

Flexible Course Scheduling: Maximizing Student Success

Hudson County Community College

October 17, 2025

Laurie Heacock & Monica Parrish Trent, PhD

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Operationalize flexible course schedules
- Understand the benefits of shortened academic terms
- Explore the benefits of evidence-based practices for student learning and success
- Begin planning with tools for prioritization, effective communication, implementation and scaling of shortened courses
- Envision what success looks like



Illinois Central College Case Study



Carnegie Classification: Mixed Associate, Medium

Adapting to meet changing needs, ICC is transitioning a majority of its courses to eight-week terms

WCBU | By **Joe Deacon**
Published July 3, 2024 at 11:58 AM CDT



File Photo / WCBU

Illinois Central College is in the process of transitioning a vast majority of its courses to eight-week schedules by the 2026 fall semester.



Shasta College (CA) Case Study



Shasta College



Carnegie Classification: Mixed Associate,
Medium

Accelerated College Education

ACE is designed using accelerated/compressed courses and structured schedules so you can complete a Certificate in 9 months or an Associate degree in 24 months (or less if you have completed some college coursework already).

The ACE Program at Shasta College

The Shasta College Accelerated College Education (ACE) Program offers a flexible, supportive pathway designed specifically for working adults who are ready to earn a college degree while balancing work and life.

Your Path to a Degree

To ensure a smooth journey from start to finish, the program features predetermined, structured pathways that allow you to complete your associate's degree in as little as two years. By providing a clear sequence of courses, the ACE Program eliminates the guesswork, helping you stay on track and achieve your educational goals efficiently.

A Faster, More Focused Schedule

Our courses are delivered in eight-week compressed blocks, allowing you to focus on just one or two subjects at a time. This format helps you move through your program in a timely manner and remain a full-time student. Most of our classes are offered online or in a hybrid format, with some evening options available to fit your schedule. While the majority of your classes will be accelerated, some specific courses may be a full 17 weeks long.

The ACE Program makes it possible to balance your education with your other commitments, helping you achieve your goals and advance your career.



Table Talks

What stands out to you – promising strategies or potential challenges?

What aspects feel relevant or transferable to our students and context?

Where do you see key differences between their context and ours that we'd need to account for?

If you could ask this college one question about the implementation, what would it be?



Today's Community College Students: AACC Fast Facts

2025 NUMBER & TYPE OF COLLEGES¹



DEGREES AND CERTIFICATES AWARDED⁸

2022-2023



AGE⁶



**AVERAGE: 27
MEDIAN: 23**
Avg/median does not include dual-enrolled students

GENDER²



MEN 43%



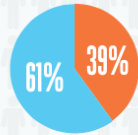
WOMEN 57%

DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDENTS ENROLLED FOR CREDIT²

HISPANIC	28%
BLACK	12%
WHITE	42%
ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER	6%
NATIVE AMERICAN	1%
2 OR MORE RACES	4%
OTHER/UNKNOWN	4%
NONRESIDENT ALIEN	2%



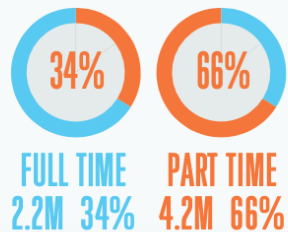
FALL 2023 HEADCOUNT ENROLLMENT



**CREDIT 6.4M²
NONCREDIT 4.1M³
TOTAL: 10.5M**

Estimated change Fall 2023 - Fall 2024: +3.9%⁴

CREDIT BY ATTENDANCE²

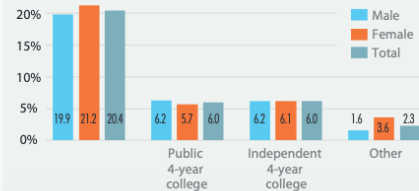


OTHER SIGNIFICANT DEMOGRAPHICS⁵

First generation to attend college	32%
Single parents	13%
Non-U.S. citizens	8%
Veterans	4%
Students with disabilities	23%
Students with prior bachelor's degrees	9%

