

# **Quarter-to-Semester Calendar Conversion**

Prepared for President Bill Destler

by

Kit Mayberry

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## ***Chapter I***

### **Context and Scope**

Chapter I briefly provides a context for the quarter-to-semester (q-2-s) discussion, including the purpose of this report, definitions of calendar types, and an overview of usage trends (Section A). Section B characterizes the scope and implications of q-2-s conversion.

# Section A

## Context

### Report Purpose

This document, prepared in the spring of 2009 at the request of President Bill Destler, serves two functions: 1) it provides the president with the information about semester calendar conversion necessary to determine whether to include a semester calendar model in upcoming calendar discussions; and 2) it advances guidelines for incorporating a semester option into these discussions, should the president request that a semester model be considered.

### Calendar Classification

In the past 70 years, three types of academic calendars have dominated U.S. higher education.

Quarters: four equal terms of 10-11 weeks spread throughout an entire calendar year, typically beginning in August or September and ending the following August.

Semesters: two equal terms of 15-17 weeks spread between late summer (August-September) and early spring (April-June), with a third summer term of (often) shorter length.

Trimesters: three terms of equal length (typically 10-12 weeks) spread between September and May-June with no use of summer.

Sub-categories. Both the quarter and semester models offer “early-start” and “late-start” variants (These category names are those used in the calendar literature and do not perfectly correspond with those used in the RIT calendar discussion of AY 07-08.

*Early-start quarter*: fall quarter typically begins on or before Labor Day and spring quarter ends in mid- to late-May (may or may not have split winter quarter).

*Late-start quarter*: fall begins after labor day and spring term ends in June.

*Early-start semester*: fall semester begins mid- to late-August and spring semester ends in early May.

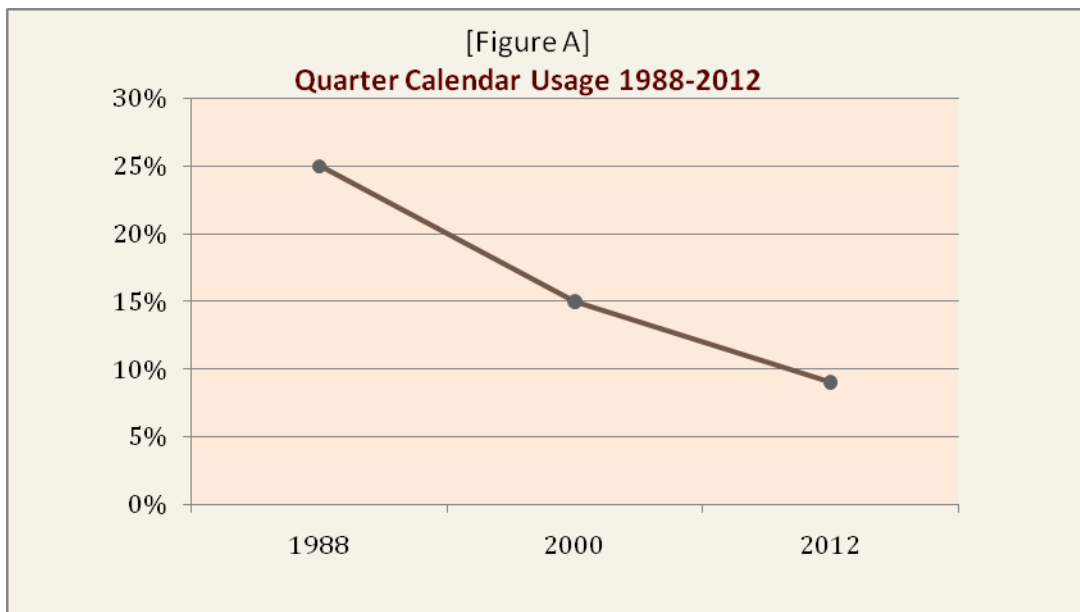
*Traditional (late-start) semester*: fall begins in September and spring extends through late May/early June.

*4-1-4*: 16-week fall semester begins in late August and is followed by a one-month “inter-session” in January designed for special study. Spring semester runs from February through May. May or may include a summer term.

