

Project 6: Flexible, Accelerated, and Culturally Responsive Schedule Options for Courses and Programs

Team Members:

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Problem

For working adults who wish to validate their credentials or improve their skills, accelerated and flexible education programs and course offerings may be the most accommodating while also benefiting student who struggle with balancing school work, and home obligations. These offerings allow students to complete course work and earn credentials in a shortened period of time; thus, it allows for faster entry or reentry into the workforce. At University of Phoenix, courses are four weeks long, so students can focus on one course at a time. At Rasmussen College, accelerated program courses start every six weeks. In addition, they also offer a Flex Choice option allowing students to compete online classes as well as optional self-paced courses. Institutions such as these offer a competitive advantage for working adults.

As identified in the Strategic Plan, Century College would like to develop schedule options that allow for flexible and/or accelerated courses and programs to not only increase completion rates but also to attract future students. In developing these flexible options, we want to be guided by the needs of our increasingly diverse students. Having options that meet the needs of these diverse groups is part of Century's effort to become a culturally responsive institution. Realizing this goal is often challenged by contractual limitations as well as external regulations like those for financial aid. These limitations make it difficult to be flexible, yet other institutions find ways around these limitations. To remain competitive we need to ensure our courses and programs can be offered in formats that meets students' needs.

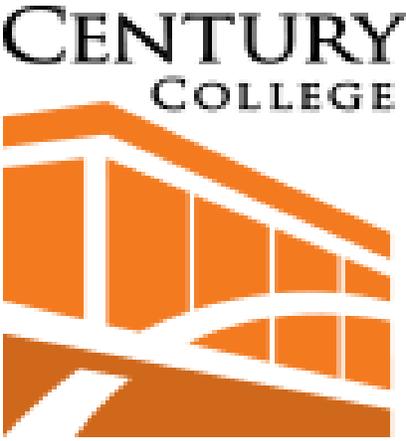
Team Charge:

1. Research and develop a summary of best practices from within MnSCU or other states and regions featuring models that support flexible and accelerated programming.
2. Based on identified best practices and consideration of current operational parameters, work through the logistics to create a toolbox for flexible programming including;
 - a. recommendations for a year-long schedule,
 - b. length of course program, and
 - c. ideas regarding on-campus and online courses to target for implementation.
3. This toolbox could include resources for ensuring course and program scheduling is responsive to culturally diverse students' needs.

Aspects of the toolbox could first be piloted and refined Century and then implemented at other community and technical colleges throughout MnSCU. It could also increase collaborative efforts across the system and help MnSCU compete more effectively with the for-profits and serve diverse populations like returning adults. Team members will need to learn about the constraints within which a core function like academic course and program delivery occurs; they will also learn how to design programming that is student-centered and engages multiple stakeholders in its development.

Understanding the Problem

Century College Profile¹

	<p>Century College is a two-year community and technical college located in White Bear Lake, MN. As one of the largest two-year colleges in Minnesota, we serve over 21,000 credit and non-credit students per year. Century offers degrees, diplomas, certificates, and courses in general education and transfer, business, human services, health sciences, technology, engineering, applied design, industrial and non-credit workforce training. With a variety of student support and student life opportunities, including athletics, student clubs and organizations, campus theatre, Multicultural Center, LGBTQ Center, Veterans Center, and much more, Century College provides a warm, welcoming and vibrant campus community.</p>
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Mission Statement

¹ <https://www.century.edu/about>

Century College inspires, prepares, and empowers students to succeed in a changing world.

Vision Statement

To be a national leader in transforming lives through an innovative, rigorous, and compassionate approach to education.

Values

The Century College community values:

- inspiring learning
- broadening perspectives
- pursuing excellence
- responding to community needs
- achieving goals
- transforming lives
- celebrating achievement

Student Demographics – 2015

- Headcount - 13,000
- Full-Year Equivalent (FYE) - 6,410
- Students of Color - 38%
- First Generation (Federal Definition) - 55%
- Average Age - 26
- Female - 56%
- Male - 44%

A Summary of Best Practices from within MnSCU or Other States and Regions Featuring Models that Support Flexible and Accelerated Programming (see Bibliography for citation credit)

MnSCU

- Metropolitan State University offers the Urban Teaching Program, collaboration with Inver Hills Community College and Minneapolis Community and Technical College. This program leads to middle school and secondary school licensure in mathematics and life sciences, among other areas. The program allows candidates' previous education or experience to meet program standards when appropriate.
- Minnesota State University, Mankato, offers an online, on-the-job option for special education teachers hired on variances to become fully licensed. Another effort, known as the Rapid Response Program, attracts new teachers for science, English as a Second Language, world languages and mathematics.

