

T E A C H I N G M A T T E R S

The Newsletter of the Center for Effective University Teaching

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Semester Conversion Special Edition

CHANGE: IT DON'T COME EASY!

- Donna M. Qualters

Like Paul Revere, we hear the cry across campus - Semesters are coming! Semesters are coming! Starting in the fall of 2003, Northeastern University will embark on a major change from the quarter system to the semester system. I think the Beatles said it best - "You know it don't come easy!" Change is difficult. Creating change in individuals and in systems is a complex operation. But what's interesting is the fact that organizational change creates the context for individual change, which in many ways is even more difficult. Research tells us that individuals go through a cycle when they try to change (Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross, 1992). We all start out "Pre-contemplative" as most of us were happily a few years ago - things were working fine and there didn't seem to be a need to change. Then we entered the "Contemplative Stage" of change. All of a sudden discussions were beginning and the pros and cons of moving to a semester system were debated both formally and informally. Next we were in the "Decision Stage". The decision had been made and timelines were generated and preparation began. Now we're in the "Action Stage". We've done our homework, made our preparations and are ready to go!

Whoa! But wait - is everyone action oriented and ready to go! Individual change theory also tells us without support individuals go into "RELAPSE" and change becomes much more difficult to undertake. So how does this idea apply to students and teachers? As teachers, we need to help students understand change and adjust to a change in their academic world. Teaching and learning in a semester system will be different from teaching and learning in a quarter system. The pace, the teaching methodology, the assignments, even the very goals and objectives of seemingly familiar courses will be different. Below are some tips for faculty

to help students adjust to changing classrooms adapted from a research study on "Managing Changing Classroom Expectations" (Qualters, 2003).

1 Prepare students for change

By thinking about the implementation of a new classroom process through the lens of stages of changes a number of valuable lessons emerge. First, NEVER ASSUME! Just because faculty have adopted change in the classroom, does not necessarily mean the students are ready. Faculty creating a change in the classroom need to realize the importance of creating the need to change for students as well. Often students need to be guided along the continuum to the contemplative stage to expand their openness to something different and minimize their resistance to change. They need to examine the tacit assumptions about education that they bring to a particular class. This can be done by stating clearly at the very beginning of the class that expectations are going to be different this term and while the course may have the

same name as the one their friend took last year it will be different. Next, telling students how you made your decision as a teacher to change the course to fit a semester model brings them into the process and lets them realize that you have given a great deal of thought to course construction.

2 Assess the change climate

It also becomes important to do some form of early assessment to check the climate of change. Teachers cannot trust the vocal reaction that can reflect a small number of students as representing the majority feeling. It becomes important to institute ways for all students to express their feelings so as to get a balanced picture. This will help sustain the change for both the students and the faculty member teaching the class. Faculty changing

In This Issue

| | |
|---|---|
| Change: It Don't Come Easy!..... | 1 |
| Teaching Academy Provides New Faculty with Tools for the Classroom .. | 3 |
| Quotations on Change | 3 |
| Semesters: Rationale and Opportunities | 4 |
| Semester Conversion: Considering Content and Process Issues..... | 5 |
| Integrating Ethical Inquiry into Expanded Semester Courses | 6 |
| Chalk Talk | 7 |

continued on next page

how they run their classes will need to do more frequent feedback about the new processes at an earlier point in the semester, and more frequently during the semester. One suggestion is to adapt the one-minute paper questions to ask students to comment on the class process, as well as the content from the very beginning weeks of the course, and then sharing the results of the class feelings with the all students.

③ Tie new expectations explicitly to course objectives

By writing objectives that clearly express that in a longer semester model, student learning outcomes will involve more time to explore higher cognitive levels of Bloom's taxonomy such as analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating materials (as well as content knowledge) and then having students relate new learning exercises to the achievement of those higher level objectives, they can begin to see that much of their learning is actually achieved by the new format of the class. One suggestion is to have students keep journals about their perception of their progress toward the course learning objectives and explicitly identify what activities in and out of class they felt helped them to that goal. This writing exercise allows students to clearly "seeing" that in order to achieve the course outcomes; they had to be doing these new activities or methodology.