Within these five sub-categories, the biggest variation is the break length between fall and winter terms.

### Usage Trends: Quarters

Popularity of the quarter calendar reached its peak in the early 1980's, with 25% of institutions on a quarter calendar (Quann). Figure A represents the decline in quarter calendar schools from the late 1980's until 2012 (planned conversion completion date for a number of schools).



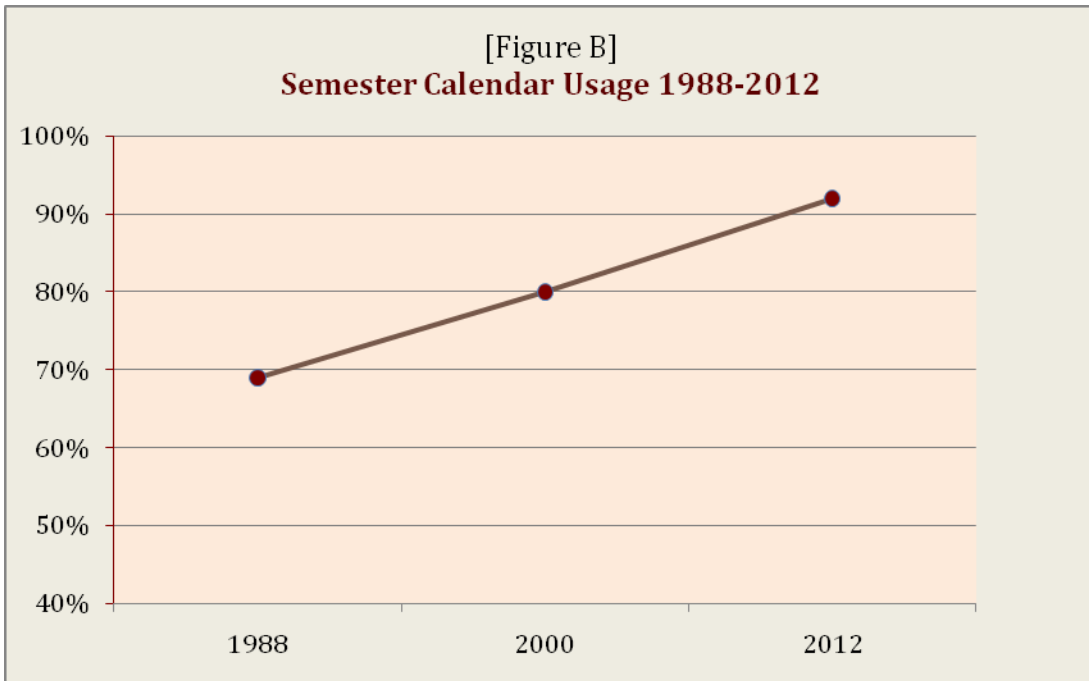
Currently, the states with the greatest quarter calendar usage are California, Washington, and Oregon.

In the New England states, the quarter calendar is used by one non-proprietary four-year institution (Dartmouth) and by no community colleges. In the mid-Atlantic region, Drexel and RIT are the only two non-proprietary quarter schools. There are no non-proprietary community colleges on quarters.

Nationally, two schools use the early-start quarter schedule with the split winter quarter: Milwaukee School of Engineering and RIT. The remaining quarter schools use some variant of the late-start model.

### Usage Trends: Semesters

Not surprisingly, the 1988-2012 increase in semester schools corresponds to the quarter-calendar decline of the same period (Figure B).