2022-23

Percent of Full-Year Unduplicated Headcount students that are high school students by gender and type of institution¹²



2019-2020

% OF STUDENTS APPLYING FOR AID⁵



2019-2020

EMPLOYMENT STATUS⁵



43% Full-time Students Employed Full Time

59% Part-time Students Employed Full Time

30% Full-time Students Employed Part Time

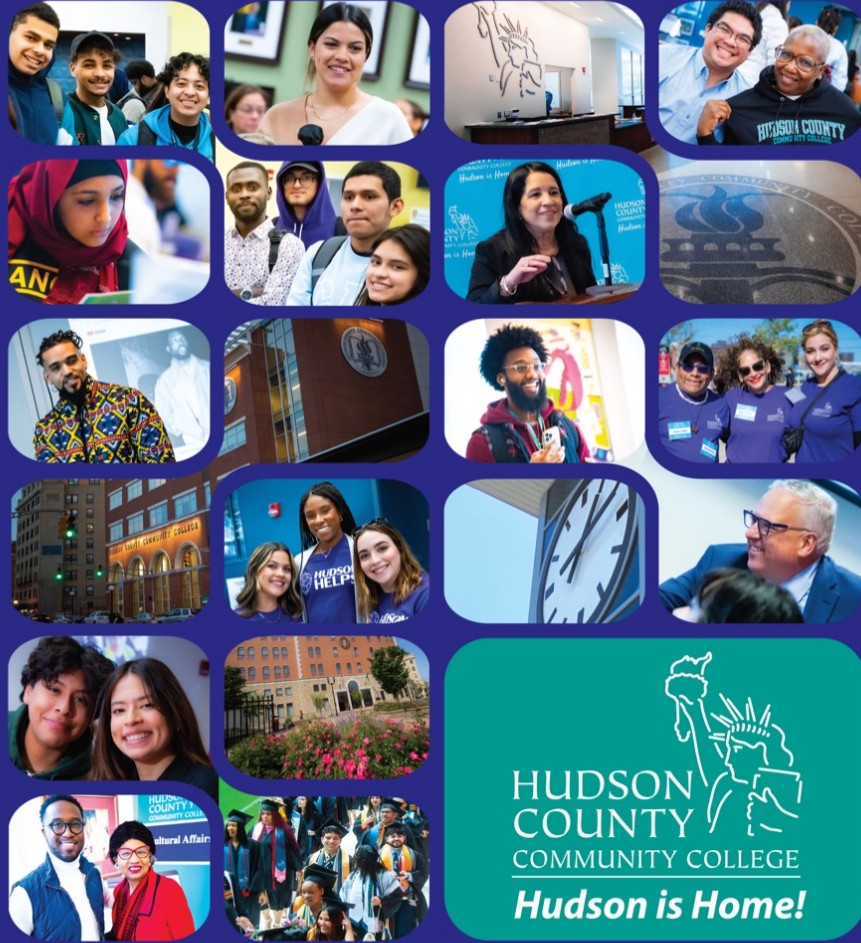
23% Part-time Students Employed Part Time



One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
www.aacc.nche.edu



2024-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN
*The Community's College:
Embracing Our History, Shaping Our Future*



Strategic Direction #1:
Empowering Student Success: Nurturing Every Dimension of Student Growth through Personalized Support In and Beyond the Classroom

Strategic Direction #2:
Unlocking Unlimited Student Potential: A High-Quality Education Informed by Data and Best Practices to Expand Access, Flexible Learning Options, and Technology-Enhanced Innovation

Strategic Direction #3:
Expanding Hudson Scholars: A Comprehensive Support Environment Empowering Every Student to Thrive Academically, Grow Personally, and Excel Professionally


Strategic Direction #4:
Cultivating Individual and Institutional Excellence through Employee Development Best Practices: Fostering a Culture of Continuous Growth, Professional Development, and Employee Engagement

Strategic Direction #5:
Expanding Our Footprint: Creating Sustainable Spaces and Facilities for Future-Ready Learning and Institutional Growth

Strategic Direction #6:
A Catalyst for Community Transformation: Harnessing Institutional Strengths and External Alliances To Address the Evolving Needs of Our Students and Community



