. Odessa College noted that they had three solid years of transforming the college under their belt when they decided to offer courses in a more flexible format. However, if the mindset of the organization is firmly entrenched in a traditional semester structure, it may take more time to make the case for change and bring about the attitudinal change required to make this work a success.

In the workbook, use the planning tables in part 2, Purpose and Case Making, to help your institution craft your "why" and make the case for a transition to shortened academic terms across the institution.

> Attitudinal change brings about cultural change, and understanding the culture of a college is also an important part of laying the foundation for transformation.

Strategy, Metrics, and Communication

STRATEGY

Determining an implementation strategy is another key early decision. Institutions will need to decide whether to roll out the shortened academic term with all of their classes at once, or to use a phased-in approach, or to implement changes with a smaller pilot group of courses. The strategy colleges choose to implement will depend on institutional culture and the amount of support the college has for this shift, the available resources, and the urgency of the work. Examples of institutions that have chosen different implementation strategies include Amarillo College's approach to convert their top 25 enrolled courses as they started this work. Northeast Wisconsin Technical College chose to convert half their courses at first and then had a plan to phase in the remaining courses over the next few years. And Trident Technical College decided to convert all courses in every program all at once. These different approaches were all successful and were based on the institution's strategic goals and capacity to undertake the change. It is critical that considerations in designing institutional strategy always include exploration of how the strategy will impact the student experience. Colleges should never design a strategy that will create barriers for students as they move through their academic program.

In the workbook, use the planning tables in part 3, Strategy, to help your institution direct how the implementation of this work begins.

METRICS

An integral part to planning for implementation are the selection of key metrics and milestones and creating an assessment plan that includes planning for data collection. While many colleges make this transition to improve student success, it is important to define the metrics of success that are important to the institutional context. It is also important to monitor both leading and lagging indicators of success to ensure that these efforts do not produce hidden consequences for students. Lagging indicators will tell the college whether they have arrived successfully at their destination. Leading indicators for each phase will allow the college to monitor the progress of the work and to ensure that the changes are moving the college in the right direction. A good leading indicator is both predictive and able to be influenced by the team (Data Discovery Guide).

“ An integral part to planning for implementation is the selection of key metrics and milestones and creating an assessment plan that includes planning for data collection.

Leading Indicator Examples	Lagging Indicator Examples
Student attendance	Course success rates
First-term grades	Persistence rates (term to term)
Percentage of students withdrawing	Completion rates
Student credits accumulated	Student satisfaction
Increased understanding by faculty and staff of purpose of change to shortened terms	GPA
Percentage of stakeholders who have been trained or received professional development	Licensure pass rates
Percentage of communication plan activities delivered	Learning outcomes met
Number of courses transitioned to shorter terms	Transfer rates

As the implementation progresses, the college will eventually see the needle move on student success metrics such as course success, persistence, students enrolled full time, and ultimately completion.

COMMUNICATING THE WORK

Communication across the institution to all stakeholders is critical to the success of any transformational change. Odessa College credits "extraordinarily effective" communication to contributing to their "all in" culture. Odessa leveraged clear and consistent messaging delivered through multiple modalities. Their intentionality and transparency helped the college stakeholders stay informed throughout the planning and implementation process. It is vital for colleges to have a communication plan to share important information with students and with faculty and staff. A good mantra for communicating this work should be "early, often, and transparently." Waukesha County Technical College created an internal communication campaign for faculty, called "Mission Possible," that helped focus their efforts and keep faculty informed. As the college works to understand the purpose of this transformation and how it will be helpful, it is critical to share a clear and consistent message focused on why the college is making the change. In addition, the college should have a clear plan to share this information with all levels of the institution. Grayson College encourages colleges to be as transparent as possible about the work from the very beginning to maintain trust with key stakeholders. Both Odessa College and Trident Technical College recommend being very intentional about controlling the narrative and ensuring that factual information is shared to prevent rumors or panic that can often accompany large-scale change at an institution. In addition, colleges should create a cadence for information sharing so stakeholders know when to expect new information to be shared with them. It is also important to consider who will deliver the communication across the institution. Several colleges used small teams made of cross-functional stakeholders to present information across the college. These "traveling road shows" keep the message consistent, allow a face to be associated with the transformation, and help colleges demonstrate that it supports a whole-college, collaborative approach to implementing change.

