

# SUMMER SCHEDULING ON A TRADITIONAL CAMPUS: EXPECTATIONS, REALITY, AND IMPLICATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Students enrolled in summer school were studied to determine reasons to attend and differences between expectations and reality. In addition, students were compared by the session format enrolled to determine differences. Students typically enroll in summer school to graduate on time, lighten the load during the regular season, and meet prerequisites. Expectations of students were about the same as in the regular system but actual experiences were different. Students in the three-week intercession and the second four-week session indicated they studied more and their grades were lower than expected. Most students felt the cost was higher than expected.

## INTRODUCTION

Summer school is considered a common component of the educational experience for many students. Most universities offer summer studies as a regular offering and students have come to expect the availability of courses. Even faculty may view summer school as expected income rather than an opportunity to earn additional income.

Yet, summer school scheduling is not as easy as it would appear. Taylor (1988) suggests that summer school may lack both legitimacy and integrity when academic needs of students are not the primary focus of the institution. But what are academic needs of students? Facilitating degree completion, providing opportunities to take prerequisite material, and serving non-traditional students appear to be legitimate academic needs. Reality also suggests increased revenues, optimal use of facilities, and faculty employment as part of the summer school issue. Competition from two-year colleges, on-line courses, and other types of distance learning certainly complicate the summer school issue.

A successful summer school suggests that institutions offer a set of courses students want and need and an appropriate schedule of those courses C balanced with academic integrity. Therefore understanding the students perspective is important. This paper focuses on the student's perception of summer school with the objective of:

1. presenting students purposes to enroll in summer school
2. determining if expectations are different than regular session
3. determining if expectations of summer school are different from reality
4. determining if differences are based on the session format
5. providing strategies for educational decision making regarding summer schools.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are few recent publications on the subject of summer school. This is disturbing considering the amount of resources and planning that goes into the creation and delivery of summer classes. It is possible, though unlikely, that the universities thoroughly understand the needs of their students as well as the necessary process to serve those students. However, students change over time and a study of current student's perspectives is important to insure that appropriate decisions are made in relationship to summer school.

### **Reasons to Attend**

Chandler and Weller (1995) found, in a study of business students, that to graduate on time was the most important reason to attend summer school. A study of two year institutions indicated that the most important purpose of summer school was to provide credit courses for the institutions regular degree or certificate programs (Young 1989). This is not surprising as fewer students are earning bachelors degree within five years. The American College Testing Program reports that in 1998, 52.8 percent of students completed a bachelor's degree within five years (1998). Since 1983, the rate for graduation within five years has decreased every year except two. The report also indicated that fewer students are earning diplomas or associate degrees within three years of beginning their studies at two-year schools.

Although dated, Keller (1982) and Patterson, Sedlacek, and Tracey (1981) suggest that other reasons to attend summer school are to complete the degree program in a shorter period of time, lighten the load for fall and spring terms, and to make up credit.

Summer school has always allowed for more flexible scheduling important to the non traditional student. The National Center for Education Statistics indicates that 40 percent of working adults were participating in work related adult education in 1995 (*Research Briefs*, February 99). This is certainly in line with the traditional summer school literature that suggests that programs are aimed toward teachers returning to school to improve their credentials or simply update their fields of knowledge (Keller 1982, Moore 1976). The percentage of undergraduates who attend part-time has also risen steadily over the past two decades. More than 42 percent of college students now are enrolled part-time. The average age of students has also increased. At least 57 percent of undergraduates are 21 or older (ACT, 1998).

### **Pedagogical Issues**

Summer school usually requires shorter, more intensive courses but pedagogical concerns for short classes do not seem to be warranted. Van Scyoc and Gleason (1993) found that students in three week courses performed better on achievement tests than those in traditional semester courses. This study was performed using college-level micro economic classes. The study also suggested that this advantage disappeared when knowledge retention was measured.

A comparison of alternative course scheduling at the teacher education graduate level found no significant differences among groups that met on a three week, one week, or a 15 week schedule (Barclay, 1990). LaFountain (1995) also found no differences of course scheduling format and long-term retention. It should be noted that these two studies were conducted with graduate students and were not conducted with undergraduate students.