Flexible Course Schedules: A Critical Factor for Timely Completion

2024 BENCHMARK REPORT 

Key results



7%
probability of graduating
when students complete
11 or fewer credits per year

Students completing 18-23 credit hours per year are

2x more likely to be retained

7x more likely to graduate than students
completing 11 credits or fewer per year



of degree-seeking
students are in blocked
Completion Paths



of Completion Paths have
financially unsustainable
enrollment levels



more lifetime credits are
earned if students take one
more course each term



of students increase their
course loads, compared to
their first year, indicating the
capacity to flex, if needed

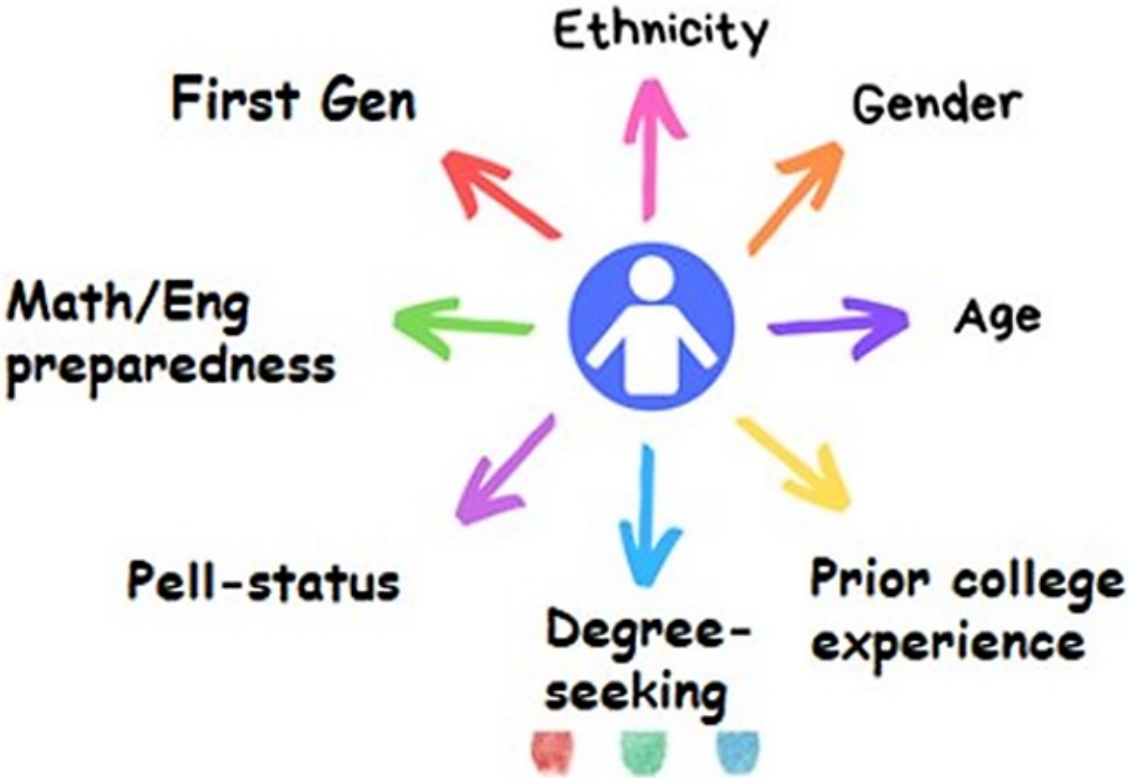
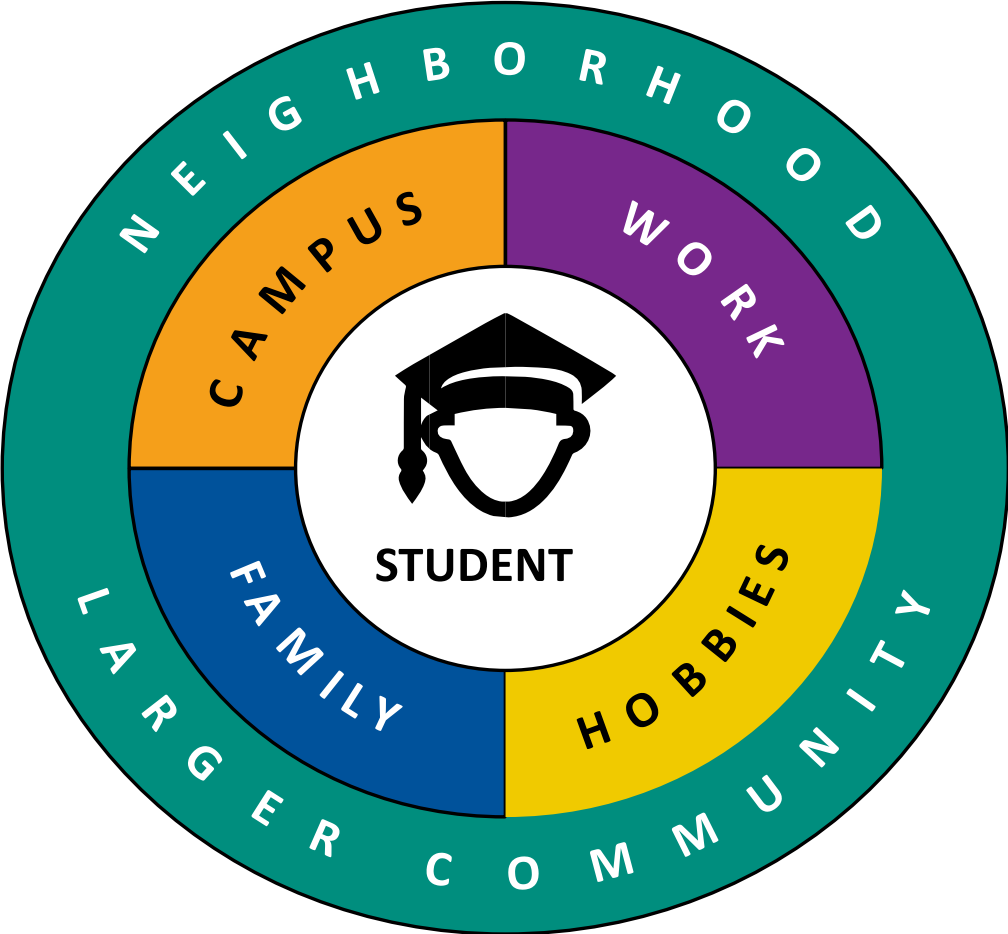
Rethinking Flexible Course Schedules