> "It is vital for colleges to have a communication plan to share important information with students and with faculty and staff. A good mantra for communicating this work should be "early, often, and transparently."

COMMUNICATING TO STUDENTS

It is critical to have all students ready to successfully engage on the first day of the new term. Thus, it is important to be clear about the behaviors and deadlines that will set up a student for success in a shortened semester. Colleges have leveraged marketing campaigns and social media and in-person listening sessions to keep students informed. Trident Technical College used an intentional marketing campaign aimed at ensuring all students were seat-ready on the first day of class. Communicating to current students may require a different plan from communicating to new students. Current students will be accustomed to the previous structures and practices and may need more information and preparation to be ready for success on the first day of class in a new format. It will be critical to identify the processes that will impact students the most and have a clear marketing and communication plan to inform students of these changes. For example, if the financial aid disbursement processes will change under the new structure, it will be important for students to understand to the changes. This information should be delivered to students in a multitude of ways, and the message should be consistent from every source. Deadline changes should also be clearly communicated so students are not surprised. Odessa College found that new students did not know any different structures or processes. The college emphasized that critical information should be built into their onboarding structures information should be delivered from multiple sources, and there should be opportunities for questions and clarification at all steps.

Teaching Students in a Shortened Academic Term

PLANNING FOR LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The conversion to a compressed term likely creates a challenge for instructors: How will you take what you might have done in 16 weeks and create new learning opportunities for the same content in 7 or 8 weeks? We urge faculty to avoid the path of simply stacking multiple class sessions from an existing design into longer sessions. Take the opportunity to approach your course with a fresh lens and ask what is most important for your students to know and to be able to do when they complete the course. Work with colleagues who have expertise in instructional design and evidence-based pedagogy; many institutions offer this support through a Center for Teaching and Learning or a Faculty Development Committee. Instructors likely have colleagues in other academic programs who have expertise in backwards design, in which the instructor begins by considering their learning goals, determines how to assess students' learning toward those goals, and then plans for learning activities that will occur during class meeting times.[16] This approach is just as meaningful in hybrid or fully online courses, as it informs the decisions we make around both synchronous and asynchronous sessions and activities.

Delivering content in 7 or 8 weeks makes it essential that faculty and students have a high level of awareness of student progress through each week of the term. Once you have established goals for student learning, we encourage you to use both formative and summative assessments to track student progress through each week of the

16 Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

course. Many instructors find benefits in incorporating learning assessment techniques as part of their time with students. These techniques may require only a few minutes of class time and can be a helpful way to signal the transition from one key section of course content to another. They signal to students where they might need to focus more time to stay on track with course material and they help the instructor understand where they might need to change the pacing of class activities. As with other suggestions shared in this section, the mix of formative and summative assessment approaches can be done well in face-to-face, hybrid, and online classroom environments.[17]

> Once you have established goals for student learning, we encourage you to use both formative and summative assessments to track student progress through each week of the course.

We encourage all faculty, across all disciplines and academic programs, to use inclusive teaching practices. A recently released Evidence-Based Teaching Guide to Inclusive Teaching suggests that this approach includes:

1. developing self-awareness,
2. developing empathy,
3. creating a positive classroom climate,
4. making inclusive pedagogical choices, and
5. leveraging networks.[18]

Changing content delivery to be effective in shorter terms can at first seem overwhelming. But these shifts actually present a tremendous opportunity to incorporate learner-centered pedagogical approaches, in which colleges engage students in active processes of gathering, considering, applying, and demonstrating their knowledge. Examples include active learning, collaborative learning, and inquiry and problem-centered learning.[19] Colleges can leverage adaptive courseware to provide immediate feedback and personalize the pace and content

17 Barkley, E. F., & Major, C. H. (2016). *Learning assessment techniques: A handbook for college faculty.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

18 Dewsbury, B., & Brame, C. J. (2019). Evidence-based teaching guide to inclusive teaching. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 18, 1–5. https://www.lifescied.org/doi/10.1187/cbe.19-01-0021

