

## Defining Features: Accelerated Course

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### Key Features

Accelerated courses, also known as intensive or compressed courses, are defined as courses that are held in less time than a typical 13 to 15 week semester. For example, they may run 8 weeks, 6 weeks, or 4 weeks.

Accelerated courses have long been an option during summer sessions. Students have seen them as a way to gain extra credit hours or repeat required courses. Increasingly, accelerated courses are being seen as a desired format in their own right, for all times of the year, especially in online programs and executive graduate programs aimed at working adults.

### Key Design Considerations

- Learning outcomes remain the same in courses that are offered in an accelerated time frame and their traditional counterparts. How you reach those learning outcomes may need to vary due to time restraints. Research shows that students in accelerated courses prefer to go narrow and deep on major concepts, rather than broad and shallow. Can you do this while still meeting the learning outcomes? Sorting concepts and material into three categories can help. What is essential for students to know? What is important for students to know, and what would be nice if you have additional time? In survey courses for non-majors, asking yourself what you would like these students to remember about your course in 5 or 10 years can also be a useful guide in selecting content.
- If you find yourself teaching an on-ground three-credit hour course in an accelerated time frame, think about how you can vary instructional activities in each class period to avoid information overload. You most likely will not want to spend 3 or 4 hours lecturing every day and your students most likely will not be able to pay attention for that long. You might want to present new material at the beginning of class, when students are fresh. Then break for an activity where students apply the material or work on projects. You will also need to plan in short breaks and perhaps even a meal break.
- In an accelerated online course, faculty often wonder if they are providing enough in the way of content and learning activities for a three hour course, or if they are indeed providing too little. This concept is called "seat time equivalency." The general formula to be compliant with federal regulations is that a three-credit hour course translates to approximately 135 hours of student work. This includes everything from reading, and watching lectures, to composing discussion board posts. SLU's Distance Education

Office is currently piloting a tool to calculate seat time equivalency and you can reach out to them for more information.

### **Contextual Variations**

Accelerated courses may be a “one off” experience for both faculty and students, or an entire program may be designed as an accelerated format. Students who are taking an accelerated course as a singular experience, or who are at the beginning of an accelerated program may need more coaching on how to handle a large amount of content in a short period of time, and in meeting deadlines. Faculty will need to pay particular attention to the design of group projects if students are only working together for a short time.

When an entire program is being offered in an accelerated fashion, especially if a formal or informal cohort model is in place, there is an opportunity for cross-course design. For example, a project might begin in the first course in the sequence, with concepts scaffolding through the next course. Since the students will have a working relationship with each other from the first course, an assignment in the second course might be to use the individual projects in the first course as a foundation for a group project in the second course.

### Resources

Wlodkowski, Raymond J, and Ginsberg, Margery B. (2010) *Teaching Intensive and Accelerated Courses: Instruction That Motivates Learning*. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2010

Katherine P. Walsh, Megan Sanders & Soniya Gadgil (2019) Equivalent but not the Same: Teaching and Learning in Full Semester and Condensed Summer Courses. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/87567555.2019.1579702>

Designing Long Classes. Retrieved from

[https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/tls/sites/rit.edu.academicaffairs.tls/files/docs/TLS\\_Course%20Design\\_LongClasses\\_v1.pdf](https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/tls/sites/rit.edu.academicaffairs.tls/files/docs/TLS_Course%20Design_LongClasses_v1.pdf)

*For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at [cttl@slu.edu](mailto:cttl@slu.edu).*