Traditional	Average Term Credits	Annual Credits	Retention (y-o-y)	Completion
Part-time	1-5	1-11	29%	7%
	6-8	12-17	53%	26%
	9-11	18-23	68%	50%
Full-time	12-14	24-29	74%	62%
	15+	30+	78%	73%

<https://www.aais.com/resources-insights/report/2024-benchmark-report-ad-1>



Who Are Your Students?



Understanding the Students You Serve

- Get to know the whole student
- Intentionally design all aspects of the student experience
- Go beyond basic demographic information to understand the *intersectionality* of your students



Table Talks: In what ways does your current course schedule support or impede your students' ability to progress and persist?



Why: The Need for Flexible Academic Models



**EVOLVING STUDENT
DEMANDS**

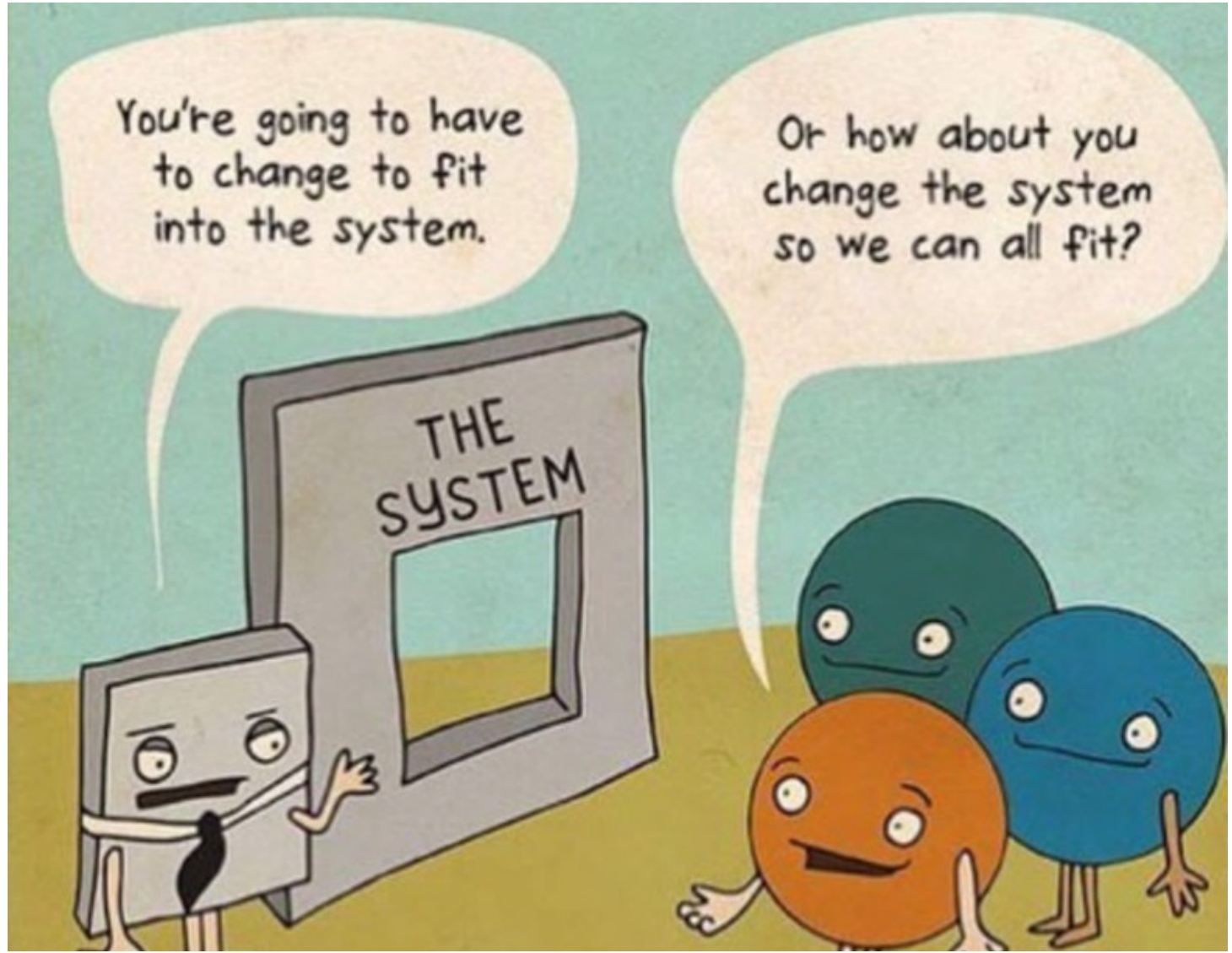


**CHALLENGES WITH
TRADITIONAL MODELS**



**THE CASE FOR
FLEXIBILITY**





The Importance of Scheduling

- Scheduling is how we actualize the curriculum.
- It is fundamental to both attracting and retaining students.
- It is one of the few areas where institutions have complete control.
- The optimal course schedule is elusive and likely an impossible goal.
- There is evidence of impact on student performance, but it is understudied.



Technology to Support Strategic Course Scheduling



hudsonccc
@HudsonCCC



Hudson County Community College Earns Coursedog Academic Operations Roll Out Award

hccc.edu/news-media/new...

