

[Substantive changes recommended by the Q2S Transition Team on or before 10-1-08 are highlighted in yellow]

[Substantive changes recommended by the Q2S Transition Team on or before 10-24-08 are highlighted in turquoise]

Quarters to Semesters Conversion: Assumptions, Constraints, and Principles

In developing a blueprint for its semester transition, Ohio University can draw on a body of documentation and analysis related to planning and implementing a successful academic system transition. The assumptions, constraints, and principles in this document draw on work done in 2006-2007 by Ohio University faculty, staff, and students who served on the Academic Calendar and Systems Committee, along with reports and plans produced by universities that have completed or are in the process of undertaking a change to semesters.

The conversion from quarters to semesters should be understood in light of three general assumptions:

1. The conversion should be viewed as an opportunity to engage in a comprehensive review and revision of the curriculum **aligned with the goals of Vision Ohio.**
2. The conversion should be neutral in terms of the size and structure of the curriculum and the resources needed to deliver that curriculum to the same number of students.
3. The conversion's success, given the interrelated character of the curriculum and specific program requirements, depends on departments/schools consulting with one another in a coordinated way to ensure that their curricular revisions do not adversely affect the resources of another academic unit.

The tension between the first assumption's call for curricular review and revision and the second assumption's requirement of neutrality in curricular size, structure, and resources can be resolved if departments/schools adhere to the constraints and principles identified below and if they adopt the coordinated approach outlined in the third assumption.

The conversion task is to take the overall curriculum needed to complete a degree and divide it into two units (semesters) per year instead of three (quarters). The conversion should be neutral at the aggregate level. Since an increase in base funding will not accompany the conversion to semesters, the conversion will require a series of constraints and principles that will set limits on how departments/schools and colleges convert the curriculum and how they staff sections so that the curriculum can be delivered with the same aggregate number of faculty to the same number of students.

Conversion Constraints

Constraint 1 – Conversion in place by Fall 2012

Given recommendations made by universities that have completed a conversion to semesters, the time it will take to review and update the curriculum, and the implementation schedule of our student information system, the fall of the 2012-13 academic year is when the semester system will commence.

Constraint 2 – Students must not be disadvantaged

The paramount assumption for the conversion is that it should be neutral, in terms of both cost and time-to-degree completion, for regularly enrolled students pursuing degrees at the time of the conversion.

Constraint 3 -- 3 to 2 Conversion of the Curriculum

The FTE definition under quarters is 45 and under semesters it is 30, which means that the conversion ratio for the curriculum must be the same (3 to 2) to create a neutral conversion. While every curricular component will not be evenly divisible by 3, the conversion of the curriculum must meet this one-third reduction at some aggregate level (department/school – college – university).

Constraint 4 – Same Number of Weeks Per Year

The amount of time available for instruction during the year should not change. This means that three 10-week quarters should become two 15-week semesters, each of which will be followed by a final exam period of approximately 3-4 days. Recommendations on options for flexibly scheduled semester courses meeting for fewer than 15 weeks will be informed by scheduling practices of other institutions on the semester system.

Constraint 5 - Cost – Revenue Neutral

The conversion should be analyzed in terms of the impact on tuition and subsidy revenues to ensure that negative effects on the budget are minimized. With subsidy currently frozen and the new funding formula under the USO shifting at least partially away from credit hour production, the degree of loss or gain the university might experience will be difficult to calculate until the new funding formula is in place and its effects can be modeled.

On the cost side, it must be assumed that there will be no additional revenue for hiring additional instructional staff, which means that the curriculum must be redesigned so that the same number of students can move through the curriculum and graduate at the same rate using roughly the current number of faculty. It is recognized that there will be one-time costs for conversion of the curriculum and student advising needs.

Constraint 6 – Use 120 SH as the Minimum Number of Hours to Graduate

The total number of semester hours (SH) to graduate must be proportionally equivalent to the current number of quarter hours (QH) to graduate. If the conversion factor is applied to the total number of hours to graduate, the current 192 hour requirement would become 128.

It is worth noting that a survey of other Ohio semester schools found that the minimum hours to graduate range from 128 (Miami, Akron) to 124 (Shawnee, Toledo, YSU), and from 122 (BGSU) to 121 (KSU) and 120 (CSU).

The conversion would be an opportunity to consider a reduction in the minimum number of hours to 120. For example, if the most common credit hours for a course change from the current 4 to 3 under semesters, a student load of 5 courses per semester (15 hours) would result in a total of 120 hours to graduate, which is similar to the current quarter system where a student can take 16 credits each quarter and end up with the 192 hours necessary to graduate. If 128 credits are required to graduate under semesters, students will need to complete an additional eight hours beyond the “normal” pace of 15 credits per semester by taking some 1, 4, or 5 credit courses at some point over the four years.

As a starting point, the minimum hours to graduate will be assumed to be 120. After the USO finalizes its funding system by the end of 2008, the financial implications of holding to this 120 hour assumption will be evaluated against alternative minimum hour requirements for graduation..

