

Report of the Quarters to Semesters Transition Team

Introduction

The Ohio University Board of Trustees gave approval during its October 2008 meeting for the university to begin a transition to semesters with the goal of having a semester system in place in fall 2012. In anticipation of the Board's decision, Executive Vice President and Provost Kathy Krendl assembled the Quarters to Semesters Transition Team ([Appendix A](#)) in early September 2008 and gave it the charge of providing recommendations on the following matters:

1. Development of a coordinated approach that schools and departments will take to convert their major-specific courses and general education courses.
2. Development of a comprehensive advising program that will focus on the needs of "transition" students.
3. Development of a semester system academic calendar which will consist of two regular 15 week semesters along with summer sessions.

This report contains the recommendations of the Quarters to Semesters Transition Team (Q2STT) on these matters and describes the process by which those recommendations were reached. Those recommendations will be forwarded in April to the deans, who will review them and seek additional consultation as needed before sending them along to the Executive Vice President and Provost (EVPP) who will resolve any outstanding issues and endorse the final conversion framework.

The Q2STT began to meet weekly starting on September 10 and, with the exception of the fall-winter intersession, continued weekly meetings through the end of winter quarter. For the first five meetings, the team discussed and revised documents that a research group ([Appendix B](#)) had prepared over the previous summer at the direction of the EVPP. This research group studied how other universities managed the transition from quarters to semesters; talked with Andy Jorgensen, a professor of chemistry who oversaw the University of Toledo's semester transition; consulted with staff leading the new student information system initiative; and reviewed reports from prior Ohio University committees charged with evaluating a move to semesters. The research group used what it learned from these inquiries to write a draft timeline for moving to semesters in academic year 2012 ([Appendix C](#)) and a draft document outlining the assumptions, constraints, and principles that should inform the decisions that colleges, departments, and schools will have to make as they revise their curricula ([Appendix D](#)).

Guiding Commitments

A guiding commitment for the Q2STT was that undergraduate students and graduate students should not be disadvantaged by the transition from quarters to semesters. This commitment is stated explicitly as a conversion principle in the aforementioned draft document and is implicit in the charge's requirement that an advising program be developed to address the needs of "transition" students. The Q2STT referred regularly to this commitment during its discussions as a fundamental priority.

A second guiding commitment for the Q2STT was to allow sufficient time for colleges, departments, and schools to discuss and decide how they could enhance—ideally, transform—their curricula and not merely convert those curricula into a semester format. University of Toledo, as Professor Jorgensen reported, did not allow sufficient time, which resulted in a missed opportunity to create a transformed university-wide curriculum. Early on the Q2STT decided to extend the original timeline to make sure that departments/schools could examine carefully their current offerings and resources, study exemplary curricula of comparable colleges and universities, and ultimately produce improved, updated courses and programs within the limits of existing resources.

A third guiding commitment for the Q2STT was to be as transparent, consultative, and inclusive as possible during its deliberations. The team meetings were open, documents under discussion and minutes from each meeting were posted on the EVPP's website, and media requests for documents and interviews received timely responses. Two meetings were held with chairs and directors in fall quarter; departments' requests to meet with team representatives were honored promptly; team members representing Classified Senate and Administrative Senate, Finance and Administration, and the regional campuses brought questions, comments, and concerns from their colleagues to the team; and the deans and Faculty Senate received regular progress reports. Formal efforts were made, with the support of Faculty Senate, Graduate Student Senate, and Student Senate, to solicit comment from their constituents on a proposed academic calendar. The results of those efforts were shared with the Q2STT and informed subsequent discussions of the proposed academic calendar.

