

A New Model Course Delivery

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The Problem

In the spirit of enhancing the education experience of our undergraduates, I argue that we need to do away with the archaic delivery of courses over a 15-16-week semester. Under the existing model student typically enroll in 4 to 6 courses per semester. The impact of this large course load is that it puts students in almost an impossible time management system. The full effect of this situation clearly emerges around weeks 7 and 8 when the full demands of each course come into play in the form of midterms, paper assignments, and other class activities. At this point students are then forced to make difficult choices about where to allocate their time. From a pedagogical perspective this is a worst-case scenario, forcing students to cram for one course at the expense of another course and violates almost everything we know about best learning practices.

My personal experience and that of others with whom I have discussed this situation is that it is also around 7-to-8 weeks into the semester that the life often goes out of the classroom. Students become overwhelmed by competing course demands and it is often the case that this is when class attendance and participation drops.

A New Model

I argue that this situation is archaic, anti best learning practices, and exist only as a historical artifact. Below I sketch a better way.

My idea is very simple. Let's assume that during fall and spring the university operates over a 15-week semester. I would divide these 15 weeks into two 6-week course delivery units separated by a 1-week break. During each 6-week unit period a student will take only two courses and each course would meet 5 days a week for 75 minutes. Below is an example for the fall semester.

Fall Semester Session A	Fall Semester Session B
1. Aug 28-Sept 1	1 Oct 23-27
2. Sept 4-Sept 8	2 Oct 30-Nov3
3. Sept 11-15	3. Nov 6-10
4. Sept 18-22	4. Nov 13-17
5. Sept 25-29	Nov 21-24 Thanksgiving break
6 Oct 2-6	5. Nov 27-Dec 1
7. Oct 9-11 Finals	6 Dec 4-8
Break Oct 16-20	7. Dec 11-13 Finals

Advantages to Students

- Allows deep emergence into the material.
- Because students engage with the material on a daily basis the content of the course remains in their active memories and allows for more active class participation (I have taught during Maymester several times and although this 13 day period was very intense, students embraced the material at a much deeper level than I ever experience with my regular semester teaching).
- Keeps the momentum going (without the weekend breaks that are especially disruptive for Tues/Thurs courses) the material carries over from one class to the next.
- Dramatic reduction in competing task demands created by course overloads.
- Allows time for more structured class activities.
- Students learn more (see [hyperlink](#) and [hyperlink](#))
- Students prefer more intense courses see [hyperlink](#)
- A student that only needs one course to graduate would only need to be on campus (live in expensive Boulder) for 7 weeks as opposed to 16 weeks. This would be a huge savings.
- May be advantageous to the semester abroad program.

Advantages/Disadvantages to Faculty

Note that under the old model faculty are committed to their course for the entire 16-week period. Under the new model the faculty would only be in the classroom for about 8 weeks. This could free up an extra 10 weeks or so of time for faculty to pursue their research activities. This would be especially advantageous to faculty whose research requires them to be away from campus and faculty who need blocks of time to complete large writing projects. The real impact of this model on faculty will likely depend on the teaching load of the faculty. It could have a negative impact on our instructor with heavy teaching loads.

Scheduling Issues

At first the new model would appear to cause serious scheduling issues. However, I don't think this would be problematic. Here is how it would work. At the department or unit level course offerings are scheduled by the semester. For an example, let's assume my department needs to offer 40

courses during the fall semester. All that would be needed is to decide which of the 40 courses would be offered during Session A (the first 7 week period) and which would be offered during Session B (the second 7 week period).

It might be more difficult to deal with courses that have labs and I am going to put off thinking about this matter unless this new model gains traction.

Summary

I have briefly sketched a course delivery model that would greatly enhance the learning experience of the students. I have not attempted to address all the issues that would come into play to successfully implement this model. Unless this model gains traction there is no point in delving into the details. So, this model is offered as a starting point for a more serious discussion.