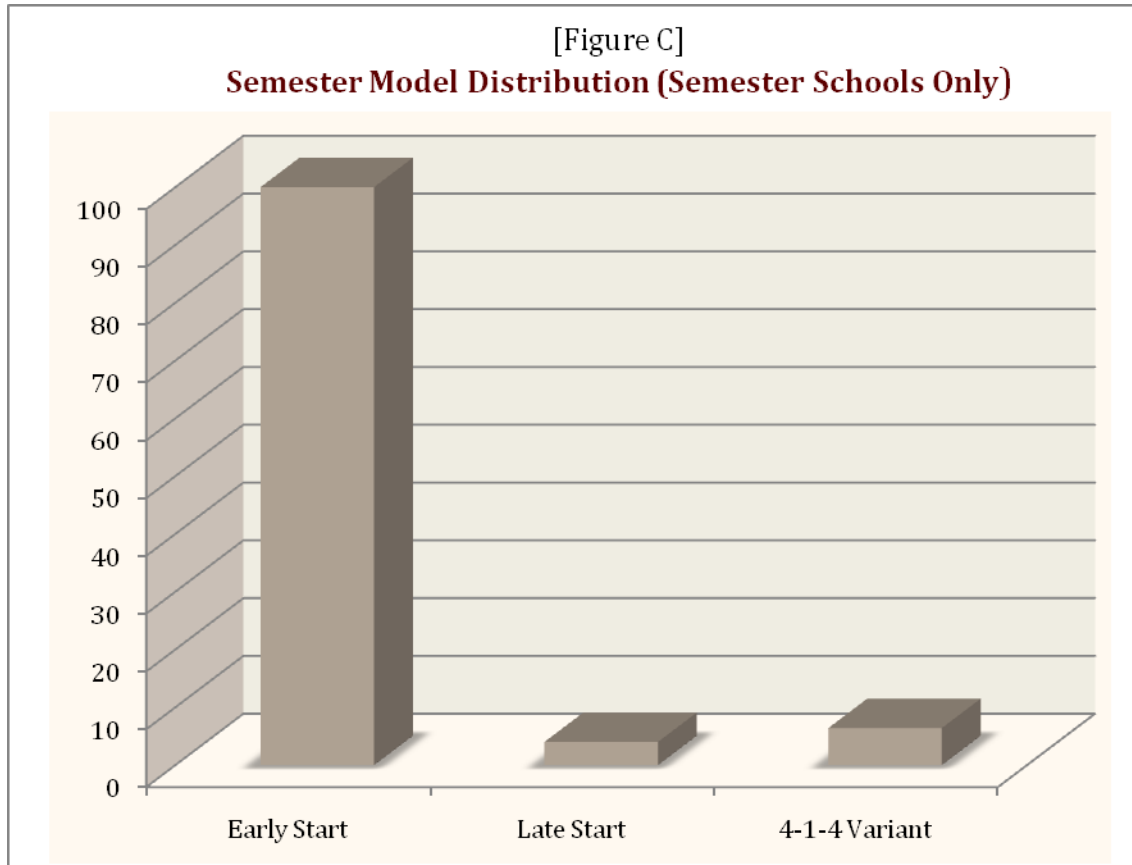


In the past 15 years, the following schools and systems have changed to semesters or announced impending q-t-s changeovers:

- Alabama system (1998)
- University System of Georgia (1998)
- Utah State System (1998)
- University of Minnesota system (1999)
- Auburn University (2000)
- Michigan Tech (2000)
- Youngstown State (2000)
- Northeastern University (2003)
- Shawnee State University (2007)
- Northwood University (2010)
- Principia College (2011)
- Ohio University (2011)
- Ohio State University (2012)
- Wright State University (2012)
- University of Cincinnati (2012)
- California State at Los Angeles (2012)

The conversions of many of the state schools cited above were required or recommended as part of a state-wide decision, although no school moved forward with the process until a favorable feasibility study and community vote had been conducted. Ohio State, for example, conducted a conversion feasibility study in 2000-01, on the basis of which they determined the timing was not propitious (they have since committed to a 2008-2012 conversion).

Figure C represents the relative usage of the three semester models as of 2008 (including schools whose conversions are in progress).



## Section B

### Scope of Q-2-S Conversion

Academic calendar conversion is a university-wide undertaking affecting virtually every institutional department and most personnel. The majority of schools consulted dedicated four years for the conversion process, though some were able to convert successfully in three years. Any school considering conversion should be fully aware *before* the conversion decision is made of the scope of the project. As Peter Zetterberg, conversion director at the University of Minnesota, puts it “Make sure it is ‘ready, aim, fire’ and not ‘ready, fire, aim.’”

Based upon material provided by other universities, this section represents the *major* conversion activities, the personnel typically responsible for each, the duration of each major activity, and a range of possible costs. q-2-s conversion at RIT would likely fall within the range of activities and costs represented here.