19 https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/active-learning

Barkley, E. F., & Major, C. H. (2020). *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H., & Cross, K. P. (2014). *Collaborative learning: A handbook for college faculty* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

of learning, ensuring that students master crucial content while freeing instructor time for group projects and the range of active learning processes that you may wish to add to your toolbox.[20]

The flipped classroom format can also provide an alternate structure that can be useful in shorter academic terms. Here, students develop an initial understanding of course material before the class meeting, and then the instructor uses the time together to support students in applying their learning through intentionally designed activities.[21]

Finally, a growing number of faculty nationwide are adopting Open Educational Resources (OER), which are "digital materials that are free and openly licensed, allowing instructors and students to collaborate, adapt, use, and share them."[22] OER can be any type of learning content, from assessments, articles, lesson plans, videos, textbooks, and images to entire courses; faculty select, combine, and revise high-quality course materials to build courses that best support their learning outcomes and reflect their students' interests. The majority of faculty engaged in ATD's recent Open Educational Resources Degree initiative reported that students responded well to OER courses, coming to class better prepared and more engaged in course discussions and projects. This finding suggests that students in shortened-term courses may benefit from faculty use of OER because this approach will ensure that students have access to all required course materials on day one.

Students in shortened term courses may benefit from faculty use of OER because this approach will ensure that students have access to all required course materials on day one.

In the workbook, use the planning table in part 4, Academic Planning, to help your institution outline the structural, process, and attitudinal changes needed for course redesign. You can also reference the sample term engagement plan at the end of this guidebook in Appendix A.

20 Vignare, K., Lammers Cole, E., Greenwood, J., Buchan, T., Tesene, M., DeGruyter, J., Carter, D., Luke, R., O'Sullivan, P., Berg, K., Johnson, D., & Kruse, S. (2018). *A guide for implementing adaptive courseware: From planning through scaling*. Joint publication of Association of Public and Land-grant Universities and Every Learner Everywhere. https://www.aplu.org/library/a-guide-for-implementing-adaptive-courseware-from-planning-through-scaling/File

21 https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/flipped-classroom

22 Griffiths, R., Mislevy, J., Wang, S., Ball, A., Shear, L., & Desrochers, D. (2020). *OER at scale: The academic and economic outcomes of Achieving the Dream's OER Degree Initiative*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International. https://www.achievingthedream.org/resource/17993/oer-at-scale-the-academic-and-economic-outcomes-of-achieving-the-dream-s-oer-degree-initiative

Supporting Students in Flexible Parts of the Term

IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE TO consider what we do in the classroom as critical in preparing for shorter terms. Yet, how we support students outside the classroom is equally important to their success at our institutions. As the college moves to shorter academic terms all processes will need to be adjusted. As Waukesha County Technical College leadership reflected, "It will touch every business process at the college." Supporting and engaging students before they enter the classroom can contribute to satisfaction and a sense of belonging and ensure a successful start. Colleges should consider best practices to support students along the entire spectrum of engagement, from recruiting through application, onboarding, and enrollment for all terms. Overall, processes from all offices that put the student at the center are more likely to contribute to satisfaction, success, and a sense of belonging. Input and feedback from students (new and existing) and stakeholders who work directly with students is critical in the planning and implementation phases of new policies and processes to support students in shorter academic terms.

The college will need to make many decisions as they start to prepare their institution to support students for a transition to shortened academic terms. Structural, process, and attitudinal changes will need to occur as the college makes the shift. As colleges examine their intake, onboarding, and enrollment processes, they should consider the changes needed in admissions, orientation, advising, financial aid, registration, billing, and the bookstore to be ready for shorter terms. Examples of key areas of policies and practice that will impact the student experience in a shift to shorter terms can be found below.

