

RESEARCH BRIEF

No. 80-17

September 2017

Impact of Session Length Changes on Enrollment: Summer 2016 and Summer 2017

Overview

In Summer 2017, the lengths of summer sessions were changed to better accommodate student learning. The full-length summer session was changed from one 12-week session in Summer 2016 to one 10-week session in Summer 2017. The half-length summer sessions changed from two sequential 6-week sessions to two sequential 5-week sessions. Overlapping 8-week sessions continued as they had been in previous summers, as did Dynamic sessions which run at varying lengths. Campuses were encouraged, but not required, to transition courses in 6-week sessions to the new 5-week format.

Summary and Recommendations

Many campuses opted to transition large numbers of 6-week courses to 8-week courses instead of adopting the new 5-week format. Since the new session lengths were not implemented as intended, enrollment subsequently declined. Moving forward, campuses should transition more courses into the 5-week format. In the past, more students enrolled in the 6-week sessions than the 8-week sessions, suggesting they prefer shorter courses. It is possible the courses they needed were not offered in the 5-week sessions in 2017, which could have been the preferable course length.

Implementation of New Session Lengths

- **Key Finding #1:** Since last summer, the total number of 8-week courses increased by 376 sections, but the number of 5-week courses (as compared to 6-week courses) declined by 495 sections. This shows many campuses did not convert a large number of courses to the new 5-week format and opted to move them to 8-week sessions instead.
- **Key Finding #2:** More students enrolled in 8-week courses in 2017 than ever before. However, this did not offset losses in 5-week sessions (6-week equivalent). Compared to 2016, 8-week courses gained 1,147 FTES, but the 5-week courses lost 1,495 FTES, which is a net loss of 348 FTES. This may suggest students prefer shorter sessions—while some enrolled in 8-week courses instead, others might have opted not to enroll at all.

Table 1. Total Sections Offered and FTES by Session: Summer 2016 and Summer 2017

Session*	Sections Offered				FTES			
	Summer 2016	Summer 2017	Difference from Summer 2016		Summer 2016	Summer 2017	Difference from Summer 2016	
			#	%			#	%
10W (12W)	420	402	-18	-4.3%	1,064	1,010	-54	-5.1%
5W1 (6W1)	716	456	-260	-36.3%	2,266	1,521	-745	-32.9%
5W2 (6W2)	558	323	-235	-42.1%	1,860	1,110	-750	-40.3%
8W1	132	359	227	172.0%	501	1,213	712	142.1%
8W2	38	187	149	392.1%	81	516	435	537.0%
Dynamic	1,080	879	-201	-18.6%	3,387	3,055	-332	-9.8%
Total	2,944	2,606	-338	-11.5%	9,158	8,424	-734	-8.0%

* Summer 2016 session lengths are listed in parentheses. Note: Summer 2017 data was retrieved from PeopleSoft on 08/11/2017.

