



Guided Pathways Recommendation on Accelerated Terms

March 1, 2021

Summary of the Research on Acceleration

The Connecticut community colleges serve a diverse population of students who face many constraints on their time, including full and part-time jobs, commutes, and child and family care obligations. As they seek to complete a postsecondary credential while balancing life's several challenges, flexibility and efficiency are high priorities for them. Course scheduling and delivery models are one area in which we in Connecticut can better meet students where they are. Offering courses when students need them, in a format tailored to their busy schedules, can make it easier for them to complete their program requirements and stay motivated over the long haul.

Some colleges have found improved student success when converting traditional semesters into accelerated terms (Austin & Gustafson, 2006; Gamboa, 2013; Logan & Geltner, 2000; Sheldon & Durdella, 2009). In an accelerated term, most courses are 7 to 8 weeks in length rather than 15 to 16 weeks. Typically, classes meet more hours per week but retain the same learning objectives and credit/contact hours. Accelerated terms enable students to focus their attention on two to three courses at a time while still allowing them to complete four to six courses over a 15 to 16-week period as they would in a typical semester.

Advocates of acceleration say the inherent intensity of the compressed format increases students' motivation, participation, concentration, and sense of community with their peers. They also say there are fewer chances for "life to get in the way" (*Best Practices in Course Scheduling*, 2018).

Accelerated terms have yielded impressive results at a handful of colleges, although empirical research on this topic is still emerging. Gains identified by these colleges are closely aligned with the Connecticut goals and metrics reflected in the Key Performance Indicators adopted by the Board of Regents (<https://www.ct.edu/regents/mission>). Most notably, in 2014, Trident Technical College transitioned to an academic calendar that was



95 percent 7-week courses, 5 percent 15-week courses, and saw striking gains across several student success indicators within three years of implementation (Feltly & Green, 2019). Indicators that improved include:

- course passing rates across developmental, gateway, and all college-level courses
- completion of multi-course sequences
- first-time student persistence from fall to spring
- IPEDS graduation rates (especially among students of color)
- incompletes and withdrawals

It should be noted that fall-to-fall retention of first time students did not show comparable gains (Trident Technical College, 2019), therefore this metric would be a priority to follow as Accelerated Terms are implemented in Connecticut, in pursuit of the positive and enduring results demonstrated by the other indicators. Other colleges experienced similar improvements after switching to accelerated terms. Odessa College, Amarillo College, and Austin Community College in Texas implemented 8-week terms and observed direct, immediate benefits to students such as higher course passing rates and semester-to-semester persistence (Sloan, 2017).

A limited yet promising empirical evidence base shows that shortened course length is consistently associated with higher course performance and course completion rates (Austin & Gustafson, 2006; Edgecombe, 2011; Gamboa, 2013; Logan & Geltner, 2000; Sheldon & Durdella, 2009). Researchers have also found that the quality of learning in accelerated courses is comparable to, or in some cases can be better than, the quality of learning in traditional-length college classes (Austin & Gustafson, 2006; Johnson, 2009; Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010; Lee & Horsfall, 2010). This finding challenges the common concern that acceleration compromises quality in the name of efficiency.



Recommendation for Connecticut State Community College

The Choice Architecture group is recommending the adoption of an Accelerated Terms strategy by Connecticut State Community College in pursuit of the following factors which empower students to achieve their goals:

- Momentum
- Persistence
- Focus

Because of these advantages for students, the Choice Architecture group is further recommending the following adoption plan and suggested timeline to the Connecticut State Community College President and administration.

Accelerated Terms Design and Implementation Recommendations

The current state of knowledge appears to point to four overarching recommendations to increase the likelihood of an effective implementation:

- 1) Support faculty:** Much of the effectiveness of acceleration comes from intentional changes to curriculum and instruction (Lee & Horsfall, 2010; Marques, 2012). An investment in a robust faculty professional learning program to restructure course content delivery is an essential strategy for capturing the benefits of accelerated terms (e.g. student momentum, persistence, and focus).
- 2) Measure both learning and academic progress:** Researchers recommend establishing clear outcomes measures and academic standards to monitor the impact of accelerated terms on student learning, as well as momentum and throughput metrics like completion, persistence, and retention.

- 3) **Collect data to support continuous improvement in a variety of institutional contexts:** The effectiveness of acceleration may vary across different institutional contexts such as departments, course types, instructional delivery methods, and student populations. As a result, college leaders should also establish a robust data collection and monitoring system to inform ways to tailor acceleration strategies and facilitate continuous improvement.
- 4) **Provide a short break in between accelerated terms:** The accelerated schedule recommended by the Choice Architecture Group includes two 7-week terms (inclusive of end-of-term exams) within the existing 15-week semester, with a 1-week break between each term to allow students a transitional period while accommodating the administrative processes of grading and registration.

Implementation Timeline

Planning, Professional Learning, & Piloting

- Respecting Collective Bargaining Agreements which govern the start and end dates for each fall and spring semester, 7-week terms at CT State Community College would be offered as two, 7-week terms within the existing 15-week semester, with a 1-week break between each term (known as a “7-1-7” format). Final exams for the 7-week courses would be given in the last week of the 7-week term.
- Spring 2021: A cross-functional team is formed by the CT State President to develop the implementation plans of these recommendations. *Champion – CT State President*
- Spring 2021 – Fall 2021: Resources are allocated to train faculty in acceleration pedagogy, including but not limited to: workshops, acceleration mentors, webinars, and research. Training for advisors will cover scheduling students in accelerated format to maximize success. Limited training to begin in spring, expanded training

starts in fall. *Champions – AVP of Teaching & Learning; Center for Teaching; CT State CFO.*

- Fall 2021: The 12 current colleges are encouraged to expand pilots in 7-1-7 course offerings to encompass courses which will allow students to complete programs in this format. This requires a combination of both program and strategic general education course offerings. Faculty members piloting these courses will be supported by the cross-functional implementation team formed by the CT State President.
Champions – College Deans; Faculty
- Spring 2022: Current policies and practices are examined, and recommended changes are made to encourage more accelerated courses. *Champions – CT State Provost; CT State VP for Enrollment Management.*
- Summer 2022 – Summer 2023: The 12 current colleges increase course offerings in the 7-week format. *Champions – College Deans; Faculty*

Beginning to Scale

- Fall 2023 and Beyond:
 - CT State Community College will begin to scale a standard 7-1-7 schedule in multiple course modalities.
 - Predictive scheduling software is adopted.
 - Scheduling is based on student success and enrollment trends accumulated from CT State student data
 - 7-1-7 format class offerings are eventually the majority of overall course offerings, again based on student success and enrollment trends to ensure that the format best fits student needs
 - *Champions – CT State Provost; CT State VP of Enrollment Management; AVP of Academic Operations; College Deans*

CT State Community College **2021—2023 and Beyond**

Accelerated Terms

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Recommendation and Endorsement

Recommended by Choice Architecture

12 March 2021

Date

Recommended by the Guided Pathways Task Force

12 March 2021

Date

Recommended by the College Consolidation Implementation Committee

19 May 2021

Date

Endorsed by President David Levinson, Connecticut State Community College

David Levinson

May 19, 2021

Signature

Date

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