



The Smart Scheduling Guide to Shortened Terms



INTRODUCTION

Students and institutions alike are looking for ways to boost success rates in a shorter amount of time, and Smart Scheduling using shortened terms can be a great way to accomplish these goals.

The promising outcomes of shortened terms find many institutions in various stages of implementation, but it can be helpful to have solid strategies in place to help smooth the transition for students, staff, and faculty.



When we launched our new four-year degree program in cloud computing, our board and chancellor asked us to offer all courses in 8-week terms because of the proven success rates of this format. To meet these guidelines, we've collaborated with Ad Astra to carefully schedule class cohorts. We know students can complete their technical and general education requirements within these accelerated 8-week terms.



RUSS FROHARDT

Dean for Academic Success, Northwest Vista College

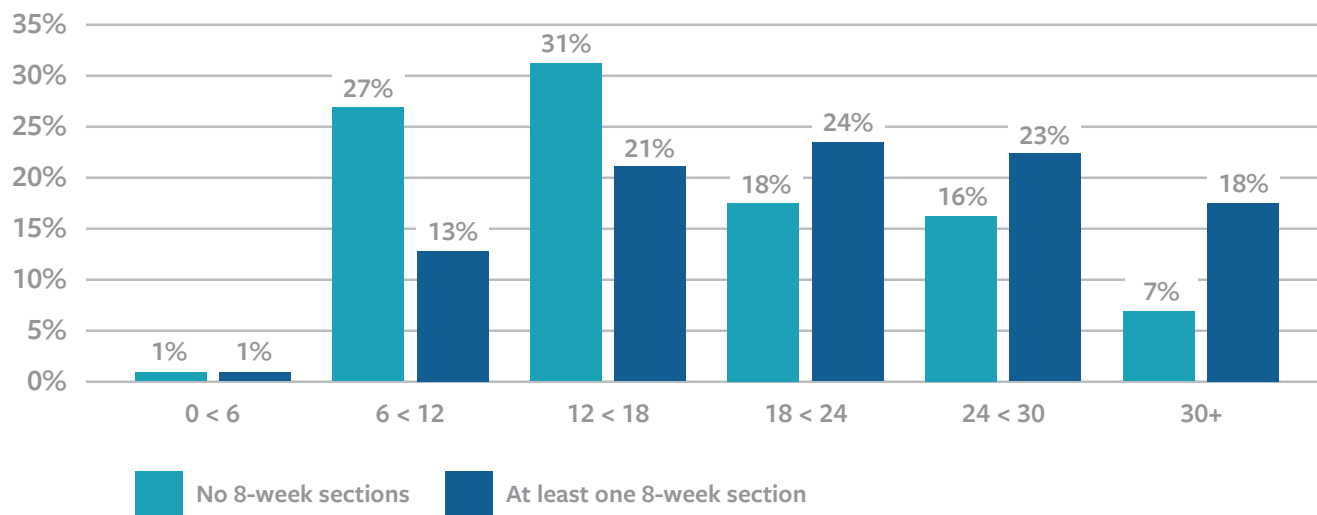


The power of shortened terms

Shortened terms allow students to progress faster and concentrated learning correlates with improved long-term outcomes, including credential completion and transfer to a four-year institution.

An 8-week schedule offers students flexibility with multiple on-ramps in the form of fewer courses for shorter amounts of time. In the event of a disruption, shorter terms also allow for more immediate credit recovery, allowing students to get back on track faster. With shortened terms, busy students can focus on fewer classes at a time and successfully attempt higher annual credit loads.

Annual Attempted Credit Rate Distribution



Students taking 8-week courses were more likely to attempt higher annual credit loads which resulted in increased credit hours, momentum, and Degree Velocity®.

The paradox of implementing shortened terms

Creating a shorter term is not about trying to compress 16 weeks of learning into 8. The deconstruction process must have relevance for all college units with consideration to the alignment of structures and processes. Failure to clearly articulate the ‘why’ behind proposed processes and policies will lead to inefficiencies and process failures.

About **30%** of students at several two-year public institutions completed at least one 8-week term in the last year.



however...