Scott (1994) compared intensive and semester-long formats in British literature and marketing courses. Faculty and students both felt that the intensive classes created a continuous learning experience allowing students to connect and synthesize ideas better. However, longer sessions fostered more in-depth discussion. The research concluded that intensive courses were a powerful learning experience if high quality attributes were present. The study further noted that students' other responsibilities and teaching skill may alter the positive relationship of the shorter intensive course.

Messina, Fagans, and Augustine (1996) used intense 45-hour courses held over three weekends in response to declining enrollments in a community college. Data collected from the students indicated an overall positive experience learning as much or more than a regular course. Eighty-nine percent of the students implied they would register for another course in the weekend format. No literature was found to suggest that shorter, intensive studies were adverse to student learning.

### **Employment and Students**

Undergraduates relied heavily on wages they received from part- and full-time jobs to help them pay for their college education during the 1995-96 year (*The Condition of Education, 1998*). The study indicated that one-half of all students who worked during the 1995-96 reported the primary reason for working was to help pay for their education expenses. Among full-time students who worked, about 19 percent worked full time. Twenty-seven percent of full-time students worked between 21 to 34 hours per week. The report also indicated that students report that jobs negatively impacted their ability to enroll in courses. Nearly 37 percent said their work negatively impacted their grades, while 15 percent said their work had a positive effect on their grades.

### **METHODOLOGY**

A questionnaire was developed based on the previous work of Chandler and Weller (1995) to assess the reasons students attended summer school. In addition, questions were asked to determine the expectations of students for summer school, what students actually experienced, and mitigating factors of employment, number of hours of credit taken during the summer session and over the entire summer school program. See Appendix 1.

Students taking school of business classes in a Midwestern regional university were surveyed. The summer school program at the university was divided into four sessions. The first session was a three and half week intersession immediately following the close of the spring semester. An eight-week session followed and included two consecutive four-week sessions. The first four-week session began at the same time as the eight-week. The second four-week followed immediately after the close of the first four week and ended at the same time as the eight week session.

Professors in each session were provided a questionnaire to administer to their students during the first two days of class. To increase cooperation from professors and students, the questionnaire was very brief. A follow up questionnaire was given to the professors to administer during the last few days of the term. Again to increase cooperation from both students and professors, the questionnaire was brief and no attempt was made to match students from the first questionnaire to the students answering the second questionnaire. All responses were grouped by session for before and after comparisons.

## Results

Four hundred and forty-two usable questionnaires were gathered. An attempt was made to survey all students registered in courses and a 51.1 percent total response rate was attained. See Table I for response rate by session.

A majority of the respondents were seniors and most were employed. The respondents studied expected to study on average 6.06 hours per week but reported actually studying 9.31 hours. See Table 2 for student characteristics by class, employment, and study hours.

Students were asked their agreement or disagreement using a five-point scale on reasons to enroll in summer school. A majority of students agreed that graduating on time (59.5%), lightening load during the regular session (53.2%), and meeting prerequisites (57%) were reasons to enroll in summer school. They did not agree that repeating the class or graduating early were reasons they attended summer school. A one-way ANOVA indicated that the sessions were not significantly different from each other any of the reasons to enroll in summer school.

Expectations of summer school we measured using a five point Likert scale. Students were asked to compare their expectations of summer school with a regular session. A majority of respondents in each session felt that assignment (50%), the cost of attending summer school (57.2% the amount of time (40%) and the grade earned (69.5%) would be slightly higher than the regular session. A one-way ANOVA indicated that the four sessions were not significantly different.

Interestingly, the actual experiences of the four sessions indicated some significant differences. The Scheffe multiple comparison technique was used to determine differences between the sessions. The 2nd four-week session was significantly different from the other three sessions ( $p < .01$ ). Students in the 2nd four-week session felt that the amount of time was greater than the regular session. In addition, students in the 2nd four-week session were significantly different than the eight-week session in terms of number of assignments ( $p < .02$ ). Students enrolled in the 2nd four-week session felt that the numbers of assignments were greater than the regular session. It is possible students enrolled in the 2nd four-week session may have been taking courses all summer and are simply fatigued. See Table 3.