Constraint 7 – Uniform Weekly Schedule

To meet current state efficiency standards for utilization of facilities, three-hour courses should follow a uniform scheduling pattern to make student course registration easier and more predictable. This will mean that the three hour semester courses should be scheduled either:

- MWF for 50 minutes with courses starting on the hour or
- TTh for 75 minutes with courses starting every 1.5 hours beginning at 8:00 a.m.

It is recognized that some courses will require beyond 50 minutes on MWF and beyond 75 minutes on TTh, and recommendations on those exceptions will be informed by the scheduling practices of other institutions on the semester system.

Conversion Principles

In addition to the above constraints, a set of guiding principles must be adopted if the curriculum is to be successfully converted and those constraints honored. Variables such as the number of credit hours per course, the number of courses within requirement areas (general education, majors, etc), section size, and the number of sections taught by each faculty member are interrelated and must be balanced simultaneously to accomplish a neutral conversion that does not adversely affect resources in another academic unit.

For example, proportionally expanding the number of credits or courses in an area would result in a need to increase faculty loads. Similarly, a proportional decrease in faculty loads could be achieved if the number of credits and/or courses is proportionally decreased. Proportionally increasing one requirement area such as general education or a major would result in a need to redistribute faculty resources from one area to another.

Given the overall assumption of a neutral conversion and the limitations imposed by the constraints required for such a conversion, these variables must be balanced by the academic programs when converting the curriculum. There is no single, correct way to convert a program from quarters to semesters, and so a department/school will have multiple choices to make but must balance those choices to maintain the neutral conversion. The following principles provide guidance for how the different variables will need to be balanced as the curriculum in each program is converted.

Conversion Principle 1– Proportional Conversion of Curricular Components

Within the total hours to graduate, the proportion for various curricular components (majors, concentration areas, minors, general education, etc) should remain as close to neutral as possible.

If a major currently requires 54 hours of major courses, a 30 hour area of concentration, and 15 hours of electives, this would convert to a 36 SH major, a 20 SH area of concentration, and 10 SH of electives. A purely mathematical conversion, to be sure, will more often result in fractions of courses, and curricular integrity might limit which components can be reduced by the 3:2 factors, which can be reduced more, or which must be reduced less. To comply with the principle that a student cannot be required to take more time to graduate, however, the conversion of curricular components must be neutral at the aggregate level. Thus, if some curricular components within the requirements to graduate cannot be fully reduced by one-third, then others will have to be reduced proportionally more to compensate.

In general, a curriculum with 3 QH courses would convert to semesters by repackaging each group of 3 current courses into 2 semester courses. With semesters expanding to 15 weeks, this conversion is contact hour neutral because the conversion is taking the same total content and dividing it in half instead of thirds, as shown below:

Quarters			Semesters	
Credit	Contact		Credit	Contact
3	30	➔	3	45
3	30		3	45
3	30			
9 90			6 90	

For a curriculum with 4 QH courses, the most straightforward conversion would be to change to 3 SH courses. This achieves a reduction of 25%, which is short of the required 33%. To achieve the complete reduction, for every 9 courses required under the quarter system the new curriculum would need to be reduced to 8 courses.

Quarters			Semesters	
Credit	Contact		Credit	Contact
4	40		3	45
4	40		3	45
4	40		3	45
4	40	➔	3	45
4	40		3	45
4	40		3	45
4	40		3	45
4	40		3	45
4	40			
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6	360		24	360

This conversion would also be contact hour neutral, which means faculty would have the same amount of time to cover the same material as under the quarter system.

For a curriculum with 5 QH courses, the simplest conversion would be to create 4 SH course units. This would achieve only 20% of the needed 33% reduction, and so an additional reduction by repackaging every 6 courses into 5 would be required to create a contact-hour neutral conversion.

Quarters			Semesters	
Credit	Contact		Credit	Contact
5	50		4	60
5	50		4	60
5	50	➔	4	60
5	50		4	60
5	50		4	60
5	50			
<hr/>			<hr/>	
9	90		6	90

A special reduction case would occur when there is a required three-course sequence. In this case, the reduction could be achieved by keeping the credit hours the same by converting three 10-week courses (30 weeks) into two 15-week courses (still 30 weeks).

Clearly, few curricula fit neatly into these conversion scenarios since they may not have a group of 3 QH courses divisible by 3, 4 QH courses divisible by 9, or 5 QH courses divisible by 6. Or they will have a mixture of courses with 3, 4 and 5 QHs or a mixture of annual sequences and other courses. Converting these curricula, will entail using the methods shown above to combine credit hours and course reductions to create a group of requirements that are neutral with respect to contact hours.

It is also possible that some small majors might not be able to meet exactly the 3:2 reduction, but in that case other majors within the department or college might have to be reduced to compensate. In other words, the conversion should not result in an increase in the proportion of the total hours to graduate devoted to a particular program, department/school or college relative to the other units in the university unless there is a matching shift in faculty resources.

Conversion Principle 2 – The Majority of Semester Courses Must be 3 Hours

The survey of semester schools in Ohio shows that the most common course is 3 SH. Currently, 60% of our quarter system curriculum is 4 QH. This suggests that the most logical conversion would be to change our 4 QH courses to 3 SH since that seems to be the typical model and would make the transfer of credit both simpler and aligned with the expectations of the Board of Regents.