Please note that cost ranges—based upon the varying experiences of consulted schools—are broadly stroked.

Appendix A contains a sample list of affected administrative processes.

## 1. Conversion Administration

Schools with successful conversions always credit their success to a fully-staffed conversion office, usually consisting of a full-time executive-level administrator, at least one full-time staff assistant, and a highly discretionary conversion budget that rolls over annually for the duration of the conversion.

The conversion director should oversee the entire conversion process and have the authority to make conversion decisions and allocate money from his/her budget for unforeseen conversion expenses.

The table below, based upon Northeastern University’s four-year conversion, estimates total administrative costs over a three- and four-year conversion period. (All salaries are calculated using a 33% benefits rate and a 3% annual increment.)

Table 1

Item/ Position	Salary + Benefits <sup>1</sup> Year 1	Salary + Benefits Year 2	Salary + Benefits Year 3	Salary + Benefits Year 4	Total 3 years	Total 4 years
Director	\$199,500	\$205,485	\$211,649	\$217,999	\$616,634	\$834,633
Staff Asst.	\$46,550	\$47,946	\$49,384	\$50,864	\$143,880	\$194,744
Budget	\$75,000	75,000	75,000	75,000	\$225,000	\$300,000
<b>Total</b>					<b>\$985,514</b>	<b>\$1,329,377</b>

## 2. Curriculum

Revision. Many q-2-s schools have used or plan to use calendar conversion as an opportunity to re-vision, integrate, and strengthen the entire curriculum or some portion of the curriculum (most commonly, general education). The University of Cincinnati, for example, plans for “the entire faculty community simultaneously to rethink the curriculum to its core and to redesign UC’s educational offerings and research.” The University of Minnesota, on the other hand, largely limited its curriculum revision to the re-packaging of quarter courses into semesters and the elimination of existing under-enrolled and non-enrolled courses.

A different slant on the relationship between calendar change and curriculum revision is to view the calendar decision as the means to the desirable end of

revamping the curriculum: “When a university is considering a curriculum overhaul, the most effective means is via calendar revision.” (Habecker & Smith). Regardless of the approach taken towards curriculum revision, every existing course remaining on the books will be revised, thus requiring curricular review and approval. Likewise, all degree programs will be revised in some way—course sequencing, course content, degree timeline, etc.

*Personnel.* Every full-time faculty member will be involved in curriculum revision at the course level. In the case of significant program revision, most full-time faculty will be involved to some degree in curricular re-shaping, with designated faculty/chairs assuming coordination activities.

*Duration/Schedule.* In both a three- and four-year conversion process, planning for curriculum revision—whether substantive or minimal—should begin as soon as the conversion decision is made, with *ad hoc* curriculum review committees constituted and ready to work in the second—if not the first—conversion year. Approval of revised curricula should be complete by the end of the second year of the process, in time for subsequent activities dependent upon revised curriculum (recruitment, advising, loading of degree audit, publications, SIS, etc). Northeastern (3-year conversion), completed curricular revision and approval within 8 quarters (including planning stages); University of Cincinnati (4-year conversion) plans 8 quarters; Ohio University (4-year) is dedicating 8-9 quarters (from first planning stage).

*Faculty compensation.* To pay each faculty member involved in course and program revision would be an unsupportable cost, and most schools take the position that ongoing curricular review and revision are part of every full-time faculty member’s job description (OSU Faculty Council, for example). Incremental compensation—in the form of release time and/or summer salary—is commonly available for those faculty and/or chairs responsible for coordinating program revision.

Because of the amount of “new” course and program review and approval, additional *ad hoc* curriculum committees are usually formed. These committees work intensively for approximately 3 consecutive quarters, and faculty members are usually compensated with one released course.

Table 2 represents the standard faculty compensation arrangement.

Table 2

Revision task	Responsibility	Additional Compensation	Number	Approximate compensation
Individual course	Full-time faculty	No	All	0
Program-level revision	Full-time faculty	No	All	0
Revision coordination	Designated faculty/chair	Yes	1 per program	1-3 course releases
<i>Ad hoc</i> curriculum committees	Designated faculty	Yes	8 faculty on 3 coms.	1 summer crse. equiv.

