

# Structured Schedules



## CONTEXT

### THE PROBLEM

More students than ever before are older, working, and having to constantly figure out work, child care, and transportation schedules around their class schedules that change from semester to semester. This constant juggling — and the costs that come with it — create an unnecessary barrier for students that often leads to delays in completion.

### THE SOLUTION

Students have a predictable, consistent class schedule for the duration of their degree or certificate program. Time on campus is consolidated so students have fewer commuting costs. Class schedules are designed around students' needs and structured to facilitate on-time completion, even for students with competing obligations.

**CLOSE the GAP** Structured Schedules benefit all students but help older and low-income students more because they are more likely to work more hours and older students make up the majority of part-time students.

## THE BIG PICTURE

**A typical class schedule that works well for someone living on campus is a nightmare scenario for working and commuting students.**

Typical Class Schedule

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8 a.m.					
9 a.m.	Commuting		Commuting		Commuting
10 a.m.	Class	Commuting	Class	Commuting	Class
11 a.m.		Class		Class	
12 p.m.	WASTED TIME				
1 p.m.					
2 p.m.	Class	WASTED TIME	Class	WASTED TIME	Class
3 p.m.	Commuting		Commuting		Commuting
4 p.m.	Work & Family Obligations	Class	Work & Family Obligations	Class	Work & Family Obligations
5 p.m.		Commuting		Commuting	
6 p.m.		Work & Family Obligations		Work & Family Obligations	
7 p.m.		Work & Family Obligations		Work & Family Obligations	
8 p.m.					
9 p.m.	Study	Study	Study	Study	Study
10 p.m.					

**And this schedule will change every semester!**



## MYTH BUSTING

Ask these questions to separate fact from fiction:

- What percentage of students start out full time and drop to part time in a future semester?
- How many years does it take your nontraditional students to graduate, on average?
- What percentage of your nontraditional students drop out before they graduate?
- How do you currently determine when you offer a particular course?
- How hard do you think it is to renegotiate child care and work schedules every four to five months?
- If you yourself went back to school and kept working in your current job, what type of schedule would work best for you?



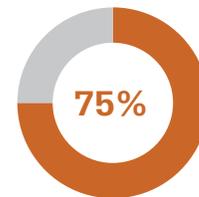
## POLICY IN ACTION

In 2015, **Texas** enacted state policy requiring all 50 community college districts in the state to implement block scheduling for at least five certificate and associate degree programs in nursing, allied health, and career and technical education. By fall 2016, all colleges had implemented this change, with several institutions extending it to additional programs.

**ALL 50 COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICTS HAVE BLOCK SCHEDULING**  
for at least 5 certificate/associate degree programs

In **Tennessee**, the 27 Colleges of Applied Technology offer programs in a block from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday with mandatory attendance. These structured programs graduate 75 percent of their students, significantly outperforming the community colleges that use an a la carte approach to course scheduling.

**Graduation Rate from Programs with Structured Schedules**



The **University of Montana (UM) Western** is the only public college in the country to offer Experience One, an innovative program in which students participate in a structured schedule and take only one course at a time. The semester is divided into four-credit blocks with students meeting five days a week for three to four hours a day in either a morning or an afternoon session. UM Western has seen significant increases in graduation rates, and the majority of its students are enrolled with 15 credits or higher.

Majority of UM Western students enroll with **15 OR MORE CREDITS**



## NEW RULES

### STATE ACTION

- **Provide data** showing the percentage of students who switch from full-time to part-time enrollment.
- **Establish a policy** that institutions serving commuter or adult populations must offer **30-credit-per-year** Structured Schedules with morning, afternoon, and evening options for their highest enrollment programs.
- **Establish a policy** that institutions with a significant population of **part-time students** must also establish **Structured Schedules** that use year-round enrollment to allow part-time students to graduate on time and other schedules that lead to graduation within **150 percent** of standard program length.

### INSTITUTION ACTION

- **Create Structured Schedules** built around student demand for high-enrollment programs with on-time and extended-time (150 percent) options.
- **Default students** into Structured Schedules when offered, and require those who request a customized schedule to see an adviser each term.
- **Establish a mechanism** for students to continue enrollment in a Structured Schedule despite disturbances such as course withdrawal.

Get started crafting your own policies using the detailed policy language found at [completecollege.org](http://completecollege.org).



## STAKEHOLDER P.O.V.

Block scheduling means that **instructors** have less input into when they teach. This will prove challenging for adjunct professors who have other professional obligations and may not be able to teach when needed.

Due to the logistical nature of implementing block schedules, **department heads, registrars, advisers,** and others will find them easier to implement if all necessary parties are involved from the beginning.

Departments that teach **general education** courses for students in other departments will need to teach those courses when other departments need them. A central coordinator of those logistics, such as a provost, can smooth the process.



## TALKING POINTS

- To meet state goals for educational attainment, significant numbers of **adults** and other **nontraditional students** will need to go back to college for a degree or credential.
- For our adult students, **time** and **money** are in **short supply**.
- Hours spent **on campus** and **commuting** to school **require students to pay** transportation costs, secure child care, and/or forego wages.
- When class schedules **change each semester**, students need to **rearrange** work, child care, and transportation. If they cannot, they may take fewer classes or take the semester off, putting them at **greater risk** of not graduating.
- Not surprisingly, evidence shows that when schedules are **predictable and consolidated**, a lot more students **graduate**.
- If we want higher education to be **student-centered**, Structured Schedules should be offered in any institution with a mission to serve **nontraditional students**.



## BE READY FOR QUESTIONS

*“Aren’t these Structured Schedules less flexible?”*

Current scheduling practice is **not as flexible** as it seems. Required courses are offered when **faculty** want to teach them, and students must **rearrange everything** to get to campus whenever that is.

*“Will this hurt enrollment and revenue?”*

**Retaining students** is good for the **bottom line**, and Structured Schedules retain students. Students for whom the Structured Schedule will not work can **still enroll**, but they will do so with significantly **more academic advising** if they opt out of the Structured Schedule.

*“Is there a cost to implementing Structured Schedules?”*

Institutions may need to hire **additional faculty** or secure **additional labs** and classrooms, but they may be able to simply use what they have more efficiently. These **investments** will generate better retention, more revenue, and better resource allocation long term.

*“Why is the policy limited to nontraditional students?”*

It **prioritizes** nontraditional students. In general, **younger students** with **campus housing** and on-campus jobs do not have to **juggle** their **time and money** as much as **adults balancing work, family, and school**.

*“Why is the state interfering in how the institution operates?”*

**Academics** — what content is taught — remains the complete purview of college faculty. **Structure** — when and where content is taught — is the **responsibility** of all stakeholders.