It would be possible to keep our courses at 4 credit hours if we were willing to make the corresponding adjustments in faculty workload and major requirements. Using a 4 SH standard would drop the number of courses needed to reach 128 from around 43 with 3 SH courses to 32 with 4 SH courses. This would require an additional reduction of the curriculum into fewer, larger course “packages,” thereby reducing the number of selections and perhaps further constraining the distribution across disciplines and curricular components.

Conversion Principle 3 – Conversion Should be Faculty Workload Neutral **Consistent with the Specific College’s Workload Policy**

Under the conversion, each college would need to develop a workload policy based on a semester system that is approved by the Provost and applies to all groups of faculty (Group 1 through 4 and Early Retired). Just as there are a variety of workloads under the current quarter system, workloads under the semester system would also vary but should be converted to their equivalents under the quarter system.

Conversion Principle 4 – The Conversion Should be Neutral with Section Staffing and Seat Availability

In addition to the conversion of required curriculum components, the number of sections that a department/school must deliver should balance with both the faculty workload and the number of enrollments in the program. As requirements are converted and course content is repackaged into fewer course units, the impact on student demand for electives and service courses in other units will shift. Therefore, departments/schools with a mixture of required major courses and electives or service courses will need to create a course scheduling plan whereby the annual sections offered matches the available staffing and maintains the instructional capacity to handle the student enrollment in the various program components. This will require the department/school to make choices with respect to the frequency of course offerings, the balance between the number of required and elective courses, section size, and the workload of faculty. **An important consideration will be ensuring the availability of trailer sections for course sequences, which might require scheduling sections in the summer.** As one of these elements is changed, the other must be adjusted to allow the annual sections offered to be

staffed with existing faculty resources and to satisfy the student demand so that student graduation is not delayed.

Conversion Principle 5 – Maintaining Academic Quality

As departments/schools work to convert their curricula they should adhere to the principle of maintaining the academic quality of their general education courses, which will ensure that the university's commitment to liberal education is not compromised, and the academic quality of their major courses, which will ensure that the university's commitment to intensive, discipline-based education will not be compromised.

Special Case: Conversion of General Education Requirements

Since components of Tier I are single courses that are currently 4 QH or 5 QH, there is no exact 3:2 (67%) conversion possible. 4 QH courses would need to be converted to 3 SH (a 75% reduction), and 5 QH courses would need to be converted to 4 SH (an 80% reduction) as follows.

Course	QH	SH	Course	QH	SH
MATH 109	4	3	ENG 151	5	4
MATH 113	5	4	ENG 151A	5	4
MATH 115	5	4	ENG 152	5	4
MATH 117	4	3	ENG 153	5	4
MATH 118	4	3	ENG 153A	5	4
MATH 120	4	3	ENG 153B	5	4
MATH 121	4	3			80%
MATH 122	3	3			
MATH 147	4	3			
MATH 150	4	3			
PHIL 130	4	3			
PSY 121	4	3			
		75%			

The same would be true of Tier III courses and Tier I J courses, which are typically 4 QH and so would convert to 3 SH. This means that the Tier I courses will consume a higher proportion of the 128 SH required to graduate than they did under the 192 QH system. To preserve the relative size of general education within the 128 SH, the conversion of Tier II would need to be adjusted. The direct 3:2 conversion of the current 32 QH Tier II requirement would be 21.33 SH which means that it will not be an even conversion. To balance the size of the total general education program against the 128 SH to graduate, the calculation of the size of Tier II could be approached as follows:

	QH	QH
Tier I Math	4	5
Tier I English	5	5
Tier I J	4	4
Tier II	32	32
Tier III	4	4
Total	49	50
% of	192 25.5%	26.0%

Depending on whether the current Tier 1 Math requirement is viewed as 4 QH or 5 QH, general education requirements account for 25.5 to 26% of the graduation requirements. Currently, only MATH 113 and 115 are 5 QH courses.

If the Tier I and III courses are converted to 3 or 4 SH, the derived size of the Tier II requirement would be somewhere between 17.67 and 20.67 SH, depending on whether we consider the current Tier I MATH to be 4 or 5 QH and whether English converts from 5 to 4 or 3 credits.

	SH	SH	SH
Tier I Math	4	3	3
Tier I English	5	4	3
Tier I J	3	3	3
Tier III	3	3	3
Tier II (derived)	17.67	19.67	20.67
% of	128	25.5%	25.5% Math = 5
Tier II (derived)	18.33	20.33	21.33
% of	128	26.0%	26.0% Math = 4

The conversion of English to 3 SH is shown because the other current semester schools in Ohio (Akron, BGSU, Miami, KSU, Shawnee, Toledo, YSU) have 3 SH English courses as opposed to 4. The advantage of this conversation would be the option of adding an extra hour to Tier II requirements. It is also important to note that general education courses such as English composition are part of the State of Ohio Transfer Assurance Guide (TAG) requirements. Transfer students will likely come in with 3 SH English composition courses, and if our English composition courses are 4 SH those students would receive credit for 4 SH for the transfer of a 3 SH course.