Figure 1. Total Sections Offered by Session: Summer 2016 and Summer 2017

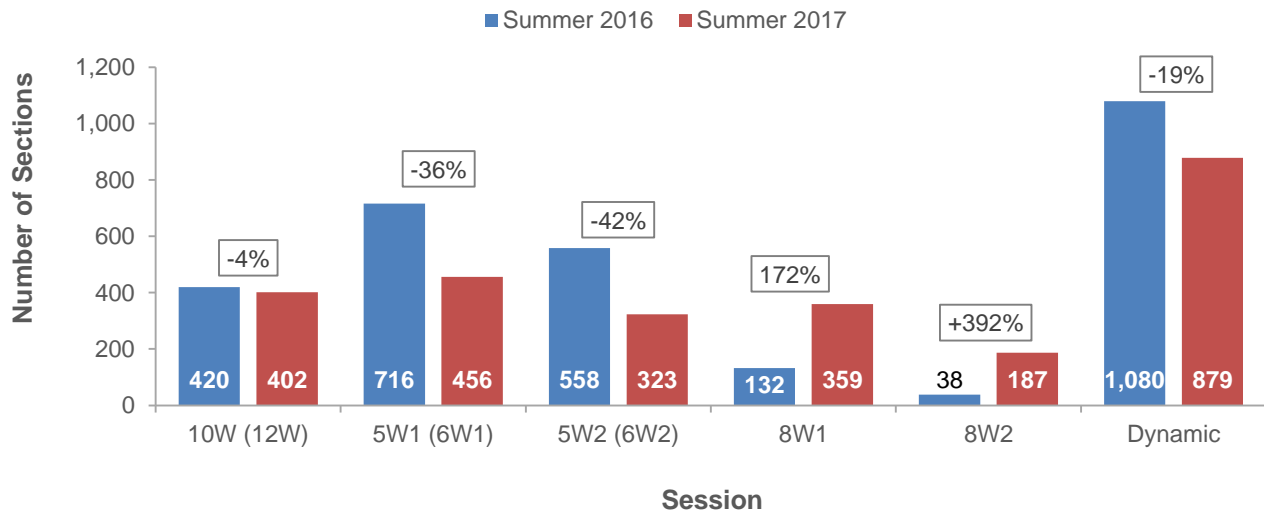
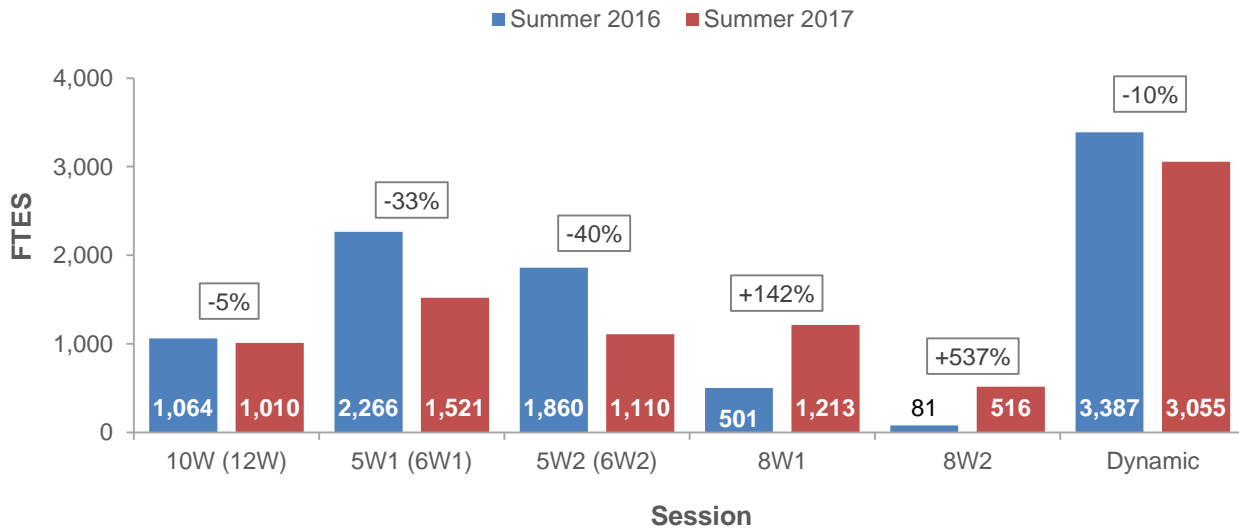


Figure 2. Total FTES by Session: Summer 2016 and Summer 2017



Impact on Multi-Session Enrollments

- **Key Finding #3:** The large majority of students who enroll in Summer classes only enroll in one session per summer. In Summer 2016, the most popular sessions for students who enrolled in only one session were the six-week sessions. However, in 2017, one-session enrollment in the five-week sessions declined by roughly 3,300 students, compared to the equivalent six-week sessions the previous summer.

Table 2. Students Who Enrolled in One Session Only: Summer 2016 and Summer 2017

Session*	Summer 2016		Summer 2017		Difference from Summer 2016	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
10W (12W)	2,219	17.8%	2,235	19.0%	16	0.7%
5W1 (6W1)	5,160	41.4%	3,420	29.1%	-1,740	-33.7%
5W2 (6W2)	3,956	31.8%	2,400	20.4%	-1,556	-39.3%
8W1	971	7.8%	2,601	22.2%	1,630	167.9%
8W2	150	1.2%	1,086	9.2%	936	624.0%
Total One-Session Enrollments	12,456	100.0%	11,742	100.0%	-714	-5.7%

*Summer 2016 session lengths are listed in parentheses. Excludes dynamic sessions. Note: Summer 2017 data was retrieved from PeopleSoft on 08/11/2017.