- Minnesota State University Moorhead has a back-to-school "seamless transition services" for non-traditional students who would like to become teachers after a career in a non-teaching field. Portions of the program can be waived, depending on the student's educational background.
- St. Cloud State University has new programs in information media, teaching English as a Second Language, school counseling and special education. All of these programs are specifically geared to individuals who hold bachelor's degrees in fields other than teaching.
- Southwest Minnesota State University is developing a graduate internship program for individuals who have a bachelor's degree in a content area of secondary or K-12 licensure, such as English, mathematics, biology or Spanish. The program could be completed by taking education courses over one summer and two semesters.
- Winona State University has a business education licensure program that is entirely online. The program provides competency-based credit for work experience.
- Minnesota Advanced Manufacturing Partnership Project (MnAMP). MnAMP institutions are developing a process to assess prior education and experience in order to ensure efficient and timely transition from training to degree completion. Upon enrollment at a MnAMP institution, participants will experience a comprehensive personal, academic, and career assessment. This will include implementation of a standardized framework to assess prior learning by adapting the methodology used by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. Built into this strategy will be an emphasis on assessment protocol designed specifically for veterans and military personnel. Assessment of prior learning will incorporate transcript evaluations and career development and skill assessments with rigorous evaluation of academic achievement and work/life experience that ensures each participant takes the most accelerated route within a career pathway.
- Inver Hills Community College's ASAP, Adult Success through Accelerated Programs.
- MnSCU Veterans Education Transfer System Accelerated Process.
- IB/AP/PSEO/Concurrent Enrollment Students earn college credits in high school through Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), concurrent enrollment, Advanced Placement® or International Baccalaureate® courses. These options allow students to get a head start on college and possible graduate ahead of schedule. They encourage colleges and universities to coordinate with K- 12 schools and are leading to new K-14 models.
- Assessment of Prior Learning Faculty assessments of work and other learning experiences result in credits that are applied to shorten the time to earn a baccalaureate degree. This strategy is most often used to assist adults who are returning to higher education with learning acquired on the job or in other settings. Most assessment is faculty-intensive work.
- The College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) is another way in which prior learning is evaluated for credit.
- Accelerated Course Loads Three-year degree plans usually require students take heavier than normal course loads during the academic year.
- Required Summer Sessions Three-year degree plans may also require students to earn credits in one or more summer sessions.
- MnSCU Board of Trustees Meeting on 17MAY2011 approved Three-Year Baccalaureate and 12-Month Calendar

A Summary Rubric of General Best Practices and Operational Parameters

Suggested Models	Research	Student Resources	College Resources
Course Scheduling and Location			
Weekend College	Course Design (online, classroom, off-site, etc.) Course Options (credit by exam, workplace training, individualized assessment, portfolio, etc.) Names (prior learning, experiential, alternative, etc.) Curriculum needs Location (advising, transfer, adult learning, veterans, etc.) Pedagogy Demographic Service/Need	Online and face-to face student support services (e.g. advising, tutoring, registration, financial aid, records, etc.). Marketing and Advertising Software and hardware resources relative to the needs of the student population Access, i.e. digital divide	Administrators Marketing and Advertising Hiring of appropriate staff Student and Faculty tech support and training Facilities Curriculum Pedagogy Assessment Accreditation Ongoing training
Online	Course Design (online, classroom, off-site, etc.) Course Options (credit by exam, workplace training, individualized assessment, portfolio, etc.) Names (prior learning, experiential, alternative, etc.) Curriculum needs Location (advising, transfer, adult learning, veterans, etc.) Pedagogy Demographic Service/Need	Online and face-to face student support services (e.g. advising, tutoring, registration, financial aid, records, etc.). Marketing and Advertising Software and hardware resources relative to the needs of the student population Access, i.e. digital divide	Administrators Marketing and Advertising Hiring of appropriate staff Student and Faculty tech support and training Facilities Curriculum Pedagogy Assessment Accreditation Ongoing training
Evening Classes	Course Design (online, classroom, off-site, etc.) Course Options (credit by exam, workplace training, individualized assessment, portfolio, etc.) Names (prior learning, experiential, alternative, etc.) Curriculum needs Location (advising, transfer, adult learning, veterans, etc.) Pedagogy Demographic Service/Need	Online and face-to face student support services (e.g. advising, tutoring, registration, financial aid, records, etc.). Marketing and Advertising Software and hardware resources relative to the needs of the student population Access, i.e. digital divide	Administrators Marketing and Advertising Hiring of appropriate staff Student and Faculty tech support and training Facilities Curriculum Pedagogy Assessment Accreditation Ongoing training
Prior Learning Credit	Course Design (online, classroom, off-site, etc.)	Online and face-to face student support services (e.g. advising, tutoring,	Administrators Marketing and Advertising