④ Confront inability to change

Many students come to higher education with set expectations of classroom experiences and those expectations must be uncovered, probed and altered. For some students it may go as far as the necessity to reframe what learning is: learning is not about "covering material" or "gathering facts", learning is about integrating and using information in a meaningful way. This also necessitates faculty taking care in selecting or creating assessment tools for the course that reflect more than just the ability to regurgitate information. The early introduction of concept quizzes, where students have to answer multiple choice questions that are geared at assessing understanding rather than simple factual recall, or the use of word logs, where students condense reading material into a single word and tell why they chose that word, help them to more clearly understand that the longer semester allows them to have a more conceptual understanding of the material they are learning. The semester model will allow teachers more time to incorporate these active, integrative activities into courses. While the value of these additional activities is obvious to the faculty using it, for many of the students it is something new and different. Initiating early, brief discussions in class acknowledging that the class will be different, that change can be hard, will validate students' resistant feelings and make them feel that their concerns are heard.

Briefly surveying students about their learning, asking them to keep learning journals, and continuing dialogue between faculty and students about the results of classroom activities

are all ways to have students appreciate and understand, at a metacognitive level, that change in the classroom is occurring for very specific reasons. While students may still not agree, at least the change is openly acknowledged. These activities create a culture of continuous communication between faculty and students which assists faculty in gauging students' progress through the stages of change.

⑤ Appreciate and emphasize the affective aspects of the classroom

Having more time in the semester to think and process information can also create a positive change in the affective domain of learning. Change occurs for students not only in their learning, but also in their learning environment. Students in this study stated that they enjoyed working with peers and felt a sense of achievement when they accomplished a task together. This factor allowed many of the students to enter a change stage further along the continuum.

There is one last point for teachers and those who evaluate teaching. It becomes important to realize the need to understand that in the process of change there is always going to be some level of resistance. Students who are less flexible regarding how they learn will always exist. The difficulty is that this resistance often manifests in the form of negative teaching reviews. It becomes extremely important, therefore, that evaluators be educated about the stages of change. Evaluators who recognize and validate that students go through stages of change that usually do not parallel faculty or institutional stages, will support faculty during this transition period and make it easier for them to continue to practice and perfect a change in classroom climate, methodologies and expectations. Studies on faculty who changed from a more traditional lecture based model to a more cooperative based model showed that it took three iterations of the class before teaching evaluations returned to previous high levels. The good news is that subsequent evaluations often were even higher. This understanding will create an atmosphere that is free from fear of initial negative student evaluations impacting promotion or tenure in the new model.

The rest of our newsletter has helpful hints, resources, and first hand experiences on preparing to teach in the semester model. We hope you find this valuable. Feel free to contact the CEUT for any questions or consultations regarding your stage of change! ❁

Donna Qualters is the Director of the Center for Effective University Teaching, and Associate Professor of Education.

Teaching Academy Provides New Faculty with Tools for the Classroom

- Yolanda Hardy

The CEUT Annual Teaching Academy was instituted this year just prior to the start of the Fall quarter. Fifteen faculty members from across the university attended this one-day event, which included seminars on building an effective syllabus, preparing for the first day of class, course assessment, and grading practices.

Attending the Teaching Academy was an excellent way to start my career in academia at Northeastern University. Being new to academia, one of my concerns was being placed into a new environment where I had to learn to “swim” very quickly in order to survive. The Teaching Academy relieved me of that concern. The topics discussed during the Teaching Academy were key and very essential to the success of a new faculty member.

The workshops in the Teaching Academy provided useful information on designing syllabi, classroom assessment,

grading practices, and the oft times anxiety producing first day of class. I especially enjoyed learning about classroom assessment techniques. I have used some of the assessment techniques in my classroom, and have found them to be very helpful. The immediate feedback that I receive by using the techniques is very useful in gauging the students’ level of understanding of the information being discussed.

