# Spring 2021 Schedule Guidelines

As we begin thinking about creating a schedule for spring, first and foremost is the need to preserve the health and safety of our community. As we have made decisions about summer and fall by keeping safety of our students, faculty and staff as our highest priority while delivering high-quality, engaging and rigorous courses, we used the same philosophy to think about the spring semester. We offered summer and fall almost entirely on line, and the schedule we are proposing for spring will keep our instruction mostly on line until the end of spring break. We intend to come back to regular on campus teaching and learning after the spring break, but we remain prepared to teach spring fully online if the virus continues to be present in our community.

We have identified some key factors that impact the need to provide students more choices through flexible scheduling.

- We need to continue to place student needs at the center of scheduling decisions.
- We need to preserve enrollments going forward.
- There is strong student interest in shorter sessions as reflected in summer and fall enrollments. We have seen significant enrollment growth in the summer sessions and 7-week sessions in fall 2020, and a decrease in 15-week session enrollments for fall. Our students favor shorter semesters, and many are unable to commit to a 15-week semester. A large number of students have either lost their jobs or have reduced number of hours of work and family circumstances that make a 15-week commitment difficult.
- We traditionally offer more 15-week sessions and fewer 7-week sessions in spring. For spring 2021, we need to increase 7-week offerings and decrease offerings of 15-week session.
- National data show that students who take fewer classes in a shorter semester, for example, two courses in one 7-week semester, have higher persistence and success rates.
- We are seeing an increase of 19% in distance offerings this fall vs. a recent decrease in face-to-face enrollments. We must ensure that we offer courses in formats that attract students and offer them maximum flexibility.
- For spring, we will have the same parts of term as usual. We recommend offering a 15-week semester and two 7-week sessions (Spring I and Spring II).
- We will offer the extended winter session (5-week online) that has been offered for the last three years and not offer the 3-week in-person and online session. These formats allow us to continue to align with MCPS.
- It is also important that we stay current with scheduling practices at our neighboring schools. Both Anne Arundel and Baltimore County Community Colleges offer flexible options in their schedules. Anne Arundel currently offers two 8-week sessions, a 13-week session, and a 15-week session. CCBC offers two 7-week sessions, one 10-week session, and one 15-week session.
- VPPs, Deans and Chairs will propose a schedule of classes for the **extended winter session, the 15-week spring, 7-week spring 1 and 7-week spring 2 sessions** for the spring 2021 semester.

Current conditions call for innovation and creativity in meeting students' scheduling needs to enhance their success, accelerate their progress, and encourage completion. Data reveal that our students have lost jobs or had their hours reduced in significant numbers. They need to be able to be more nimble to respond to employment possibilities. Distance learning courses and shorter-term SRT/face-to-face offerings meet that need.

The research around block and shorter session scheduling at the college level is clear. These scheduling options provide the opportunity for both "flexibility and focus," [i] creating the opportunity for students to adapt to changing work/life schedules more easily and fostering student success by accelerating the completion of sequential and non-sequential courses in a shorter period of time. As far back as the late 90's in a five-year study involving 446,000 students, researchers at Santa Monica College found that shorter session length resulted in higher levels of student success as indicated by retention, success rates, and GPA.[ii] Subsequent studies reveal similar results,[iii]/[iv] and many other community college studies report positive impact on student success.*

Students and their scheduling needs must remain at the center of our focus as must the health and safety of our community. Flexible scheduling addresses student success needs, will assist students to complete their academic goals in this difficult time, and provides students greater opportunities to achieve their academic goals while balancing work and personal demands. Compressed scheduling is a demonstrated, successful strategy to provide students more options. We have had this option for several years. The spring semester scheduling will increase our flexibility and build on our previous success with compressed scheduling at the College. We have offered over 700 unique courses at the College in a compressed format. The spring semester offers the opportunity to build on our previous success and take it to the next level to support student success and address the demands to be flexible to support students and help them achieve their goals.

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[i] Glanzers, Perry L. "The Case for Block Scheduling in the Fall." *Inside Higher Ed*, May 6, 2020. https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/05/06/advantages-block-scheduling-can-offer-when-colleges-reopen-opinion. Accessed 18 August 2020.

[ii] Logan, Ruth and Peter Geltner. "The Influence of Session Length on Student Success." *Researchers and Planners Group Proceedings*. 2000. https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Audiences/Institutional_Researchers_and_Planners/The_Influence_of_Session_Length_on_Student_Success.pdf. Accessed 18 August 2020.

[iii] Austin, Adrian and Leland Gustafsen. "Impact of Course Length on Student Learning." *Journal of Economics and Finance Education*, vol. 5, no. 2, Summer 2006. http://www.afa-srjc.org/senate_AustinGustafson.pdf. Accessed 18 August 2020.

[iv] Sloan, Ron. "Improving Student Outcomes Utilizing 8-Week Courses: Considering its Feasibility for Ivy Tech Community College." Ivy Tech Community College, version III, November 2017. https://www.sanjac.edu/sites/default/files/Iv-Tech-8-Week-Courses-Study-Paper.pdf. Accessed 18 August 2020.

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* Odessa College changed their 16-week to an 8-week semester and this led to increased enrollment, increased completion, and increased persistence. The number of FTEIC students achieving 12 credit hours increased substantially also.

Austin Community College has a history of flexible scheduling options. They have 25 different semester sessions of varying lengths. Students in 8-week courses complete at a 75% success rate. Students in the shorter courses have a higher persistence rate, using the DFW rate as compared to traditional 16-week semester format.

In a compressed format, a comparison of compressed accounting courses versus traditional formats did not show any difference between the two comparison groups. The outcome was that a compressed format is as effective as the traditional format and addresses student persistence issues without a loss of learning.

A compressed format was effective academically for community college students and would expand access to higher education for more students who otherwise would not be able to sustain the 14-week course format.

The results of this study are in agreement with other studies, including Sheldon and Durdella (2009), which found significant improvements in student success in developmental courses offered in compressed formats.

As reported previously, students enrolled in 6-week compressed sections of courses regularly had higher success rates than those enrolled in the same courses during a 16-week semester. The results for 8-weeks were intermediate to these. Students enrolled in 16-week sessions dropped more courses than those in 6- or 8-week sessions, roughly in inverse relationship to the success rates seen in the same sessions.

The data are fairly positive for student persistence and success rates are equivalent or better than the traditional course delivery format.

The full text of these studies may be found here. (A link will be added with the .pdfs of the research.)