

## Semester Conversion: Teaching Tips

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**Q: I am concerned about my courses moving to semesters! There is a big difference between a 10-week and a 15-week course. What kinds of things do I need to consider for the longer term?**

- A. Remember that you are *not* simply adding 5 more weeks to your semester course. Time modules for classes will change, but as an average, just five hours is being added per term. Weekly meeting patterns for classes will vary, many becoming shorter. Adding more material to those extra weeks is probably less effective than rethinking your course. Do not think of conversion as adding 5 (or 10) more class meetings to existing curriculum. Your semester course may keep the same credit-hour value as it did on the quarter system, in which case you must increase course content, the course may be collapsed with another, in which case you must decrease content, or the course may decrease in credits.

Conversion will affect every area of the classroom. Be attentive to the following:

### Remain Flexible

Some faculty, staff, and students may find the conversion to semesters stressful, especially the first semester term (fall 2016). Take time to support colleagues, and know it will get better.

### Avoid Curriculum Drift

There's a lot to like about semesters in terms of learning. Semesters allow faculty and students to explore topics in depth. The longer term allows for more flexibility with content. Students have time to absorb difficult theories, to practice what they've learned, and also have extra time to improve performance.

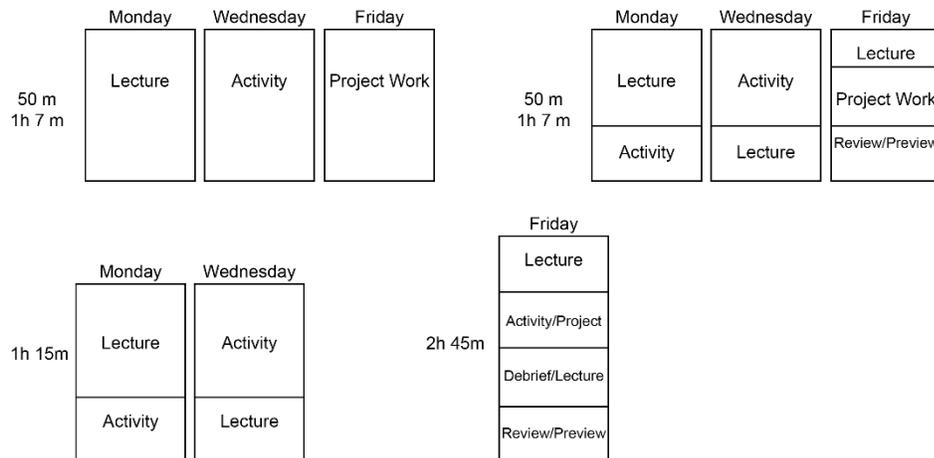
However, the possibility of "curriculum drift" with conversion is very real. A course may slowly lose steam unless it is rethought. Institutions that have converted from quarters report their faculty struggle with the 8th and 9th weeks of the new semester— about the time the quarter would have been ending.

### Be Prepared to Adjust Your Teaching

Semesters are longer and the rhythms of teaching will be different. Think through each class period. Pay special attention to your class schedule. Are there new activities you have wanted to try? It's a good time to introduce these. You may want to break up lectures, etc. with more active learning, especially for courses on a fifty-minute session. See the following suggested modes for 50 minute-, one hour and 15 minute- and 2 hour and 45 minute-sessions:

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The structure of these three modes are different and will impact what you can do within each time frame. You might consider course redesign using a flipped, or reverse-engineered model. CETL offers Institutes on Online-Hybrid Course Redesign, workshops on Active Learning, and Moodle workshops. Please take advantage of these sessions to improve your first-semester experience.

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### Helpful Resources for Adjusting Your Teaching

- Take a CETL *Active Learning* Workshop winter or spring 2016.
  - University of Adelaide: [Bookending](#)
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### Foster Community in the Classroom

Semesters are an opportunity to create and reward community. Students will interact with each other longer over the course of the new term. Group work is appropriate as the term advances, when students have gotten to know one another. Change groups mid-semester.