I would highly recommend the Teaching Academy to any new faculty member that joins Northeastern. It is a wonderful addition to the new faculty orientation process. The information gained during this program will definitely help a new faculty member make a smooth transition into teaching at the university. ❁

Yolanda Hardy is a new faculty member in the Department of Pharmacy Practice.

Quotations on Change

Every thing teaches transition, transference, metamorphosis: therein is human power, in transference, not in creation; & therein is human destiny, not in longevity but in removal. We dive & reappear in new places.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson



Change has considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the fearful it is threatening because it means that things may get worse. To the hopeful it is encouraging because things may get better. To the confident it is inspiring because the challenge exists to make things better.

-King Whitney, Jr.

Man’s mind stretched to a new idea never goes back to its original dimensions.

-Oliver Wendell Holmes



Semesters: Rationale and Opportunities

- Coleen Pantalone

The move to semesters has provided a great opportunity to reassess and revise our programs in broad terms, and departments and colleges have made significant changes. All of that work has been vetted, approved, and coded into our system.

We are now approaching Fall 2003 when faculty begin to deliver their “semesterized” curricula. As we begin the large task of designing all these new courses, and preparing our syllabi, it is important to remember why we voted to move to a semester system. As far back as the 1960s, when we moved to our current quarter system, faculty argued the benefits of semesters. Those voices grew larger in the early nineties.

Over these forty years, three basic arguments have continued to be made in support of semesters. The arguments revolve around:

- Student learning
- Co-op experience
- Support for cross-institution interaction

The key argument for semester is a pedagogical one. A semester timeline better supports student learning. Students will have more time (14 weeks rather than 10) to delve into their coursework and grapple with key concepts. They will be able to explore the subject matter in greater depth. The decision to build a curriculum based on four, four-credit courses as the norm supports a rethinking of curriculum and content. Because we could not just take our 4 quarter-credit courses and teach them as 3 semester-credit courses, we will have to think carefully about course content, building on what has been done in earlier courses and preparing students for what is to come.

What are some of the things that we, as faculty, can do to maximize the benefit of learning in a semester environment?

- Don't just add all the chapters at the end of the text. This calendar change allows us to cover material in greater depth, building student understanding of fundamental principles. Take some of that extra time to engage students in discussion and problem solving in more depth than you were able to on quarters.

- Review drafts of major papers or projects. Students will have more time for additional research,

revising, and rewriting, and will have a significantly richer experience as a result.

- Add student presentations when appropriate. We know students benefit from the opportunity to develop communication skills and the classroom is an ideal place to develop strengths in this area.

The second argument for semester conversion is that the move to six-month co-ops will improve the work experience, - students build experience in the earlier part of the job, and then become a stronger contributor for the remainder of their co-op. Six-month co-ops aren't new. Currently a large percentage of upper class students are already in six-month co-op divisions. Students are also more able to accept co-ops out-of-state or abroad with the longer co-op period. And, from a faculty-in-the-classroom perspective, students will be engaged in the job search process only once a year. We have all seen how the job search process, while important and a great learning experience, can be stressful and time-consuming for students in our classes. Reducing this to once a year will improve the students' academic experience.

And finally, this move puts us in synch with most other universities. We will start and end when our colleagues do. We will be able to attend professional meetings without worrying about final exams, or maybe even midterms. The same benefit exists for students. They will head to Northeastern University at the same time as friends leave for their respective schools and they'll be home when their friends return. They will also more easily fit into semester study-abroad programs and other cross-college programs. For a transfer student or faculty member coming to Northeastern from a semester school will say, the quarter system is frenzied. We are behind before we start and so we are always trying to catch up.

The semester world is kinder. But to take full advantage of it, we must think carefully about the content and delivery of our new courses.✿

Coleen Pantalone is Executive Vice Provost, directing the semester calendar conversion process. She has served as professor in the Finance Department, as well as associate dean for undergraduate programs in the College of Business.