@CoursedogInc @DrCReber @NJCommColleges @CCTrustees
@Comm_College @NISOD @BellwetherCC @BHEF @HudCoTweet



Hudson County Community College Earns Coursedog Academic Operations Ro

From hccc.edu

4:26 PM · Aug 13, 2025 · **358** Views

What the Research Says

- Shorter semesters have a positive impact on student learning
- Student outcomes improved in 6- or 8-week terms versus 16-week terms
- Student success improved because of revised and student-centered learning outcomes
- Decreases in the number of students withdrawing from courses, led to improved completion
- Increases in student success in a shortened terms regardless of the modality or discipline
- Students can see and attain progress to degrees faster
- Students have more frequent interactions with instructors and peer learners

Student Voice

A May 2024 Student Voice survey found **one in five** students believe their institution offering courses on an eight-week accelerated basis is among the most important actions administrators could take to increase their academic success.

Among community college students:

- Students taking more than a typical course load (24 percent)
- Online learners (24 percent)
- Students 25 and older (21 percent)
- Students who work full-time (20 percent)



Continuous On-Ramps Help Students Stay on Pace

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

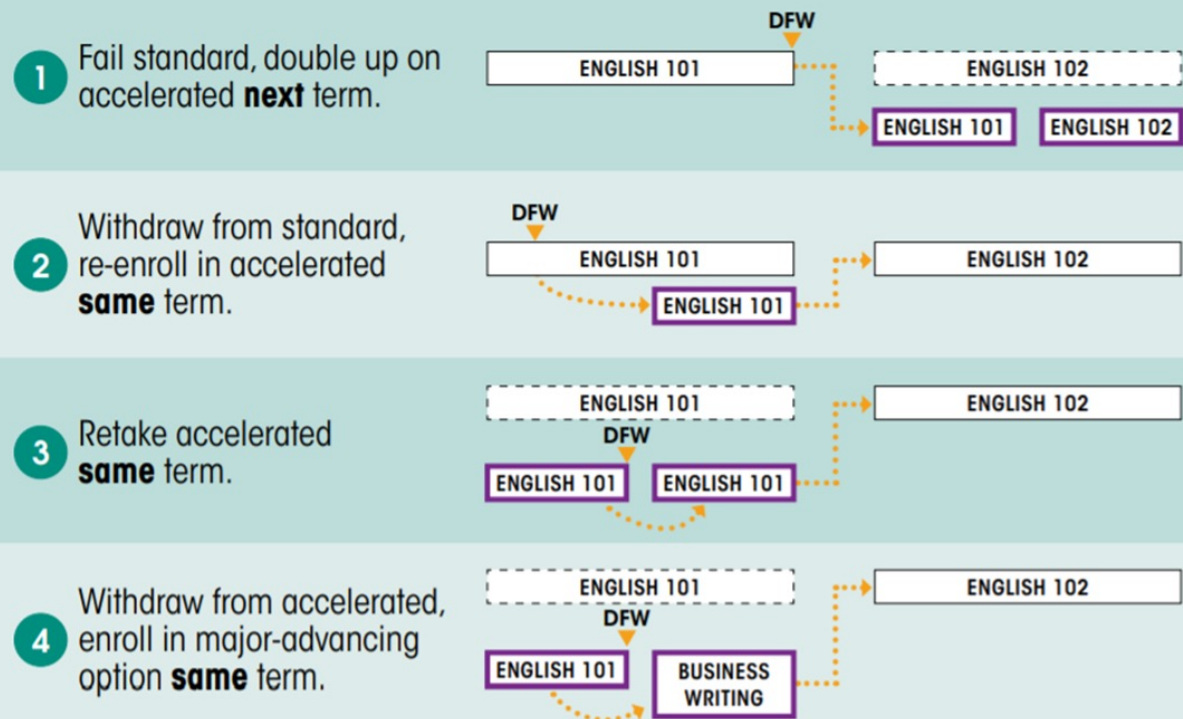
Sample Year-Round Schedule

Fall 1 Aug. 28-Oct. 23 • 6 credits	Fall 2 Oct. 30-Dec. 22 • 6 credits
Spring 1 Jan. 1-Feb. 26 • 6 credits	Spring 2 Mar. 5-Apr. 30 • 6 credits
Summer 1 May 7-Jun. 29 • 3 credits	Summer 2 Jul. 9-Aug. 27 • 3 credits