	<p>Course Options (credit by exam, workplace training, individualized assessment, portfolio, etc.)</p> <p>Names (prior learning, experiential, alternative, etc.)</p> <p>Curriculum needs</p> <p>Location (advising, transfer, adult learning, veterans, etc.)</p> <p>Pedagogy</p> <p>Demographic</p> <p>Service/Need</p>	<p>registration, financial aid, records, etc.).</p> <p>Marketing and Advertising</p> <p>Software and hardware resources relative to the needs of the student population</p> <p>Access, i.e. digital divide</p>	<p>Hiring of appropriate staff</p> <p>Student and Faculty tech support and training</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Curriculum</p> <p>Pedagogy</p> <p>Assessment</p> <p>Accreditation</p> <p>Ongoing training</p>
Alternative Start Times	<p>Is the current class schedule preventing or reducing the likelihood of prospective students enrolling in classes relative to student demographics?</p>	<p>Online and face-to-face student support services (e.g. advising, tutoring, registration, financial aid, records, etc.).</p> <p>Marketing and Advertising</p> <p>Software and hardware resources relative to the needs of the student population</p> <p>Access, i.e. digital divide</p>	<p>Administrators</p> <p>Marketing and Advertising</p> <p>Hiring of appropriate staff</p> <p>Student and Faculty tech support and training</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Curriculum</p> <p>Pedagogy</p> <p>Assessment</p> <p>Accreditation</p> <p>Ongoing training</p>
Off Site Alternative Partnerships/ Branch and Satellite Campuses / On-Site and the Workplace	<p>Identify industries, businesses, and/or organizations to share goals (serving students, employees, community members, and other stakeholders and shared resources, i.e. funding, facilities, etc.).</p>	<p>Online and face-to-face student support services (e.g. advising, tutoring, registration, financial aid, records, etc.).</p> <p>Marketing and Advertising</p> <p>Software and hardware resources relative to the needs of the student population</p> <p>Access, i.e. digital divide</p> <p>Career Services</p> <p>Community Outreach</p>	<p>Administrators</p> <p>Marketing and Advertising</p> <p>Hiring of appropriate staff</p> <p>Student and Faculty tech support and training</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Curriculum</p> <p>Pedagogy</p> <p>Assessment</p> <p>Accreditation</p> <p>Ongoing training</p>
Course Design		<p>Online and face-to-face student support services (e.g. advising, tutoring, registration, financial aid, records, etc.).</p> <p>Marketing and Advertising</p> <p>Software and hardware resources relative to the needs of the student population</p> <p>Access, i.e. digital divide</p> <p>Career Services</p>	<p>Marketing and Advertising</p> <p>Hiring of appropriate staff</p> <p>Student and Faculty tech support and training</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Curriculum</p> <p>Pedagogy</p> <p>Assessment</p> <p>Accreditation</p> <p>Ongoing training</p>

		Community Outreach	
Open-Entry and Open Exit	Courses with no set date for starting or ending. An updated version of the correspondence course.	Online and face-to-face student support services (e.g. advising, tutoring, registration, financial aid, records, etc.). Marketing and Advertising Software and hardware resources relative to the needs of the student population Access, i.e. digital divide Career Services Community Outreach	Marketing and Advertising Hiring of appropriate staff Student and Faculty tech support and training Facilities Curriculum Pedagogy Assessment Accreditation Ongoing training
Modularized	Courses built in around fewer topics, for example, taking a 3 credit course and offering it as three 1 credit courses.	Online and face-to-face student support services (e.g. advising, tutoring, registration, financial aid, records, etc.). Marketing and Advertising Software and hardware resources relative to the needs of the student population Access, i.e. digital divide Career Services Community Outreach	Marketing and Advertising Hiring of appropriate staff Student and Faculty tech support and training Facilities Curriculum Pedagogy Assessment Accreditation Ongoing training