Even without compensating f-t faculty for work at the course and program level, curriculum revision can still be the most costly activity of calendar conversion. Ohio State is budgeting \$2.4M for revision, as is the University of Cincinnati. The University of Minnesota provided one summer course equivalent to those faculty working on *ad hoc* curriculum committees (total not available).

Table 3

Revision task	Responsibility	Number	Approximate compensation	Total Compensation
Curriculum revision coordination	Designated faculty/chair	100 (1/major program)	3 course releases @ \$3500/course <sup>2</sup>	(100x3x\$3500 + benefits) <b>~\$1.4M</b>
Membership on <i>ad hoc</i> CC's	Designated faculty	8 faculty on 3 <i>ad hoc</i> CC's	1 course release	(24x3500) <b>~\$112K</b>
<b>Total faculty compensation</b>				<b>~\$1.4M</b> (including benefits)

Credit conversion. Converting from quarters to semesters requires a decision about the method by which a quarter-based curriculum is re-loaded into semesters. This decision in turn defines student course load and faculty teaching load.

The typical student load at RIT is four 4-credit courses per quarter, 48 credits per 3-quarter year, and (no more than) 192 credits for graduation. On a semester schedule, these figures would be reduced by one-third, as below.

Table 4

<b>Semester</b>	32 (.66x48)	128
<b>Quarter</b>	48	192

How does a q-2-s school slice its curriculum such that students take approximately 32 credits per year or 16 credits per semester? Typically, this reconfiguration is done in one of two ways: through the *constant content* or the *constant format* model.

*Constant content method.* Course content remains the same, but because it is spread over a longer period of time, the number of credits awarded per course is reduced. Using this model, the content of a quarter-long course would remain the same on a semester calendar, but it would be spread over the longer semester term (usually through reducing the number of weekly contact hours). Four hours times 11 weeks (quarter system) is roughly equivalent to 3 hours (3 credits) x 15 weeks (semester system). To accumulate a sufficient number of semester credits to graduate with  $\geq 120$  credits, the semester student needs to take at least five 3-credit courses per semester ( $15 \times 2 \times 4 = 120$ ), which puts the typical faculty load at three to four 3-credit courses per semester (with the assumption that new faculty are not hired).

This model works best for quarter schools with a majority of 5-credit courses.

Among converted and converting schools that used or plan to use this method are Auburn University, Ohio State, and Ohio University.

*Constant Format method.* Semester courses retain the same credit-hour value as on the quarter system, but course content is increased. This works well for full-year sequences, as it is not difficult to divide a full year's content by two rather than by three.

In the case of stand-alone quarter courses, content is expanded (often pulled in from other courses) to fill the semester.

If the q-2-s school has a majority of 4-credit courses, the constant format model requires no change in the typical load of a student: it remains four courses @ 4 credits during each semester, or a one-third annual reduction of courses (but not content). Likewise, faculty teaching load would decrease by a third.

Schools that used or plan to use this method include:

- Georgia Tech
- Northeastern
- University of Minnesota
- University of Tennessee at Knoxville
- Michigan State
- California State Fullerton

At schools using the constant format conversion method, teaching load varies between four and five courses per year.

Course Scheduling. With the constant format method, master course schedules will have to be entirely re-built. The constant content method requires significantly less re-scheduling by the registrar's office and scheduling officers.

### 3. Advising

The constituency most likely to lose sleep over calendar conversion is the group of students who will be enrolled under both calendars. Thus it is imperative that a comprehensive student advising campaign covering the entire transition period be developed at the very outset of the conversion process.

Tasks. In addition to the central work of student advising, advisors (both staff and faculty) may undertake the following tasks:

- Formation of university-wide advising committee (could be our advising council)
- Determination of need for additional advisor staffing
- Development of strategies for advising students at different points *vis à vis* actual changeover
- Advisor training
- Development/dissemination of advising materials (web and paper)

Personnel. Schools with high student-advisor ratios have resorted to hiring temporary advisors for the conversion process. The University of Cincinnati's original projection (since reduced) included a total of 91 additional advisors for the transition. The biggest single conversion expense for the University of Minnesota in their 1997-99 conversion was the hiring of additional advisors (mostly graduate students).