Only **2%** of students at the institutions studied were able to complete **all** courses in the 8-week format.



Data from institutions we analyzed

Students taking 8-week courses are less likely to see a broad distribution of course offerings, and they are less likely to have all necessary courses available to them to meet pathway requirements.

Metric	Institution A	Institution B
Total active courses offered in 8-week terms vs 16 weeks	33% vs 88%	21% vs 92%
Program pathway course coverage in 8-week vs 16-week	56% vs 89%	35% vs 90%
# of Pathways available in 8-week terms (90% of offerings)	21	9

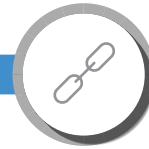
10 steps to smart scheduling for shortened terms



01.
Determine the goals



02.
Benchmark current shortened term offerings



03.
Build infrastructure to support program of study completion in shortened terms



04.
Update pathways for shortened terms



06.
Update scheduling grid to accommodate shortened terms



05.
Determine the most effective completion paths



07.
Build a shortened term schedule



08.
Integrate enrollment management and advising



09.
Monitor registration and make updates for continuous improvement



10.
Assess the results and determine next steps

1. Determine the goals

Institutions that are ready to explore the deconstruction of the traditional semester structure can offer students more flexibility and continuous on-ramps to support and accelerate toward a credential of value. But a strategy of intentionality must focus on offering courses for the completion of programs of study and not the offering of popular courses, general education, etc, to fully realize these benefits. Start by determining your goal for implementing shortened terms.

What benefits are you hoping to gain?



Increased enrollment

Additional on-ramps



Increased retention

Additional opportunities to stay
or get back on pace



Increased completion

Additional ways to take no more than two
courses per term but complete 30 annual credits
(including summer)

2. Benchmark current shortened term offerings

Most institutions are offering some courses in shortened term. Understanding your institution's current approach to shortened terms can provide key insights in how to build on the successes you are already seeing and mitigate the risk for students who are unable to complete all courses in the shortened term format.



Analyze your course offerings

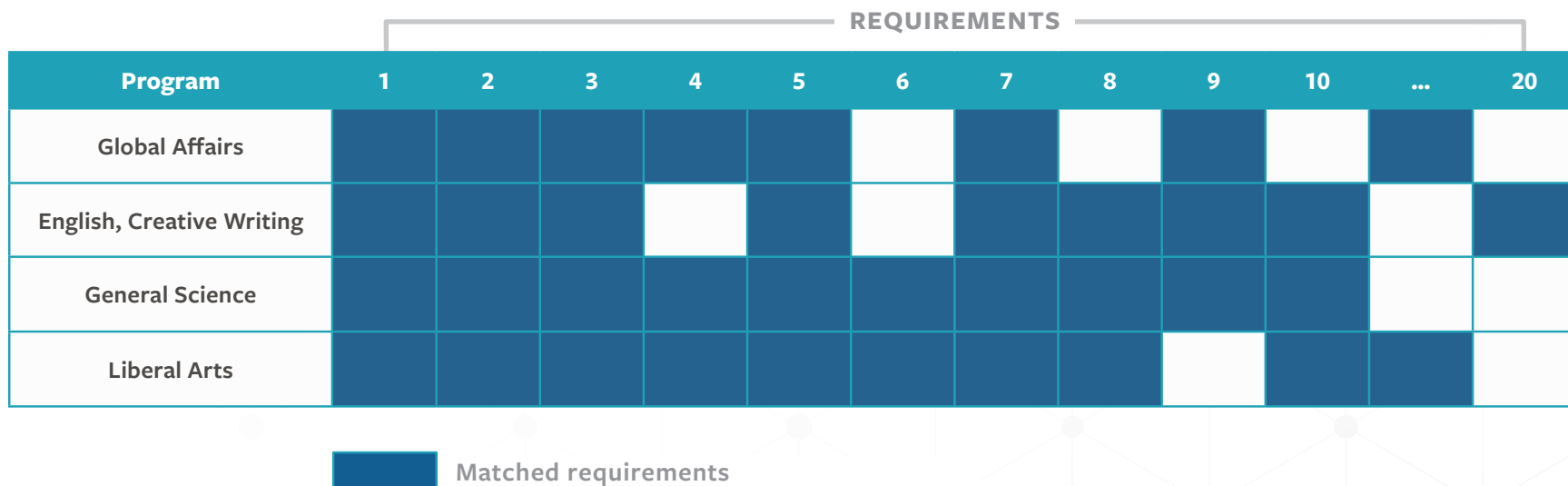
- » Which courses are offered in shortened terms?
- » Are those courses also offered in the full term?
- » How does your scheduling grid accommodate shortened term courses and full-term courses?
- » How are those courses offered? (Campus, modality, and time of day are all considerations.)
- » What are the DFW rates for full term vs. shortened term courses?