Paired t-tests were used to compare expectations to actual experiences in each of the four summer sessions. The intersession comparison indicates that students studied more than they expected to study in the regular session and their grades were lower than expected. Intersession students also felt that the actual cost outside of fees and tuition was higher than in the regular session. Students in the eight weeks session indicated that grades were lower and the cost higher as compared to the regular session. The first four-week session students felt that the cost was higher than expected and the second four-week felt that the costs were higher, the assignments and time were greater than expected, and the number of hours studying was also higher. See Table 4.

One concern of faculty during shortened courses is the amount of time spent on activities outside of the classroom. During summer school, the number of student activities decrease to few university sponsored events. However, employment among students is on the increase. Employed students indicated they worked on average 26.8 hours per week. Working combined with additional family and social responsibilities decrease the amount of time spent preparing for classes.

It is interesting to note that approximately 22 percent of students responding each term indicated they worked 30 or more hours each week. In addition, of the total number of students working over 30 hours (95), 46 percent were taking two or more classes during that term.

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The results indicate that students enroll in summer school to graduate, lighten the load for the regular session, and meet prerequisites thus supporting earlier research. The importance students place on degree completion supports the institutional mission of teaching and the primary responsibility of meeting academic needs.

The difference between expectations and actual experiences of summer school compared to the regular session should be a concern for administration. While there were some differences among the four summer sessions, generally, expectations of the amount of hours studying, cost outside of tuition and fees, and earned grades were not met. These expectations can be problematic for the professor as well. Students expecting less commitment in terms of time and hours studying may not be performing to course standards creating an adverse learning environment for the student and a less than ideal teaching situation for the professor. Students may not understand the demands of the professor while the professor is wondering what is wrong with the unmotivated students. Certainly a decrease in expected grades will occur if students do not put forth the necessary effort.

In addition, an unexpected increase in the cost to attend school may lead to working more hours at part or full time employment, decreasing the hours available for study. A vicious circle then envelopes the student as course demands increase with decreasing available time.

Certainly it is incumbent upon administrators and faculty to assist students in making correct decisions for enrolling in summer school. Providing information is essential in creating the appropriate expectation. Possible strategies include:

1. Research student needs and provide courses and course sequencing to assure students have the correct mix of summer classes to meet degree requirements.
2. Involve faculty to determine which courses are more appropriate for short intensive study and those that would be better on a longer term.
3. Create flexible schedules to allow students to meet scholastic and employment demands. This would be especially important for non- traditional students.
4. Counsel students on the appropriate number of hours to take given restraints of necessary, employment and other obligations.
5. Have syllabi and course requirements available for students in advance of registration so they can make informed decisions. Linking schedules to syllabi on the college web page would be an easy and inexpensive way to keep students informed. Waiting until the first day of class places students in a no-win situation after they have committed to housing and other obligations.
6. Encourage faculty to speak to their students realistically about course requirements for summer school. This would be easy for faculty teaching a second A sequenced course during the summer.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

While the study supported some previous research, it does have limitations. Findings may not be generalized to all colleges of business with summer programs due to the single university sample. In addition, failure to match the first questionnaire to the same respondents follow up questionnaire limited data analysis by session only.

The current study expands the literature on summer school. Findings suggest that students enroll in summer school for academic reasons but expectations are different than actual experiences. Future research should include professors perspectives as well as students opinions about summer courses and formats. Research should also link performance measures to determine the appropriateness of summer school formats to the specific course taught. Research into the decision making process to enroll in summer school may also provide input on what information needs to be made available to students. Additional research may also focus on the factors creating the expectations that students have (previous experiences, other student's opinions, etc.) so that administrators and faculty can design approaches to best inform students.

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**TABLE I**  
**Student Response Rate by Term**

	Registered	n	Response Rate
Intersession	270	147	54.4%
8 Week Session	335	148	44.2%
1st Four Week	144	87	60.4%
2nd Four Week	89	46	51.7%
Total	838	428	51.1%

**TABLE 2**  
**Student Characteristic by Term**

		Intersession	8 Week	1st 4 Week	2nd 4 Week
		n=147	n=148	n=87	n=46
<b>Year in School</b>					
	Seniors	60.5%	32.4%	24.1%	13.0%
	Juniors	27.9%	31.1%	60.9%	69.6%
<b>Employed</b>		70.7%	75.7%	74.7%	67.4%
<b>Avg. Hours Worked per Week</b>					
	10 and under	4.1%	8.8%	5.7%	6.5%
	11 - 20	18.4%	22.3%	24.1%	10.9%
	21 - 30	21.1%	16.9%	20.7%	21.7%
	Over 30	20.4%	24.3%	21.7%	26.1%
<b>Credit Hrs. Enrolled</b>					

