

Palm Beach State College's Strategic Early Planning for Express Terms



Context and Rationale

Palm Beach State College began exploring shortened academic terms, branded as Express Terms, as part of a broader effort to improve student momentum, persistence, and completion. College leaders recognized that while these terms offer significant opportunities for student success, they also introduce complexity across instruction, advising, systems, and operations. Rather than moving quickly, Palm Beach State adopted a measured, inclusive approach to minimize disruption and maximize long-term impact.

From the outset, leaders framed Express Terms as a whole-college redesign rather than a scheduling adjustment. This framing acknowledged that success would depend on institutional readiness, faculty preparation, and alignment across academic and student support functions.



COLLEGE PROFILE

Classification: Four-year, large, suburban

**Total undergraduate enrollment
fall 2023:** 24,369

Faculty union: No

Scope and Design Decisions

Palm Beach State committed to a phased implementation strategy grounded in disciplined execution. Rather than piloting informally or scaling prematurely, the college set a clear timeline that included approximately 18 months of planning, a soft launch in fall 2026, and a target of 75% implementation by 2028.

What changed:

- Express Terms were established as a strategic institutional priority.
- Planning and implementation were structured around a shared execution framework.
- Faculty course redesign and advising preparation were embedded early in the process.

What deliberately did not change:

- The college avoided rushing to implementation without adequate preparation.
- Academic rigor and accreditation requirements remained non-negotiable.
- Decisions about course suitability for shortened terms were evidence-based rather than universal.



This phased scope enabled Palm Beach State to build capacity intentionally while preserving institutional stability.

Leadership and Cross-Functional Coordination

Palm Beach State grounded its implementation strategy in the Franklin-Covey 4 Disciplines of Execution (4DX) framework. Student completion became the institution's Wildly Important Goal (WIG), with an aligned Express Term sub-WIG reinforcing shared accountability across divisions.

This framework provided a common language for execution and helped align academic affairs, student services, advising, IT, and marketing around shared outcomes. Departmental leaders were responsible not only for planning within their areas but also for coordinating dependencies across units, reinforcing that Express Terms required collective ownership rather than siloed execution.

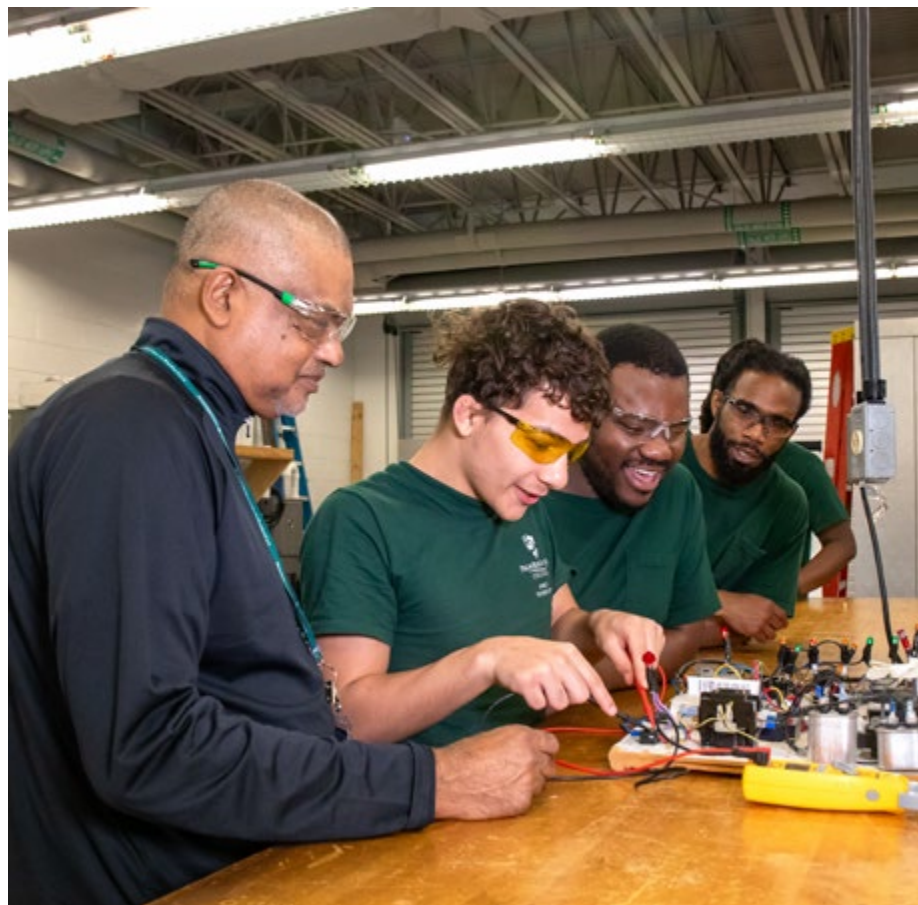
Palm Beach State has also focused on learning from peer colleges. Leadership and cabinet members engaged directly with Western Technical College and Ivy Tech Community College to share insights, challenges, and strategies. These collaborations underscore Palm Beach State's belief that institutions can support one another rather than compete in promoting student success.

Instructional and Student Support Implications

Recognizing that shortened terms require intentional pedagogy, Palm Beach State prioritized faculty development early. The college launched a Backwards Design Academy to help instructors redesign courses for a faster pace while maintaining rigor, coherence, and student success.

Faculty engagement focused on:

- Reframing courses around essential learning outcomes
- Aligning assessments and activities to accelerated pacing
- Anticipating student workload and support needs in shorter terms



Student-facing staff, particularly advisors, were engaged early. Advisors were equipped with revised program maps and targeted training to enable informed, proactive conversations with students.



Operational and Systems Alignment

Palm Beach State relied heavily on Achieving the Dream (ATD) resources as the foundation for operational planning. ATD guides and case studies were adapted into a customized *Palm Beach State Playbook*, ensuring that national best practices were tailored to the local context.

To operationalize the work:

- The Playbook was converted into an Excel-based project management tool.
- Responsibilities were assigned to departmental leads.
- Each department developed its own aligned implementation plan, reinforcing ownership while maintaining coherence.

This approach ensured that systems, policies, and workflows evolved in parallel rather than in isolation.

Communication and Change Messaging

How the institution explained the change internally and externally

Palm Beach State invested early in a comprehensive communication strategy. The model was intentionally branded “Express Terms” to align with the college’s existing Express A and B sessions, creating continuity and reducing confusion.

Key communication strategies included:

- Early and sustained collaboration with marketing
- Student- and community-facing videos and website updates explaining the model and its benefits
- Internal messaging that emphasized collaboration, readiness, and shared responsibility rather than urgency

By prioritizing clarity and consistency, the college positioned Express Terms as an evolution of current practices rather than a disruptive departure.



What Practitioners Should Notice

Palm Beach State’s approach surfaces several important lessons for institutions considering shortened terms:

- **Readiness matters:** An extended planning window builds institutional capacity and reduces implementation risk.
- **Execution frameworks add discipline:** Using a structured framework, such as 4DX, helps translate vision into action and maintain focus over time.
- **Faculty preparation must come early:** Backward design training supports quality and reduces resistance.
- **Exceptions should be evidence-based:** A formal exception process balances flexibility with rigor and prevents default opt-outs.
- **Advising is central to success:** Preparing advisors early ensures students receive accurate, consistent guidance.
- **Peer learning strengthens design:** Engaging with other colleges reduces blind spots and accelerates learning.