Early and Important Decisions		
Structural Considerations	**Process/Policy Considerations**	**Attitudinal Considerations**
What is the timeline to accomplish this transition? What courses/ programs will convert first to a shortened term?	What key academic and student affairs process deadlines will need to change to accommodate a shift to shorter academic terms?	How does the use of technology (LMS, Student Success platforms, Acitve Learning platforms) improve student success in shortened academic terms?
How will facility utilization change? Will there be lecture hall and/or laboratory capacity concerns?	How will registration processes look different to support students registering for two terms per semester? Will the college still maintain a semester structure for registering students?	How do we expand faculty and staff mindset beyond a semester time-frame to include alternate academic calendar options?
How will contracts for full-time and part-time faculty and staff change? Will compensation structures need to change?	Will there be a change to attendance policies as format and modality of courses change?	How do we reinforce a "whole college" mindset around student support?
What will the academic calendar look like, and how will this change course scheduling?	Will there be new/different require-ments in technology utilization polices?	How do we encourage a growth mindset regarding student capacities in shorter academic terms?
What course formats will be leveraged to implement these efforts?	How will the financial aid processes be different? Will the college still disburse aid in a semester structure? How will this impact the student experience?	
Will there be technology implementa-tion/utilization changes?	How will billing processes change to adjust for two terms per semester? Will the college bill students twice in a semester?	
What will the communication plan look like to market this work internally and externally?	What bookstore policies need to change? Will the bookstore need to expand return policies for term 2 courses?	
What professional development and training programs will be required to prepare faculty and staff?	How will the appeals processes need to change to be completed in a term format?	
Will this change impact institutional or programmatic accreditation structures?	How will hiring processes change for adjuncts? Will they be hired for a full semester of courses or by term?	
Will staffing structures need to change to accommodate this new way of offering courses?	What will be the impact on faculty and staff workload policies?	
Will the hours of operation of key support offices need to change? Will this impact vacation schedules?	How will the process of providing accommodations to students living with disabilities change?	

In the workbook, use the tables in part 5, Student Support Planning, to help you move through areas of non-academic change that impact students.

Conclusion

DECONSTRUCTING THE SEMESTER STRUCTURE provides an opportunity for colleges to offer courses in a more flexible and intentional format that helps meet their students' needs in an equitable way. Community college students arrive at our institutions with complex lives. It is our responsibility to know our students and design our institutions to meet their needs. The typical 16-week semester format has not traditionally yielded success for all community college students. Having multiple starts of term allows students to start no matter when they arrive at our institutions and removes the notion of being a "late" registrant. Being late for one shortened term presents an opportunity for the student to be early to the next term. This format also allows students to focus on fewer courses at once, allowing life disruptions to have less impact on students' overall progress. Finally, this format provides part-time students with an opportunity to stay continuously enrolled and still meet the early momentum metrics that will help them successfully complete their programs.

This transformation is more than course redesign, and colleges must approach this work in a systemic and collaborative, whole-college way. The student experience, both in and out of the classroom, must be planned for and assessed with intentionality to reduce barriers that could potentially widen equity gaps. Leadership at all levels and across the organization must prioritize and support this work and ensure the college understands how this approach to delivering courses will improve success for students. Effective communication practices will also be critical to keep the college community informed of progress, for the work still to be done, and to celebrate the small victories along the way. While this type of shift is not a silver bullet, it is another key equity strategy to reimagining and redesigning our institutions to meet our students where they are and help them achieve their goals successfully.

Appendix A:
Examples of Data to Help Colleges Know Their Students

Examples of Data to Help Colleges Know Their Students	
Area of Interest	**Data Points**
Disaggregated Student Identity Data	• Race and ethnicity • Percentage of students working more than 20 hours/week? • Percentage of students who are parents? • Percentage of Pell Grant students living below the poverty threshold? • Percentage of students who are food or housing insecure? • Percentage of students who are first generation college students?
Course Success Rates	• By term-length Maymester, summer, and full-term courses? - Does this look different when disaggregated by race/ethnicity, income, or attendance status? • By program - Does this look different when disaggregated by race/ethnicity, income, or attendance status?
Attendance Patterns	• What is the PT/FT ratio? • What does your part-time student look like? - Gender - Parental status - Programs enrolled in • What is the average number of hours students take per semester? • What are the term-to-term persistence rates? • What is the average time to completion? • Average credits earned at completion?
Withdrawal Rates/ Patterns	• What is the withdrawal rate? - Who is withdrawing? - From which program? - When are they withdrawing (which week)? - Why are they withdrawing?