Recommendations for a Year-Long Schedule, Length of Course Program, and Ideas Regarding On-Campus and Online Courses to Target for Implementation

Our initial recommendation is for the decision-makers to consider the Century College mission and strategic plan in deciding which initiatives to pursue. We are not aware of any type of return-on-investment methodology here which can help determine the best initiatives to focus on. The Century team will have to determine how much time and effort they are willing to expend on any particular initiative and weigh that against a return-on-investment estimate. No matter, which recommended initiatives are undertaken, there should be an implementation plan developed, along with appropriate an assessment plan to determine whether or not a particular practice is worth continuing as is, with modifications, or discontinued entirely. Many colleges are good with coming up with new ideas. Not as many colleges are good at deciding when a particular initiative should be discontinued.

Our first recommendation is for the Century team to go through a process of starting with answering a number of different questions about various accelerated or alternate class models. In addition, for each possible model, there should be a consideration of resources: those needed by students to be successful and those the college needs to support students. The table below provides some examples of questions and resource needs that should be considered before

proceeding with an implementation plan which includes ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the initiative:

After determining which initiatives among hybrid, online, and accelerated classes to pursue, here are some recommendations to include in the planning.

Recommendation 1

Provide professional development for all faculty and staff involved in the delivery of any non-standard mode class. This should include formal training for faculty prior to teaching online/hybrid/accelerated courses, as well as ongoing training that includes more sophisticated technology and any new developments both in technology and best practice that develop. Courses should be regularly reviewed for quality through either Quality Matters or some other review process. Faculty should have access to various teaching resources specific to these types of classes. Examples of these resources include: Atomic Learning, YouTube videos, and online MnSCU resources specific to online instruction. The college should help build and foster a professional development community and culture for the exchange of best practices and for sharing of experiences and innovations. Part of this community could be the development of a faculty mentor program.

Recommendation 2

Provide an orientation for students for each of the non-standard delivery modes. These can be in a variety of formats which include synchronous face to face versions to asynchronous online versions. The main goal of the orientation is to help the student have a strong and successful start with the class.

Recommendation 3

Develop a robust credit for prior learning option for students. Assess college's current credit for prior learning options. Research the different models that exist for granting CPL, such as using the CAEL approach, credit for military training, and CLEP exams. There is likely a difference between credits for technical programs and credits for liberal arts/transfer awards. For example, some technical programs have industry recognized certification exams, which could be used to demonstrate competency.

Recommendation 4

Begin with a smaller scale pilot in which select programs/departments begin offering accelerated and online courses. Course offerings could be streamlined with limited section offerings combined with more prescriptive curriculum pathways for students. Along with this provide students with 2 to 3 year class scheduling plans. Include 7 or 8 week long classes in regular fall and spring semesters.

Recommendation 5

For all initiatives be sure to include systematic and regular assessment, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

All research supports that traditional models of education, although well-meaning and well-intentioned, are not sufficient enough to serve the dynamic needs of students, business, and industry. This means that accelerated learning at the community college is no longer an option; it is mandatory, if it has not already, and standard part of college curriculum and design for all educational institutions and their programs, especially post-secondary institutions. Our year-long project has revealed that more direct work and engagement by the college itself and its stakeholders is required in order to make specific and feasible recommendations required of a year-long schedule and its implementation. To build successful and structural accelerated learning at Century College, the college must intentionally, actively, and directly engage all of its community members from its students, employees, business and industry partners, and other organizations to begin the process of identifying their student demographics and their relative needs and the viability of moving forward with targeted and direct accelerated learning with a combination of different but pertinent course designs, locations, and pedagogies.

Resources for Ensuring Course and Program Scheduling is Responsive to Culturally Diverse Students' Needs

Please see the report's bibliography, which offers a list of resources to start the college's process of accelerated learning.