3. Build infrastructure to support program of study completion in shortened terms

Utilize the benchmarking analysis and current pathways structure to determine programs with the most overlapping requirements. This allows an institution to target a group of programs to ensure courses are offered in shortened terms for the entire program of study.

 **CONSIDER THIS...**

An initial review of a partner institution showed that the Global Affairs, Creative Writing/English, General Science, and Liberal Arts programs have a 74% overlap in degree requirements. Additionally, the combined enrollment in these programs is extremely robust. A strategy would be to offer the courses in these four programs first before moving to the next group of target programs.



4. Update pathways for shortened terms

Pathways are the unique, ordered course requirements that a student must take to complete a program of study. As shortened terms are implemented, pathways should be adjusted to allow students to take advantage of opportunities to complete requirements during the same semester.

Pathway analysis from Ad Astra can assist institutions in creating structured and optimized degree pathways to improve student success and degree completion rates.



CONSIDER THIS...

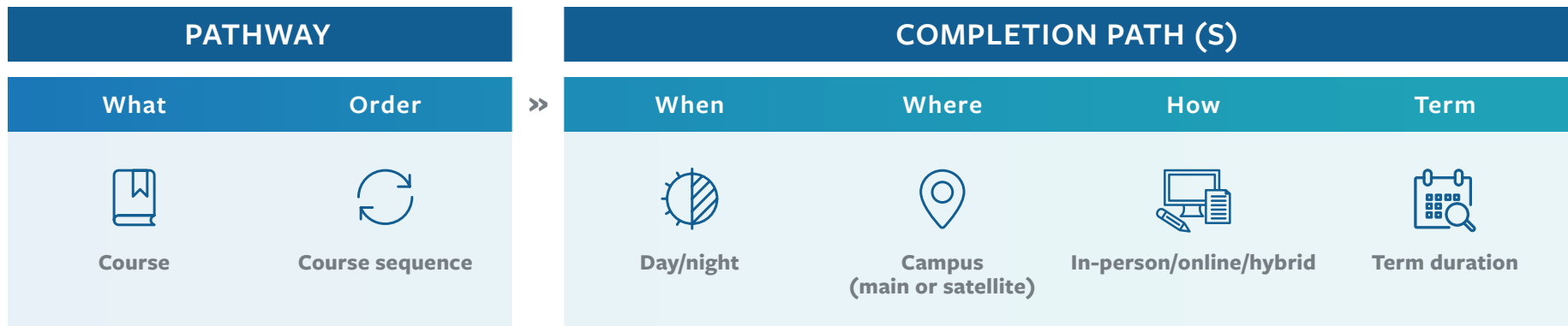
A pathway may need to be adjusted to allow a student to complete both ACC 101 and ACC 102 in the fall term, accelerating time to embedded credentials such as an Accounting certificate.

Year 1 (traditional pathway layout)				Year 1 (shortened term pathway layout)					
FALL		SPRING		FALL I		SPRING I		SUMMER I	
Course	Credits	Course	Credits	Course	Credits	Course	Credits	Course	Credits
ENG 101	3	ENG 102	3	ENG 101	3	ENG 102	3	PHL 101	3
MAT 101	3	MAT 102	3	ACC 101	3	SCI 101	3		
ACC 101	3	ACC 102	3						
HIS 102	3	PHL 101	3						
SCI 101	3	ART 101	3						
FALL II		SPRING II		SUMMER II		SUMMER II		SUMMER II	
Course	Credits	Course	Credits	Course	Credits	Course	Credits	Course	Credits
MAT 101	3	MAT 102	3	MAT 101	3	MAT 102	3	ART 101	3
ACC 102	3	HIS 102	3	ACC 102	3	HIS 102	3		

Under this model, students are now only taking two courses simultaneously, allowing students to focus on those content areas. This also limits the number of midterm and final exams within a specified time frame.