Semester Conversion: Considering Content and Process Issues

- Elise Dallimore

As I reflect back to when the issue of the semester conversion was initially under consideration, I remember some of the concerns raised. Faculty voiced concern about whether the extra few weeks under the semester system would really make a difference in students' ability to master course material. I was privy to conversations where faculty discussed the relative benefit of using the extra weeks

to cover a broader range of topics or to cover current content areas in greater depth. Since the decision was made, I have spoken with many faculty (some with excitement, others with reservation) who concede that the transition to semesters has at the very least served as the impetus for reviewing and revising our current curriculum. I believe these conversations regarding course content are important; however, equally important I would suggest is the need to revisit pedagogical choices. We will have missed an important opportunity if—during the transition—we address content issues (such as deliberations over which topics and readings to add to our courses) but fail as diligently to ponder how to extend or improve our instructional processes.

I think that the semester conversion provides a number of possibilities for faculty interested in enhancing students' educational experiences. One such opportunity is a move toward integrating more experiential learning in our courses (and by doing so helping our students to master the application as well as the understanding of course materials). For my classes, the move to semesters will mean a continued emphasis on service learning in order for students to apply course concepts to practical life situations (and in doing so respond to the university's practice-oriented and urban mission by utilizing content-based knowledge and skills to address community-based needs). I have been doing service learning for a number of years and have often had faculty tell me they would like to try it but don't see how it could work in a 10-week quarter. Now faculty have the opportunity to incorporate experiential learning opportunities such as service learning into their course curriculum without the same time constraints we currently experience on the quarter system.

Additionally, for those of us who will now be able to teach in the 100-minute class sessions, there is a range of possibilities that just weren't possible in 65 minutes. Not only will we now have a longer class structure to engage in more in-depth inquiry of course topics, but in doing so we will have an even greater opportunity to incorporate a more varied range of instructional strategies within a given class session. For example, for me the ability to discuss course readings and

then have students engage in a thorough case analysis in the same class session is an exciting prospect. Students will have the opportunity to move from demonstrating lower-level understanding of course material to application of that material in the same class session. I see this as inherently valuable in terms of my ability to move students toward higher-level cognitive thinking.



Further, I would suggest that with the increased length of the semester, we have an opportunity to more systematically gather feedback from our students. I currently do mid-quarter evaluations of my teaching but often find it difficult in a 10-week quarter to balance the need to wait until students get a sense of both course content and instructional methods with the need to gather feedback in time to successfully make mid-course corrections. With the move to semesters there is more time to gather and address student feedback as well as consider our success in helping students achieve course objectives. This practice (of collecting mid-quarter feedback) is one of many ways in which faculty and students can raise the quality of dialogue over a semester-long course. Such dialogue can include discussion of both course content and instructional process issues, and in doing so can provide formative feedback which will allow faculty and students to develop a better sense of what is working, what is not, and how things can be improved.

These are just three of many ways in which I see the semester conversion benefiting both my students and me. Overall, I see the semester conversion as overwhelmingly positive. From merely a logistical standpoint I am looking forward to beginning and ending courses twice a year as opposed to three times. Think about the time spent preparing syllabi and embarking on the "first-class" experience, setting up new Blackboard accounts, learning students' names, working to build rapport with students and to create an effective learning community with each new group of students—not to mention the process of writing and grading final exams and computing final grades. Beyond just the logistical advantages is the possibility that semesters will progress at a less frenetic academic pace allowing for more thinking and learning and less administrating.

Additionally, the instructional benefits of having students for 14 weeks can be profound. Having taught under a semester system, I know that over 14 weeks the classroom learning community becomes much more cohesive and integrated, students' understanding of course content becomes more sophisticated, and my relationships with my students are much more fulfilling

I think many other faculty share my belief that the extended time during semesters will lead to a more productive learning environment because students will have more time to engage with new material in order to make it their own. Also perhaps, faculty will be more willing to embrace experiential elements (like service learning) when they are not starting and stopping three times a year. I would argue, however, that the transition provides much more than an opportunity to examine the content of the courses we teach.

It is an excellent opportunity to also examine process including the opportunity for pedagogical change and improvement in a variety of ways. ☼

Elise Dallimore is a professor in the Department of Communication Studies.