Reflections on the Project

What Worked Well

Our team consisted of faculty and administrators from six different MnSCU institutions, including both two-year and four-year schools. To our team, we all brought varied perspectives, opinions, views, and experiences. This diversity contributed to a well-rounded and interesting team that had a great deal to offer and much insight to share.

We all possessed the skill to work well under pressure as well, and this was valuable at our face-to-face meetings where we were able to accomplish a great deal of work. Additionally, we all have very different personalities, and like our experience and expertise, this contributed to the broader project in a positive way.

Each person on our team had a good experience with the mentor they chose to work with over the course of the year. We believe the mentor helped worked with us on problems we faced in our daily jobs, while also helped counsel us through challenges we faced as a team and in this project work. We gained valuable feedback, insight, and recommendations from our mentors and consider this component of the Luoma Leadership Academy program an important one.

The inventories (Strengths Finder, DiSC, MLQ, and LSPS) we completed pre-academy, and analyzed during the week-long conference, were beneficial to each of us in terms of self-exploration, understanding how we function in a team setting, and enabling us to identify how to

best tap into our strengths and strongest communication skills. We valued this component of the program as well.

In terms of completing the work related to the Action Team Project, we found our face-to-face meetings to be of most value. While video conferencing enabled flexibility given our distinct geographical locations, we didn't accomplish as much on our calls.

Challenges We Faced

We faced a variety of challenges as we worked on this Action Team Project for Century College. Each member of the team holds a demanding position at various MnSCU institutions throughout the state. As such, it was difficult to balance the work of our jobs with the work demanded by this project. The work of this project was very time intensive, and all team members struggled to carve out enough time to devote to the project. It forced us to prioritize our "day job" responsibilities, and in some cases, tasks went uncompleted or weren't done to the quality we would typically devote to our work because we were stretched too thin.

As mentioned, we are from a variety of institutions spread throughout the state of Minnesota, thus we faced challenges that resulted from our geographical proximity. Over the course of the year, we were only able to meet in person three times. This was especially unfortunate because our face-to-face meetings were the most productive. We did meet via phone/video conference many times; however, those meetings weren't quite as effective.

Our team struggled with role definition and a lack of team structure. While we didn't experience any conflicts, many folks on the team are natural leaders, yet despite this, felt uncomfortable exerting power to "take the lead". We all have mutual respect for one another, and no one felt at ease with asserting control over our process. At times, we also lacked motivation, though we can't articulate precisely what that stemmed from.

Finally, though we departed from the July 2015 week in the academy with a good understanding of what our college partner desire from us, the project suffered from scope creep as the year progressed. It ultimately became unreasonable and unrealistic.

What We Learned About Leadership

Over the past year, we've all experienced tremendous personal and professional growth. We can certainly attribute some of our growth to participation in the Luoma Leadership Academy Program. While each person learned different things and gained unique insight, we shared some common truths/understandings. They can be summarized in this way:

We have a better understanding of our personal limitations, and we also better understand the limitations others experience.

We now have a greater appreciation for the demands placed on leaders, particularly leaders in the MnSCU system.

We have a greater understanding of the ways in which the larger structure impacts colleges, people, and processes on a more micro-level. In this, we see how Charting the Future is a very aggressive and complex plan given how diverse each campus is within the MnSCU system. This experience enabled us to recognize and articulate our own personal and professional goals, and the importance of doing this in our demanding campus roles. We acknowledge that leaders can be impacted in both negative and positive ways by their roles, and that looking out for yourself is critical to your health and ability to lead.

We soul searched and have a greater appreciation for the importance of doing so. We acknowledged the importance of honest, authentic conversations in order for real growth and development to occur, though we questioned whether that can exist in environments that are sometimes deemed unsafe (particularly for certain populations of people). In this, we learned that people, for the most part, do not want to engage in conversations that make them feel uncomfortable. This is very unfortunate and we believe this will serve as a serious barrier to any real change occurring.

We have a better understanding about how either including or excluding diversity, equity, and inclusion in any major plan can result in serious repercussions down the road. Organizations can become unwelcoming and toxic, processes can exclude populations, and people can be further marginalized and ignored. We all lose when this happens.

We now understand that our system is rich with talented and amazing people, but individuals whose expertise is not valued as much as they should be.

Finally, we learned being a strong leader is a complicated endeavor and involves being courageous, honest, willing to have challenging dialogue, and prepared to question the status quo.

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