5. Determine the most effective completion paths

Completion paths are the where, when, how, and which term you offer programs for degree completion. Shortened terms are their own completion paths, but they should be combined with the other elements to ensure students have access to the courses.



CONSIDER THIS...

A student may be planning to complete a program in 8-week terms online, but if one of his/her/their courses is only offered on campus, it could be a barrier to degree completion.

DATA FROM INSTITUTIONS WE ANALYZED

- In-person 8-week terms do not have good distribution throughout the scheduling week
 - + Concentrated on MW mornings
- Imbalance in first 8-week term versus second 8-week term
 - + First 8-week term had two-thirds as many offerings as second 8-week term

6. Update scheduling grid to accommodate shortened terms

A scheduling grid is a set of the common meeting patterns used by an institution. For example, an institution’s standard, 16-week scheduling grid might use the following patterns: MWF 8:00-8:50 a.m., 9:00-9:50 a.m. and TR 8:00-9:15 a.m., 9:30-10:45 a.m.

To accommodate the appropriate contact hours for a shortened term, an institution must establish appropriate meeting times. A shortened term course may meet MWF from 8:00-9:50 a.m. Also, the institution may choose to allow some of the contact hours to be completed in a hybrid format.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00 AM	8:00-8:50	8:00-9:15	8:00-8:50	8:00-9:15	8:00-8:50
9:00 AM	8:00-9:50 with 10 minute break	8:00-10:45 with 15 minute break	8:00-9:50 with 10 minute break	8:00-10:45 with 15 minute break	8:00-9:50 with 10 minute break
10:00 AM	9:00-9:50	9:30-10:45	9:00-9:50	9:30-10:45	9:00-9:50
11:00 AM	10:00-10:50	10:00-11:50 with 10 minute break	10:00-10:50	10:00-11:50 with 10 minute break	10:00-10:50
12:00 PM	11:00-11:50	11:00-12:15	11:00-11:50	11:00-12:15	11:00-11:50
		11:00-12:45		11:00-12:45	
		▼▼		▼▼	

7. Build a shortened term schedule

The schedule can be a forgotten student success strategy. Failure to offer the courses in the defined sequence can leave students frustrated and decrease retention and completion. Even in traditional semester formats, Ad Astra's analysis of fifteen institutions found that 26% of required offerings are NOT offered in the term listed on the pathway. As you roll out shortened terms, be sure to offer the required courses as defined on the updated pathways. Software like Ad Astra's Data-Informed Scheduling solution can assist with this process.



26%

of required courses are NOT offered in the term listed on the pathway*

8. Integrate enrollment management and advising

Enrollment management plays a key role in setting expectations for incoming students, and the advising community provides a close connection with your student population. Pathways and schedule updates must be communicated to ensure a smooth transition. A thorough understanding of your shortened term strategy can also help from a recruitment perspective.

*2024 Benchmark Report: Analysis of the relationship between scheduling effectiveness, student progress, and completion



Advising reform is a critical part of guided pathways, and breaking down silos between departments is a key success of Texas Pathways. We emphasize the importance of initial onboarding advising, where advisors help first-time college students understand program structures like 8-week terms. This requires specialized training and professional development. Our leaders bring teams to our Institutes to ensure everyone, from advisors to faculty, is aligned and equipped to support student success through comprehensive ongoing advising and a variety of touchpoints.