Integrating Ethical Inquiry into Expanded Semester Courses

- Perrin Cohen, NUCASE Director



On the quarter system, teachers and students often feel that they are on a treadmill moving faster than they like. If lucky, there is time to cover the basic topics but few, if any, opportunities for teachers and students to acknowledge ethical concerns related to those topics. In some cases, a teacher might squeeze in an anecdote, mention an egregious example of something “unethical”, or make an “ethics” assignment.

With semester conversion, we should be able to do much better. In many classes there will be more opportunities for ethical inquiry both on-campus (e.g. classes and research projects) and off-campus (e.g., co-op, internship, and service learning project). How does one empower students to be more competent and confident to engage in reflective, ethical inquiry? This may seem daunting for no other reason than students are often hesitant, unprepared, or even “contraprepared” to identify ethical issues and be reflective about them. Also, as teachers, we may not be clear about our roles, responsibilities and boundaries in working with students in this area.

How can NUCASE help teachers meet the challenge of more effectively integrating ethical inquiry into newly expanded semester courses?

NUCASE is Northeastern’s interdisciplinary, ethics education community (www.nucase.neu.edu). As a Center, its primary goal is to help students be more confident and competent to address ethical concerns/issues experienced on- (e.g., classes & laboratories) and off- campus (e.g. co-op). As part of its efforts, NUCASE provides programs and resources that can help teachers effectively infuse ethical “AIR ” into newly expanded courses. By Ethical AIR we mean integrating “Awareness”, “Investigation”(e.g., research, analysis, and decision making) and “Responding”(e.g., options, alternatives). It does this in several ways:

NUCASE Teacher Workshops: Offered in collaborations with CEUT and Division of Co-operative Education. Please see the NUCASE and CEUT websites for dates and times.

Co-op Faculty: These workshops help co-op coordinators to integrate ethical inquiry into the students’ work experience. Ethical and pedagogical issues will be addressed.

Academic Faculty: These workshops help academic faculty to integrate ethical inquiry into their course and curriculum development. Ethical and pedagogical issues will be addressed.

Teaching Assistants (TAs): These workshops help TAs deal with ethical concerns that students present as well as with ethical issues that TA’s experience in their relationship with students and faculty.

NUCASE Web Resources: The NUCASE web page (www.nucase.neu.edu) provides interdisciplinary resources for both teachers and students. The “Ethics Education” page focuses on course and curriculum development and the “NUCASE Community” page includes a list of current ethics-related courses at Northeastern. Ethics education issues also are addressed in StepForward (a clearinghouse of information about ethical inquiry), NUCASE Library (student, faculty & administrator contributions), Getting Started and Ethics in University & College Life. We invite colleagues to contribute (e.g., syllabi, articles, and announcements) to the NUCASE webpage. Please forward information to p.cohen@neu.edu.

NUCASE Referrals: NUCASE is an interdisciplinary community of colleagues who have expertise and experience in integrating ethical inquiry (both ethics-related content and pedagogy) into courses and curricula. These colleagues are available to teachers for consultations. They also are available to discuss ethical issues with students as well as provide academic advising about ethics-related courses. If you or your students would like a referral, please contact p.cohen@neu.edu. ☼



The purpose of the Jonas Chalk "Chalk Talk" column is to initiate a dialogue on best practices, successes, and frustrations in teaching. (Although the concerns covered are often universal, we do put a particular emphasis on the challenges and rewards of teaching freshmen.) This column hopes to stimulate, engage and occasionally nudge professors to share their wisdom and ideas about the best ways to achieve outstanding learning outcomes in the freshmen year. Readers can submit letters, questions, or ideas that you have to jchalk@coe.neu.edu.

Old Jonas columns can be accessed at: <http://gemasterteachers.neu.edu/documents/documents.html>

Dear Jonas,

As I revise my class to fit the semester schedule, I have been thinking about having students do a group project. I've talked with a few colleagues, and some say it's not worth doing because of all the logistical work involved, while other colleagues say that grading is a lot easier because there is less to grade. I know that some students don't like group work because they feel their grade is dependent on people who may not be doing their fair share, while other students apparently like collaborative projects. Are group assignments worth the effort on either side? Any information would be appreciated.