<b>Current Term</b>					
	3 or less	44.9%	22.3%	31.1%	30.4%
	4 - 6	51.0%	44.6%	37.9%	50.0%
	7 - 9	2.0%	23.0%	20.7%	6.5%
	10 -12	.7%	7.4%	4.6%	10.9%
	Over 12	-	0.7%	2.3%	-
<b>Expected Hrs/Week Preparing</b>		6.02	5.68	6.51	6.52
<b>Actual Hrs/Week Studies</b>		8.61	6.46	7.64	22.27*
*Students in one class reported unusually high hours of preparation time. It was consistent through the class and students noted on questionnaires that this was Areally@ true. This raises the average for the term.					

**TABLE 3**  
**Actual Experiences of Summer School Compared to Regular Session by Term**

<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Descriptives</b>				<b>ANOVA</b>		
	<b>Session</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean</b>		<b>Sum of Sqs.</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<b>Number of Assignments</b>	Intersession	124	3.05	Between Groups	17.387	3.480	.016a
	8 Week	118	2.82	Within Groups	614.6063		
	1st 4 Week	86	2.92	Total	1.989		
	2nd 4 Week	45	3.53				
<b>Amount of Time Spent</b>	Intersession	124	3.42	Between Groups	23.412	8.937	.000b
	8 Week	118	3.26	Within	322.229		





- Hours expected for preparation per week	6.09	-	-	5.83	-	.155	6.53			6.43	-	.00
- Hours actual studied per week	8.68	3.51	.001	6.60	1.43		7.63	-.137	.175	22.27	4.48	.00
Pair 2												
- Grade expected compared to regular semester	3.36	5.26	.000	3.26	3.33	.001	3.22	1.133	.260	3.33	3.08	.00
- Grade expected end of course compared to regular session	2.88	2		3.01	0		3.13			2.98	4	4
Pair 3												
- Expected time spent compared to regular semester	3.42	-	.260	3.31	.517	.606	4.02	1.085	.281	3.53	-	.00
- Actual time spent compared to regular session	3.56	1.13		3.26			3.35			3.56	2.77	8
Pair 4												
- Expected number of assignments compared to regular session	2.77	-	.136	2.79	-	.719	2.95	.416	.678	2.96	-	.00

- Actual number of assignments compared to regular session	3.05	1.50		2.82	.361		2.89			3.53	3.09	3
Pair 5												
-Expected cost compared to regular session	2.86	2.11	0.37	2.62	-	.003	2.75	-2.11	.038	2.91	-	.10
- Actual cost compared to regular session	2.65	1		2.90	3.03		2.96			3.11	1.65	7

### APPENDIX I

#### Questions on reasons to enroll in summer school.

I enrolled in summer school to	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
graduate on time.....	1	2	3	4	5
graduate early.....	1	2	3	4	5
meet prerequisites.....	1	2	3	4	5
lighten academic load during regular year...	1	2	3	4	5
repeat class.....	1	2	3	4	5
Other: please specify-----.....	1	2	3	4	5

#### Questions on expectations of summer school.

I expect	Much less	Less	About the same	More	Much More
the number of assignments, as compared with the regular semester, will be.....	1	2	3	4	5

the amount of time I spend on this class, as compared with the regular semester, will be.....	1	2	3	4	5
the cost (all expenses except tuition and fees), compared with the regular semester, will be.....	1	2	3	4	5
the grade I earn, compared with the regular session courses, will be.....	1	2	3	4	5

**Questions on actual experiences in summer school.**

During this summer session:	Much Less	Less	About the same	More	Much More
the number of assignments, as compared with the regular semester, was.....	1	2	3	4	5
the amount of time I spent on this class, as compared with the regular semester, was.....	1	2	3	4	5
the cost (all expenses except tuition and fees), compared with the regular semester, was.....	1	2	3	4	5
the grade I expect to earn, compared with the regular session courses, will be.....	1	2	3	4	5