Appendix B: Sample Term Engagement Plan

Engaging Your Students Before the First Class Meeting

Use your Learning Management System (LMS) to reach out to your students in advance of the first class meeting. This is an important opportunity to check in, introduce yourself, convey your excitement about the course that's about to begin, and set a tone that you want to see your students succeed. If a compressed semester is relatively new at your institution, you may also want to use this communication to explain this structural change to students and to share your thoughts about how this approach may support their success. The schedule necessitates that students have their required course materials from day one, so part of your outreach should include confirming that students understand what course materials are required and how they can access them.

Making the Most of the First Class Meeting/Start of Term

The first class meeting or two are especially important in a compressed semester. The tone you set and the extent to which you foster a sense of classroom community can impact your students' sense of belonging and their interest in the course material. One key step is to design introductory activities that are not exclusively focused on the instructor's delivery of the course syllabus. Create space for you to share your expectations of the students and for the students to share their hopes and expectations for the course. One popular activity is First Day Graffiti, in which the instructor writes a number of different sentence stems on whiteboards or flip charts around the room; students move around to write their responses and chat with their peers and instructor about what they are writing and reading in the other responses. Examples include "I learn best in classes where the instructor …," "I am most likely to participate in classes when …," and "Something that makes it hard to learn in a course is …." As students complete their responses, the teacher moves to each one and reflects a bit on what they see.[23]

23 https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/course-design-ideas/first-day-of-class-activities-that-create-a-climate-for-learning/

The First Day Graffiti activity and other similar techniques share a common goal of fostering a sense of classroom community from day one. They can be successfully implemented face to face and in hybrid and fully online environments. Learning students' names, co-creating class norms, and hearing from students about their goals and interests opens up meaningful lines of communication between students and between faculty and students. These approaches signal to students that faculty are interested in their success. This doesn't mean that your course will be less rigorous or "soft." Rather, it means that you have high standards that you know your students are capable of meeting, and that you view your role not as a "deliverer of wisdom" but rather as a coach, a facilitator of their success. You have deep expertise and passion for what you teach, and it is essential that you share that with students in a spirit of community.

Gathering MidsemesterFeedback

Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF) is a high-impact professional learning strategy that empowers students to partner with educators in improving the teaching and learning process. The SGIF approach asks faculty to volunteer to be informally observed by a faculty peer as they teach. The faculty observer spends the final 30 minutes of class time engaging students without the instructor present. The observers asks students to respond individually, in small groups, and as a whole class, to four questions about the course:

1. What helps your learning?
2. What hinders your learning?
3. What can the instructor do to improve your learning?
4. What can you do to improve your learning?

The observer then synthesizes this feedback into a confidential written report shortly following the feedback session and meets with their faculty partner to discuss and consider ways to make positive change. The instructor then closes the loop by meeting with students to discuss ways that both the instructor and the students can make changes to support learning and success for all. The act of engaging in this exercise signals to students that the instructor really cares about their learning and their experience of the course. The compressed semester presents an especially significant opportunity for the instructor to quickly incorporate student feedback and adjust plans for the second half of the term. This doesn't mean that the instructor will redesign the

course at this point, completely changing assessments and course requirements. But there are often small tweaks to be made that can make a real difference in student engagement and success.

Wrapping Up the Term

Faculty who can implement the suggestions we have shared should find their students navigating the compressed semester with deeper levels of engagement and higher rates of success. Regardless of your institution's formal approach to collecting student course surveys at the term's end, we urge faculty to informally collect student feedback at this stage of the course. This move will be consistent with others the instructor has made throughout the semester to create a learner-centered course grounded in a strong sense of community. Collecting this feedback informally also creates a helpful sense of closure between faculty and students and gives the instructor an opportunity to reflect on the feedback while the course is still fresh, as one looks ahead to the next term.

Since 2004, Achieving the Dream has helped hundreds of colleges and millions of students achieve their goals of success. Informed by research and more than 15 years of practice with institutions of varying demographics, sizes, and contexts, ATD has helped them:

- Enable institution-wide systems and culture change
- Envision the ideal student experience
- Prioritize the barriers to student success
- Share evidence-based strategies for change
- Anticipate necessary changes in college structures and processes
- Plan how to engage stakeholders in making the case for change
- Provide insights and transformational strategies to improve equity
- Track implementation progress and impact of change initiatives