Under the semester system you will get to know your students better! Try and learn their names—it's an easy and effective way to connect with students, and has been shown to help them persist in their studies.

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### Helpful Resources for Fostering Community in the Classroom

- CETL Resources on *Groups*: [Setting up Groups in Moodle](#)
  - Carnegie Mellon: [Using Group Projects Effectively](#)
  - Template on structuring group assignments in Moodle: [Helpful Tips on Working in Groups](#)
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### Practice!

Semesters are a boon to faculty teaching iterative content, such as writing or research, both time-intensive activities. Semesters will give students more time to practice learning.

Take advantage of the longer term to have your students do more work in front of you, using the so-called flipped model. This way of teaching, also called formative assessment, allows students to practice what they are learning with you present. You can “bookend” a class—lecture for 30 minutes, stop for 15 for an activity, and then lecture again. You may want to rethink the way you evaluate classroom activities.

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### Helpful Resources for Practice!

- Take CETL’s *Flip Lecture Workshop*: [CETL Events & Workshops](#)
  - Carnegie Mellon resources on [Flipping the Class for Active Learning](#)
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### Manage Your Course

If you do not anticipate increased social interaction then semesters may feel like they are dragging on. There is some evidence that the longer term may also increase classroom conflict.

Please revisit your classroom etiquette and attendance policies and state these in your syllabus. Most instructors find they will need to rethink participation, especially for classes that meet more often and require more concentration for shorter bursts of time.

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### Helpful Resources for Course Management

- Help manage your course by using Moodle: [CETL Educational Technology: Moodle](#)
  - Take CETL’s *Getting Started with Moodle Workshop*: [CETL Events & Workshops](#)
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### Help Students Manage their Time

It is easy for students to procrastinate during a semester term. When creating large assignments you should build in more checkpoints: scaffold, or chunk out due dates, etc., so students can work through a series of deadlines for longer projects. Do not make research papers or larger projects due the final week of the semester, when students will not have a chance to review your feedback.

Students will struggle with coming back after longer fall Holiday and Spring breaks. Plan for this. It is best practice NOT to give an assignment for students to complete during the breaks. Most instructors find they will need to revisit their attendance policies; classes will meet more often and require more concentration

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for shorter bursts of time.

### Get Feedback Early

A semester is long—don't wait until the end of term to get student feedback. Take time to hear informally from your students no later than the fourth week of the quarter. Questions such as: What is the best feature of this course? What is helping you learn in this course? What is making it hard to learn? What, if anything, would you change about this course?, and, What suggestions do you have for improving the course? Will tell you what you can change before more time goes by.

### Consider Civic Engagement

Although many courses may have lost classroom time by combining courses in a sequence, semesters do offer an opportunity to make better use of experiences outside the classroom. Service learning becomes a more powerful pedagogy to use during semesters. Students have the chance to participate for 13 or 14 weeks instead of 7 to 8 weeks. CETL, in partnership with the Office of Service Learning, will be offering workshops in during winter and spring quarters 2016 on “Civic Learning Assignment Design” and “Developing a Service Learning Project.” Other opportunities to consider are offering your course for honors, making better use of group projects, and field trips outside of class.

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### Helpful Resources for Civic Engagement, Service Learning and Civic Learning

- Take a *Civic Learning* workshop: [CETL Events & Workshops](#)
- Read more: [Center for Engagement, Service and the Public Good](#)
- Contact Director of Service Learning Dr. Michael Willard at [mwillar@calstatela.edu](mailto:mwillar@calstatela.edu)

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### Closure

Hopefully you have built a stronger, more cohesive community experience in your classroom over the semester term. Plan on closing the course, acknowledging the more intensive relationship you and the students have had with the course content, and with each other.

### More questions about the new timeline or credit-hours?

Contact Dr. David Connors, Director of Academic Programs and Accreditation at [david.connors@calstatela.edu](mailto:david.connors@calstatela.edu)

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