

Stony Brook University
The President's Council of Student Advisors
Report Summary for 2015-2016

Course Availability, Degree Progress and the Academic Calendar

The primary goal of the Council was to investigate factors that can potentially increase the four-year graduation rate. Our first objective was to see how a lack of course availability and other difficulties surrounding course enrollment might cause a potential delay in graduation time. Our research incorporated the use of both small focus groups and campus-wide surveys to investigate student opinions of Saturday, evening, online and hybrid courses. The second objective included an investigation of Stony Brook's academic calendar to determine if it is optimally structured to foster four-year graduation rates as well as a conducive learning environment for students. The Council also reviewed other AAU institutions that follow a semester-based calendar using Stony Brook University as a midline. By analyzing both Fall and Spring semesters, we compared the overall semester length, total number of days off and semester end dates. Our goal was to determine how increasing course availability and changing the structure of the current academic calendar could optimize student success.

Based on the results from student surveys and focus groups, we concluded that not only do students find online and hybrid courses fairly effective, but they also experienced less trouble when enrolling in them. Overall, students preferred to take online courses when it satisfied a General Education Requirement (i.e. DECs/SBCs), rather than a major or a minor requirement. It is important to note that students experienced more difficulties when enrolling for DEC (60%) courses than SBCs (40%). Therefore, it seems that implementing SBCs has been a positive step to reducing problems when registering for courses. We also suggested an increase in online and hybrid classes to expand the availability of high demand and controlled access courses in various departments. We believe implementing these changes could decrease pressure on students during registration.

Additionally, we found that the inclusion of Saturday courses is a viable option for increasing course availability. When faced with the alternative of waiting an extra semester, students reported to prefer lectures and labs on Saturdays, and were not opposed to taking courses on a Tuesday/ Thursday/ Saturday schedule. While doing so will not change the length of the semesters, such changes would increase the amount of course seats available. Implementing these changes can make it easier for students to avoid difficulties when registering – students can enroll in courses they need to fulfill their degree requirements, potentially increasing our overall four-year graduation rate.

Finally, we concluded that Stony Brook already follows a relatively standard Spring semester, with no significant differences when compared to other AAU institutions. When given the option of eliminating the Winter course options in turn for a sooner Spring semester end date, students still preferred the availability of Winter classes. For these reasons, there were no recommendations made regarding changes to the Spring Semester schedule. However, when examining the Fall Semester schedule, we found that not only is there a significant span of continuous days of class, but that students reported to prefer an implementation of a mid-semester break at the cost of a longer semester to create a more optimal learning environment.