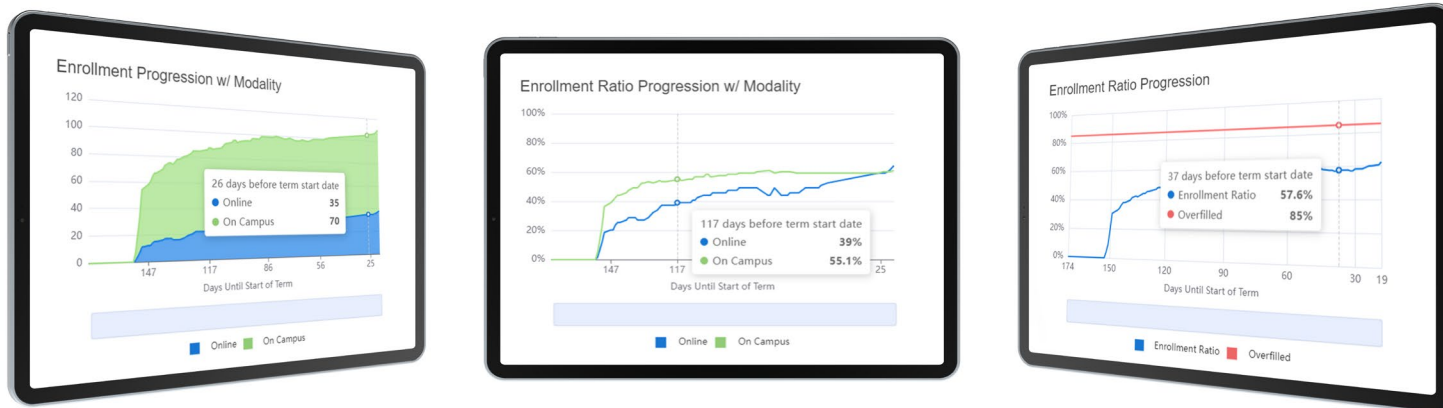
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Texas Association of Community Colleges

9. Monitor registration and make updates for continuous improvement

As you roll out any new strategy, it is important to pay close attention to registration. If courses are filling too quickly, consider adding additional sections. If courses are lagging in enrollment, canceling shortened terms too quickly can be dangerous to future success. Offering some low enrollment sections as you are starting the process may also be required. Because real-time data is essential for this effort, many institutions use solutions like Ad Astra's [Registration Monitoring](#) to streamline this process.

Ad Astra's Registration Monitoring dashboard



10. Assess the results and determine next steps

After the first term and academic year, review the results of your strategy. What are the lessons learned? Continue to build momentum by adding additional programs of study and scheduling for completions.

NEW!

Service offering from Ad Astra

Shortened term strategy analysis™

A customized service that identifies opportunities to optimize shortened term offerings for better alignment with student and institutional needs.

BENEFITS



Identification of potential institution-level gaps in offerings



Optimized shortened term offerings



Longitudinal measurement of shortened term progress

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- + **Student engagement analysis** of how the student population is blending shortened term offerings and main term offerings.
- + **Optimal program identification** to determine which programs are best suited for a comprehensive shortened term strategy and/or could benefit from a refresh of a current shortened term strategy.
- + **Student performance assessment** of annual attempted credit rates and DFW rates for students enrolled in shortened terms.
- + **Student requirement access analysis** to identify which courses meet program/pathway requirements in the main term compared to the shortened term format.
- + **Shortened term offerings evaluation** of the distribution of shortened term offerings from the levels of active course catalog, section, seat offering, registration, modality, time-of-day, and the balance between shortened term I and shortened term II.

[Consult with an expert >>](#)



Keeping our completion promises

With uneven demand across higher education, institutions need to quickly and thoughtfully rethink schedule offerings to meet demand in a sustainable way while making good on completion promises to students. Such efforts strongly increase the likelihood of attracting and retaining students and offer the ability for them to complete programs on-time and without unnecessary expense and debt.

Working together, we can meet complex needs by helping students manage their life around college — meeting them where they are at the moment. **Ad Astra can help.**



[Learn more at aais.com](https://www.aais.com) »

Sources:

Preparing for Shortened Academic Terms: Guide, Workbook, and Spotlights
Texas Playbook for Scaling Eight-Week Terms for Pathways Transformation