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# How can multi-term registration fix course bottlenecks?

1:00 PM on April 14, 2016 **by Katherine Burns**

According to the IT Forum's latest research on student success, specific markers across the student lifecycle can indicate a student's potential risk of attrition (e.g., missing a financial aid deadline, performing poorly on midterms). Flagging these markers, coupled with proactive faculty or advisor intervention, can help correct a downward trajectory before students decide to drop out.

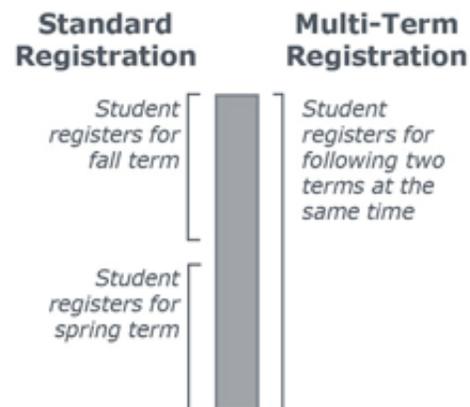
## Course bottlenecks—a key barrier to student success

An even better outcome than early intervention, however, is to prevent a risk marker from occurring in the first place. One such risk marker is course bottlenecks.

Bottlenecks are often considered one of the early indicators that a student may struggle in the future. For example, a student may have an inability to register for a key prerequisite course. This can then translate into a lighter course load, which causes a delayed path to graduation and more money spent on tuition. In turn, this worst-case scenario places the student at higher risk of dropping to part-time status or withdrawing from school.

Progressive institutions are moving toward **multi-term** registration as a solution to the bottleneck problem.

Traditionally, students plan their schedules from semester to semester, which can lead to possible bottleneck challenges during each period of registration. Students are now encouraged to register several semesters in advance—making it easier for the institution to plan scheduling and course availability around a highly accurate demand forecast.



## Helping students help themselves

Multi-term registration places students—rather than faculty or administrators—at the center of course scheduling and planning, providing them with a more seamless, integrated experience. Students can plan ahead and be confident that the courses they need to take will be available. In addition to improved student planning, here are three other benefits of multi-term registration.

### 1. Students are psychologically “in it for the long haul”

Students who sign on for a full year of courses are less likely to opt out mid-year. Multi-term registration turns the decision to withdraw on its head: Rather than considering whether to opt in, multi-term registration requires students to consider whether to cancel their registration—and backing away from a set plan is much harder than walking away from something nonspecific.

## 2. Faculty can plan out the entire academic year

Real-time registration information enables faculty and staff to build schedules around the specific curricular needs of students, instead of overvaluing faculty convenience or historical scheduling patterns. Improved scheduling can lead to cost efficiency gains, since resources and instructor workload are better aligned with enrollment.

## 3. The registrar has additional time to map demand to capacity

An understanding of how many students want to take a specific class each semester allows administrators to better coordinate faculty schedules and designated class times, staggering courses throughout a day to accommodate more students. This upfront planning also makes it easier for students to take more credits per semester and achieve their degree milestones in a timely manner.

## Learn from your peers: Cleveland State University

Cleveland State University was struggling to meet student demand for specific courses, resulting in bottlenecks that were delaying students' paths to graduation. In response, the university switched in 2012 to a multi-term registration format that allows administrators to monitor demand, add or subtract sections when needed, divert resources to over-enrolled courses, and generally run course scheduling more efficiently—all while serving students more effectively.

As the Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Services & University Registrar explains, "We wanted to start giving our students a viewpoint of really thinking about it as a series of years to complete a degree, and not as isolated events that happen each semester that don't relate to each other."

Thus far, student response confirms that multi-term registration is a sweet spot of what's best for the university being best for the student:

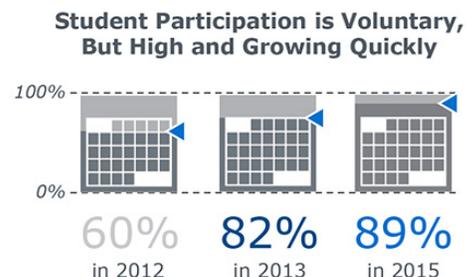
- 60% of students opted in to the program in its first year
- Retention also increased by three percentage points in the first year of implementation
- In 2015, 89% of students opted in to the program

## Making the switch to multi-term registration

There are few, if any, technical impediments to enabling multi-term registration. While a large amount of planning is required to schedule courses at the appropriate times, few changes are required to the registration system itself. Add/drop deadlines and payment plans can also remain the same. The primary change is building the full-year model one time and turning on registration for one full academic year.

The heavier lifting involves analyzing students' registration data, and making adjustments as necessary—ensuring student eligibility for the courses they've signed up to take, moving students on and off waitlists, and opening additional sections where necessary.

Given the relatively manageable level of effort required to build a multi-term registration platform, and the potentially high return in enrollment, demand prediction, and other key student success measures, we expect that more institutions will migrate to this model in the near future.



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