External consultations began in early fall and included regular teleconferences with the three state universities still on the quarter system: Wright State University, University of Cincinnati, and Ohio State University. The sharing of information and ideas about semester conversion also occurred with Ohio University's two-year partners on the quarter system, Washington State Community College and Hocking College. The goal of the conversations with partner schools was to ensure that all three institutions, as they move to semesters, make coordinated decisions that strengthen extant articulation agreements. Conversations with the universities have focused on shared concerns related to institutional planning and decision-making. Wright State's Board of Trustees approved, in March, moving to semesters in 2012. Ohio State's University Senate voted in March to recommend moving to semesters in 2012, and its Board of Trustees endorsed the move to semesters in April. University of Cincinnati's Board of Trustees approved, at its January meeting, moving to semesters in 2012. A different sort of external consultation occurred with the November visit of Professor Jorgensen, who met with the Q2STT, Faculty Senate representatives, deans, the Provost, undergraduates, and graduate students. He offered valuable advice in person, assessed the Q2STT's progress in a written report, shared documents ([Appendix E](#)) that proved to be effective during Toledo's transition, and agreed to evaluate the team's final report.

Internal consultations began with meetings held in late fall with the 112 program coordinators appointed by the colleges and regional campuses to lead their departments/schools' transition to semesters ([Appendix F](#)). These meetings were opportunities for Q2STT members to affirm that faculty indeed do control the curriculum and that it is the responsibility of departments/schools to decide how to change their courses and programs; to present the revised timeline and the revised

document on assumptions, constraints, and principles; and to answer questions and offer advice. Coordinators will be compensated for their work with either a stipend or a course reduction. Meetings with program coordinators will be set for spring quarter and will continue through academic year 2009-10.

New members were added to make the team more inclusive. One example was the addition of Professor Patrick Munhall from the Lancaster campus to expand representation of regional faculty, and another was the addition of Professor Jeff Giesey, Chair of the Educational Policy and Student Affairs Committee (EPSA). Given the overlap between the team's charge and the purview of EPSA, it seemed sensible to ask Professor Giesey to join the team to ensure effective communication between this key Faculty Senate committee and the Q2STT.

Emerging from initial meetings with Professor Giesey was the recognition that two parallel actions should be taken to make sure that the implementation of the transition succeeds. The first effort was to construct a streamlined curricular review process that would permit effective management of the submissions of revised curricula. The process originally was planned to commence in spring quarter 2009. Professor David Thomas, Chair of the University Curriculum Council (UCC) and a member of the Q2STT, scheduled weekly meetings with faculty leaders of UCC committees. Central to these discussions were the acknowledged need to develop guidelines designed to facilitate the flow and timely review of submissions associated with the transition to semesters; to establish a sequence of college submissions; and to ensure that the project of digitizing the curricular review process is completed in time to assist with that transition. Those draft guidelines were shared with UCC and the Q2STT and, once revised, will be shared with the coordinators.

The second action was to appoint the leaders of the conversion implementation during intersession rather than follow the original plan to appoint them in spring quarter. The justification was that the leaders would be able to work with the Q2STT in winter quarter and contribute to the discussions and decisions from the perspective of those would be responsible for implementing the resulting recommendations. The Provost accepted this recommendation, consulted with the deans and Faculty Senate, and appointed Professor Giesey and Gary Neiman, Dean of Health and Human Services, as Co-Directors of The Quarters to Semesters Conversion Office. Dean Neiman joined Professor Giesey as a member of Q2STT for winter quarter, and they will work together in the coming years to manage the conversion.

Blueprint Documents

The draft timeline and the draft document of assumptions, constraints, and principles were intended as blueprints that departments/schools could consult as they revised their curricula. The draft timeline and the draft document drew "on work done in 2006-07 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."

As noted above, the timeline was revised to allow more time for departments/schools "to engage in a comprehensive review and revision of the curriculum aligned with the goals of Vision

Ohio.” Although the “assumptions” were not revised, they were intensively discussed by the Q2STT. The second assumption, that “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,” raised a number of questions which can only be answered as departments/schools determine how to deliver their revised curricula in light of the constraint that revenues will be neutral and consistent with the conversion principle that faculty workload, section staffing, and seat availability should remain neutral. The neutrality concept cuts across the assumptions, constraints, and principles, and should guide departments/schools as they decide how to redefine their courses and programs.