30

Number of total credits accumulated in calendar year

Accelerated Courses Offer Four Ways to Get Back on Pace



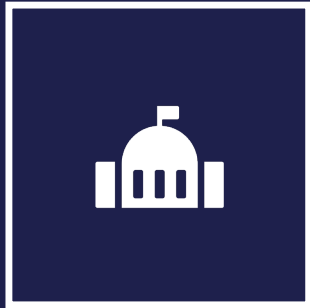
Source: <https://eab.com/insights/expert-insight/academic-affairs/how-to-transform-an-early-course-withdrawal-into-a-timely-catch-up-opportunity/>



The Work of Change



Driving Organizational Change



Structural Change

Modify institutional structures to enable new behaviors, e.g. shift to an academic calendar with two 8-week blocks



Process Change

Adjust day-to-day practices to match the new model, e.g. advisors help students plan for both 8-week sessions



Attitudinal Change

Build shared understanding and buy-in, e.g. make the case for shortened academic terms

Implement a holistic approach to drive sustainable change across the organization.

Building the Foundation for Change



Leadership across all levels of the organization is required to make this initiative successful

Identifying High Impact Opportunities



Examples of Key Areas to Capture Insights

Student Data		
Part-time, Age, First Generation, Pell, Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Working, Parenting		
Course Data	Program Data	Outcomes Data
Enrollment	Enrollment	Early momentum metrics
Course Success Rates; DFW Rates	Opportunity (demand/wages)	Completion rates
Online readiness	Online readiness	Transfer rates
Type of course (gateway, gen ed, required, elective)	Type of program (certificate, associates, career, transfer)	Time to Credential

Table Activity: Choose One Tool to Help Identify Prospects

Option 1

Top 25 Highest Enrolled Courses

- Review the completed Top 25 courses data
- Engage in the discussion questions on the handout
- What course selection criteria might make the most sense?
- Are there any courses that might be good candidates for implementing or scaling S-A-T? Why?

Option 2

Program Prioritization Rubric

- Walk through the rubric to review the criteria (enrollment, structure, labor market demand, sequencing, and readiness)
- Surface opportunities and challenges for prioritization – what criteria might make the most sense for Hudson?
- Are there any programs you think might be a good place to start? Why?

Table Synthesis: From Discussion to Shared Insights

Use the quadrant to **synthesize your discussion** by capturing your **top 1–3 courses, clusters, or program areas** (e.g., certificates, online programs, gateway courses), **why they matter, potential timing, and big questions or barriers**.

Courses or Programs

- * List 1 or more courses, clusters, or programs that surfaced as strong prospects for shortened academic terms.

When (Timing / Phasing)

- * Note whether these are early pilot candidates or longer-term opportunities (e.g., “early phase,” “needs redesign,” “phase 2”).

Why These?

- * Briefly explain why these stand out — e.g., high enrollment, gateway course, sequencing opportunity, equity gap, labor market demand, student demand.

Big Questions or Barriers

- * Capture 1–2 structural or process questions, faculty considerations, or barriers that would need to be addressed.

Supporting Shortened Academic Terms



Evidence-Based Pedagogies and Practices to Support Shortened Terms

What Works?

- Active Learning
- Inclusive & Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
- Holistic Pedagogy
- Constructivist Pedagogy
- Inquiry Learning
- Collaborative Learning
- Experiential Learning

High-Impact Practices

- First Year Experience

Emergent Practices

- Open Educational

Key Common Elements:

Faculty design learning experiences where:

- A) Students actively explore ideas, ask questions and solve meaningful problems
- B) Students make connections between academic experiences and lived experiences – community, culture, personal, career, etc.

Faculty need time and support in order to learn how to do this well.

Key Student Affairs Adaptations

Align advising, financial aid, and registration processes to support multiple entry points and timelines.

Streamline intake and onboarding so students can enroll and begin quickly.

Offer continuous on-ramps and schedule flexibility to minimize delays between terms.

Ensure key student services are available on accelerated timelines, including tutoring, counseling, and tech support.

Use technology and clear communication to manage multiple term calendars and keep students on track.