Tentative on Teamwork

Dear Tentative,

Don't be! When group projects are used for student learning, students learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other formats. And while some faculty fear that group work does not measure individual achievement, there are clearly other skills that are appropriate for students to learn through this format. As John D. Rockefeller said, "I will pay more for the ability to deal with people than any other ability under the sun."

To use teams effectively, there are a number of steps to take in the planning stages that can help student groups to succeed. Setting things up appropriately at the start will make operation more efficient for you and learning more efficient for your students. In planning the project, consider: i) how to form groups, ii) how to structure their tasks, and iii) how to grade group work.

When you set up the groups, try to keep them small, in the order of three to four members as this will lead to greater individual accountability in the group effort and make it easier for the group to schedule meetings. Consider assigning groups rather than having them choose. Many students will work more productively with people other than their friends, and it's easier on those that might otherwise be left out. If you do assign groups, think about such factors as knowledge level, gender, year in school, and even personality type so that all students gain through the experience. There is an effective method that combines both student choice and instructor assignment: allow students to rank some choices of people they'd like in their group and then assign groups based on the ranking and other factors to balance it, such as interests in topic areas, whether students live on campus or not or whether they have preferred meeting times.

As you are probably aware, simply placing students in teams and telling them to work together is not likely to produce desired results. You should provide clear goals and tasks for the groups to work towards. This is particularly true for freshman who may not have the skills needed to collaborate effectively. You might ask each group to assign specific roles for each member, such as leader for written report, leader for oral presentation,

meeting scheduler, meeting summarizes, etc. To improve the interactive nature of the group, you should provide some guidance. First ask each group to establish its own ground rules, in writing, addressing such areas as attendance, accountability of work, providing feedback, etc. Next, you could require groups to keep track of their meetings and attendance in a log book (this might include a summary of assignments for individuals with due dates and completion dates), which should be examined by the instructor periodically. Your grading could reflect attendance at face-to-face meetings, as well as achievement of goals.

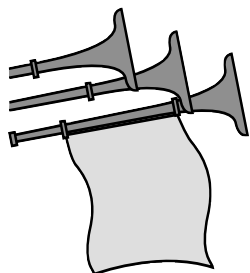
Grading can be individual, group, or a combination of both - it should, however, be structured to motivate the team behavior that you want. There is no "right" formula, but be sure that the grading rubrics match the project objectives. Some faculty assign all students in the group the same grade on the group task, because they believe that individual grades can lead to competition within the group and thus subverting the benefits of group work. Other faculty grade the contribution of each student on the basis of individual test scores or the group's evaluation of each member's work. For individual grades though, it is important to include a mechanism for students to anonymously rate the members of their own group as part of this grade. Be sure to indicate at the beginning of the project that students will be able to rate group members for their contributions to the completed project, since this can motivate students to participate in group activities. You can also give students an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of their group. Once or twice during the group project, ask group members to discuss two questions: What action has each member taken that was helpful for the group? What action could each member take to make the group even better?

Monitoring group progress can be difficult, especially if much of the project work is done outside the classroom. Besides having groups submit assignments related to structured tasks, you could set up some of the "group" features in the Blackboard course management system to help facilitate group interaction through discussion boards, email, file posting and live chat. In addition to giving students an online "meeting space," the electronic record of group postings allows instructors to monitor how student groups interact and assign responsibilities. You could consider assigning percentages of the grade for contributions to the discussion board. You can also use Blackboard to post group surveys to collect information on each group's effectiveness.

By thoughtfully setting up the objectives, formation guidelines, tasks and grading policies for your group project, you can avoid some of the shortcomings that others may have encountered in their facilitation of teamwork. Since teamwork is so important in the engineering profession, it is important to provide students with opportunities to learn how to succeed in this forum.

Good Luck!

Jonas ❁



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For more information, contact [Cynthia Sanders at c.sanders@neu.edu](mailto:c.sanders@neu.edu)

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