The third assumption holds that the transition’s success depends on departments/schools “consulting . . . in a coordinated way to ensure that their curricular revisions do not adversely affect the resources of another academic unit.” Appointing the coordinators was the first action taken on that assumption, and the goal is to encourage the coordinators to communicate regularly outside formal meetings so that shared problems are identified and resolved proactively. The curricular revision guidelines being developed by the UCC group also call for departments/schools to consult with one another to prevent unanticipated and negative consequences for other units. One example of these guidelines is the stipulation that departments/schools submit a “notification of intent” of their planned curricular revisions to any academic unit that might be affected by them.

After the second Q2STT meeting, Professor Giesey, in his role as representative of EPSA, reported that two constraints, one conversion principle, and any general education revisions should be reviewed by EPSA because they all fall within its oversight domain. The constraints were that a minimum of 120 hours should be required for graduation and that a uniform weekly schedule be established with 50 minute classes on MWF and 75 minute classes on TTh. The conversion principle was that a majority of semester courses must be 3 hours. The document considers general education a special case and proposes that the current proportion of required general education hours relative to the 192 required hours to graduate in the quarter system remain constant in the semester system.

EPSA studied the issues tied to these elements of the document and, congruent with the document’s intentions, presented three resolutions for first reading at the March 9 meeting of Faculty Senate. With respect to general education, EPSA proposes a straightforward conversion with no substantive change in Tier requirements. The proportionality issue will not be resolved until departments/schools that offer Tier I quantitative skills courses announce the semester hours for those courses, but it is encouraging that the Department of English announced that the Tier I composition course will be 3 hours.

One significant revision to the document warrants mention, which is the addition of a fifth conversion principle at the behest of the President of Student Senate, Michael Adeyanju. This conversion principle, which addresses the responsibility of departments/schools to uphold academic quality as they revise their curricula, reads as follows: “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 that the academic quality of their major courses, which will

ensure that the university's commitment to intensive, discipline-based education will not be compromised.”

Proposed Semester Calendar

The Q2STT spent the latter part of fall quarter and the first half of winter quarter on the critical task of devising a semester calendar. The semester calendars of other colleges and universities were studied, and the advantages and disadvantages of various models were considered. The Office of the University Registrar was very helpful in supplying the models that informed the discussions. The Q2STT finally reached consensus on a model that was presented to the university for comment ([Appendix G](#)). Faculty Senate, regional campuses, Student Senate, Graduate Student Senate, Classified Senate, and Administrative Senate all sought comment from their constituents on the proposed model.

Faculty expressed support for the proposed model and made specific suggestions ([Appendix H](#)). First among those suggestions was to have the longest possible summer break to permit maximum time for research and creative activity. Second was to consult with local school districts to create a common calendar to prevent problems with incompatible vacation schedules and with childcare. Third was to make sure that the calendar accommodates local teachers' interest in taking graduate and professional development courses in the summer. The fourth suggestion was to take into account the needs of specific programs such as those within Education Abroad, Environmental and Plant Biology, the College of Business, and the Department of Geography when choosing the calendar. Undergraduate students ([Appendix I](#)) and graduate students ([Appendix J](#)) who responded to surveys also expressed support for the proposed calendar, but both groups preferred, for different reasons, a four week semester break over a three week semester break.

After discussing the feedback from the campus community, the Q2STT addressed the question of how to construct a summer calendar that would be academically sound and responsive to the feedback. Many different options were considered, and examples from other schools influenced the discussions. The possible advantages of a “Maymester,” which is typically a term that begins immediately after the end of spring semester and runs for three or four weeks, received much attention early in the deliberations because it is a common practice at many schools. Once the registrar and representatives from Finance and Administration pointed to the need to have one week off after spring semester to process grades and other important academic administrative tasks, and at least one week between the end of summer sessions and the beginning of fall to refresh residence halls and handle related maintenance tasks, the disadvantages of the “Maymester” became apparent and the idea began to lose support. In its place a consensus developed that adopting a simple summer calendar that preserved the current option of flexibly scheduled classes would be a better choice.