- **Key Finding #4:** The number of students enrolled in two *different* sessions declined since last summer. In fact, the number of students enrolled in both 5-week sessions declined by 1,181 students (-48 percent) when compared to the number of students enrolled in both equivalent 6-week sessions the previous summer.
- **Key Finding #5:** While there was an increase in students in the 8-week combination, this did not offset the decline of students in the 5-week combination. Between the two session combinations, there was a net loss of 964 students between 2016 and 2017. This suggests that the courses students needed may have been offered as 8-week courses instead of 6- or 5-weeks, and the longer length made it difficult for them to enroll in multiple sessions.

Table 3. Students Who Enrolled in Two Sessions by Session Combination: Summer 2016 and Summer 2017

Session Combination*	Summer 2016		Summer 2017		Difference from Summer 2016	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
10W (12W) and 5W1 (6W1)	697	16.8%	334	8.6%	-363	-52.1%
10W (12W) and 5W2 (6W2)	449	10.8%	208	5.3%	-241	-53.7%
10W (12W) and 8W1	107	2.6%	440	11.3%	333	311.2%
10W (12W) and 8W2	40	1.0%	214	5.5%	174	435.0%
5W1 (6W1) and 5W2 (6W2)	2,459	59.3%	1,278	32.7%	-1,181	-48.0%
5W1 (6W1) and 8W1	206	5.0%	578	14.8%	372	180.6%
5W1 (6W1) and 8W2	33	0.8%	218	5.6%	185	560.6%
5W2 (6W2) and 8W1	88	2.1%	194	5.0%	106	120.5%
5W2 (6W2) and 8W2	50	1.2%	209	5.4%	159	318.0%
8W1 and 8W2	15	0.4%	232	5.9%	217	1,446.7%
Total Two-Session Enrollments	4,144	100.0%	3,905	100.0%	-239	-5.8%

* Summer 2016 session lengths are listed in parentheses. Excludes dynamic sessions. Note: Summer 2017 data was retrieved from PeopleSoft on 08/11/2017. Enrollment in two sessions could be at the same campus or two different campuses.

Impact on Multi-Session Enrollments (cont'd)

- **Key Finding #6:** The number of students who enrolled in both 5-week sessions decreased on every campus in 2017 when compared to enrollment in both 6-week sessions the previous summer. Most notably, enrollment in the 5-week combination decreased by 200 students (-62 percent) at the Alexandria Campus when compared to enrollment in the 6-week combination the summer prior.

Table 4. Students Who Enrolled in Both 5-Week (6-Week) Sessions by Campus: Summer 2016 and Summer 2017

Campus	Summer 2016 (Both 6-Week Sessions)		Summer 2017 (Both 5-Week Sessions)		Difference from Summer 2016	
	#	% Out of Campus Total*	#	% Out of Campus Total*	#	%
Alexandria	323	72.3%	123	24.3%	-200	-61.9%
Annandale	826	60.2%	472	39.9%	-354	-42.9%
Loudoun	271	48.0%	148	28.8%	-123	-45.4%
Manassas	241	61.2%	151	44.8%	-90	-37.3%
Medical Education	75	51.0%	55	50.5%	-20	-26.7%
Woodbridge	146	42.8%	63	14.7%	-83	-56.8%
Total	1,882	57.6%	1,012	32.8%	-870	-46.2%

Notes: Summer 2017 data was retrieved from PeopleSoft on 08/11/2017. The total in this table differs from corresponding data in Table 3 because these only include students who took courses in both sessions on the *same* campus.

*Out of the campus total of students who took courses in two sessions at the *same* campus.

Discussion

Based on the data, it can be concluded that many campuses opted not to transition 6-week courses to the new 5-week format, and instead converted a large number of these courses to 8-weeks. This may have led to large decreases in enrollments in the 5-week sessions (compared to 6-week sessions the year before) that were not offset by the increase in 8-week enrollments. Multi-session enrollments in particular declined, with fewer students overall and on each campus enrolling in the 5-week sequence compared to the 6-week sequence the previous summer.

The 6-week sessions were the most popular in previous summers. Therefore, it is possible some enrollment declines in 2017 might have been the result of a student preference for shorter courses, and the inability of students to find the courses they needed in the 5-week sessions. If this is the case in future semesters, some students will choose to enroll in the 8-week session, while others may choose not to enroll at all.

Possible Questions to Consider

- Do students prefer shorter or longer summer courses?
- Were students able to find the courses they needed in their preferred length?
- Do faculty prefer a longer course format during the summer instead of shorter sessions?
- Do faculty think students do not want to take a 5-week course?
- Are there pedagogical issues with a 5-week versus a 6-week course?