Building the Supports Needed for Success: Key Questions for Consideration

- **Academic:** *What supports would you need to redesign courses/programs for 7-week terms?*
- **Student Affairs/Operations:** *What would you need to respond to accelerated course scheduling?*
- **Capacity-building:** *What professional learning, tools or resources would bolster your ability to confidently support or lead a coordinated effort to increase shortened academic terms course offerings across multiple programs?*

Communication



Key Strategies To Planning & Implementation

An institutional strategy on scaling shortened terms can make the difference between a successful and unsuccessful deployment.

- Start with YOUR “why” grounded in YOUR data.
- Include faculty and student affairs staff early in the planning process.
- Communicate early, often, and transparently.
- Engage in course redesign that implements high impact practices.
- Work across the institution to support students in and out of the classroom.
- Provide space to do the work and professional development.

Communicating Flex Terms To Students



Be clear about success tips and deadlines that will set up a student for success in a shortened course/semester.



Differentiate communication for new vs returning students.



Clearly communicate deadline changes.



Review and ensure onboarding structures support flex terms.



Ensure a feedback loop for questions and clarification.

Communication Planning: Who Needs to Hear What?

≡

Audience/role

Who is the audience?

Intent

What do you want your audience to think, say, or (most importantly) do because of your communication?

Message

What is the message?
Brief, memorable, repeatable, data-backed, emotional

Modality

How and where will the message be delivered? (multiple channels)

Frequency

How often?
Establish an early, often, transparent communication mantra



Communication Planning: Who Needs to Hear What?

Audience

Sample Message

Modality / Channel

Faculty & Academic Affairs

“Shortened terms give students the chance to focus on fewer courses at once, which can improve learning and success.”

Department meetings, Faculty Senate

Students

“8-week terms let you focus on fewer classes at a time so you can stay on track, respond to other priorities, and graduate faster.”

Orientation, student portal, social media, email

Advising & Student Affairs

“Shifting to 8-week terms helps students stay on track—and it means we’ll align timelines for advising, registration, and support.”

Staff meetings, training sessions



ATD's Shortened Academic Term Workbook Sections Include:

▲ Phases of work

The content of this workbook is split into the following phases of the work.



Part 1: Early Decision Making



Part 2: Purpose and Case Making



Part 3: Strategy



Part 4: Academic Planning



Part 5: Support Planning



Connecting the Dots: From Insight to Action

We examined national data and case studies on the impact of shortened academic terms and lessons learned

We explored who can influence and will be impacted by shortened academic terms and what supports they'll need

We considered how to communicate effectively to different audiences to build understanding and trust

We examined program criteria to inform which courses and programs to prioritize

We reviewed enrollment data to identify high-impact courses — including math, English, and program gateway courses

We introduced the Shortened Academic Term Workbook to start shaping strategies and action steps.



What Support Would You Need to Make Shortened Academic Terms Work at HCCC

- **Academic:** *What supports would you need to redesign selected courses/programs for 8-week terms?*
- **Student Affairs/Operations:** *What would you need to respond to accelerated course scheduling?*
- **Capacity-building:** *What professional learning, tools or resources would bolster your ability to confidently support or lead a coordinated effort to increase shortened academic terms course offerings across multiple programs?*

What's Next for HCCC?

- Synthesize input from today and share summary
- Continue data analysis
- Refine criteria for selecting courses and programs for shortened academic terms
- Invite continued faculty, staff and student engagement
- Continue to build and update an FAQ based on faculty, staff and student questions
- ???



Resources

Boeding, L. (2016). *Academic Performance in Compressed Courses: A phenomenological study of community college student success.*

Geltner, P., & Logan, R. (2001). *The influence of term length on student success.*

Sloan, R. (2017). *Improving student outcomes utilizing 8-week courses.*

<https://data.generationlab.org/InsideHigherEd/AnnualSurvey.html#q1>

<https://www.aais.com/resources-insights/white-paper/the-smart-scheduling-guide-to-shortened-terms>

<https://achievingthedream.org/preparing-for-shortened-academic-terms-guide-workbook-and-spotlights/>