The Q2STT finally agreed to endorse the following recommendations on the academic calendar:

1. Ohio University will have a 17 week fall semester that includes 75 days of instruction, a week for final exams, and time off for Thanksgiving and national holidays.

2. Ohio University will have a 17 week spring semester that includes 74 days of instruction, a week for final exams, and time off for spring break and national holidays.
3. Ohio University will have either a 3 week break or a 4 week break between fall and spring semesters. Advantages of each option will be shared with deans, who will consult with the Executive Vice President and Provost in making the final decision on this and all other calendar options.
4. Ohio University will have 2 six week summer sessions. The first session will begin at least one week after the end of spring semester. The second session will end at least one week before the beginning of fall semester. Flexibly scheduled classes within either summer session will continue to be an option for departments/schools.

Academic Advising Plans for Quarters to Semesters Transition

The Q2STT recognized the critical role that effective advising and communication will play in ensuring that students are fully informed about the effects of the transition on their academic experience and graduation plans. Other institutions invested in advising and communication so that students would not be disadvantaged, and Ohio University has decided to follow their lead. Colleges will be allocated supplemental, one-time only funds to cover the costs of the additional advising that will be necessary to meet the needs of transition students.

Each college will develop an advising plan. Since the approach that the colleges take to advising varies, it is expected that each advising plan will be different. The Quarters to Semesters Advising Taskforce, which begins its work in late March, will be responsible for developing the format for the advising and communication plans that the colleges will submit in academic year 2009-10. This taskforce will set standards for the advising plans and will make recommendations for establishing central advising structures and functions to support the Q2S transition. College advising and communication plans will include the following:

1. Description of how the college does advising
2. Budget for transitional advising needs
3. Description of how transitional advising will be done
4. Identification of strategies through which each college will communicate with its students

All advising and communication plans will ensure that advisors are familiar with the semester curricula and competent to advise students. In addition, the plans will ensure that all students will have the opportunity for an individual meeting with an advisor and be supplied with a document outlining the courses they should take to complete their degrees under the semester system. With the exception of cohort programs, which handle advising and communication needs differently, individual advising is preferred over group advising. It is also expected that some portion of the advising and communication funds will be dedicated to making improvements in academic advising that endure beyond the transition to semesters.

The University Academic Advising Council (UAAC) will assist the colleges and help to coordinate this initiative across the colleges. The UAAC will collaborate with the Faculty Commons and the colleges to deliver advisor training to faculty and staff members charged with executing the colleges' advising plans. The Allen Student Help Center will serve as a central

information point for all students seeking general advising related to the impact of the transition to semesters on their academic experience and graduation plans.

Proposed Budget for Transition Costs

There are costs associated with making the transition to a semester system. During fall quarter, Professor John Day, who is also Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Budgeting, prepared a budget for those costs after consultation with the deans. Beyond the costs of coordinators and advising, the budget includes costs associated with the faculty responsible for UCC oversight, a conversion office for the implementation co-directors, and assumed contingencies. Included as well are costs for implementation of software to help with the conversion of quarter-based courses to semester-based courses, and support for staff in the Office of the University Registrar. A full budget that details costs per college for coordinators and for advising is in [Appendix K](#), and the following is the general budget for all of those transition costs:

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|--------------------------|----------------|
| Advising | \$1,090,000 |
| Conversion | 315,000 |
| Conversion Contingencies | 35,000 |
| UCC | 35,000 |
| <u>UCC Contingencies</u> | <u>35,000</u> |
| | \$1,510,000 |
| | |
| DARS TA | \$500,000 |
| Encoding Position | 114,000 |
| <u>Conversion Office</u> | <u>200,000</u> |
| | \$814,000 |
| | |
| TOTAL BUDGET | \$2,324,000 |