Schools with a robust degree audit system (like RIT's Tiger Tracks) are less likely to require additional advising headcount, as the students' new degree completion plans are available through those systems, once they are loaded with the new degree program content.

Duration. q-2-s advising will begin the moment the conversion decision is made and end when the last transitional student graduates (transitional students are those who enter the university under quarters and graduate under semesters).

Costs. The most significant advising costs come in the form of salaries for incremental temporary advisors. The number of additional advisors required depends upon the current student-advisor ratio, the robustness of a degree audit system, and the organizational talents of the advising task force. The

University of Minnesota paid additional advisors a total of \$1.7M (Zetterberg). Ohio State is budgeting \$500-\$600K (OSU 2009). On the other hand, Ohio University (mid-conversion now) is not hiring additional advisors, nor did the University of Toledo.

There appears to be no precedent for incremental compensation of existing advisors.

The following summary assumes a moderate need for additional temporary advisors, but a full-scale audit of available advising resources will be needed in order to determine exactly what the needs are.

Table 5

Position	Number	Salary	Benefits	Total
Temporary f-t advisors	10/year for 3 years	\$37,000	\$12,210	\$49,210
<b>Total</b>	30			\$1.48M

Advising-specific communications. See **Communication** section directly below.

#### 4. Communication

Veterans of successful conversion processes emphasize the importance of constant, consistent, multi-pronged communication regarding the calendar change. The University of Minnesota’s conversion director offered the following advice to the University of Cincinnati:

“Every student, faculty and staff member will be affected in some way....Make sure it is ‘ready, aim, fire’ and not ‘ready, fire, aim’ regarding communication planning implementation and other functions related to conversion. If adequate time and resources are not provided to the communications function, a number of integrated conversion functions likely will be hampered, leading to potential long-term damage to University of Cincinnati’s regional and national reputation” (Zetterberg).

To the extent possible, the development and distribution of calendar-related communication should be centralized under one communication professional fully dedicated to the conversion process and widely represented by a communication task force. A full-time staff assistant may also be necessary.

Tasks. The communication team will be responsible for the following:

*Web site development, coordination, and management, including*

- Website dedicated to calendar conversion process, including schedules, FAQ’s, announcements, information (for faculty, students, staff)
- Electronic handbooks for current students
- Electronic handbooks for faculty

- Training materials for advisors
- Curriculum conversion website
- Revision of all calendar references on entire university website

*Hard-copy handbooks and guides for students, faculty, advisors*

- Ongoing communications initiation, monitoring, and response to news media, blogs, discussion boards, emails, phone calls, etc.
- E-mail campaigns to multiple constituencies
- Management of news and information for external media

**Duration.** Communication work begins with the development of a comprehensive communication plan and will continue through the entire conversion process. In the first year following conversion, there will likely be continued communication requirements associated with the conversion.

**Costs.** The table below suggests possible salaries and budget for communication administration.

Table 6

Item/ Position	Salary + Benefits (1)	Salary + Benefits (2)	Salary + Benefits (3)	Salary + Benefits (4)	Total 3 Years	Total 4 Years
Comm. Prof.	\$79,800	\$82,194	\$84,659	\$87,198	\$246,653	\$333,851
Staff Asst.	\$46,550	\$47,946	\$49,384	\$50,864	\$143,880	\$194,744
Budget	\$115,000	\$115,000	\$115,000	\$115,000	\$345,000	\$460,000
<b>Total</b>					<b>\$735,533</b>	<b>\$988,595</b>

## 5. IT

Calendar conversion will require the re-loading of our newer student systems and the modification or replacement of every legacy system related to curriculum, registration, enrollment, financial aid, recruitment, billing, housing.

One of the biggest issues faced by schools relying on older student information systems is whether and when to move to a new system (typically, PeopleSoft or Banner). Existing system modification can be expensive, and it is increasingly difficult to find people who can work on legacy systems. (At the time of this writing, ITS was working up cost estimates of legacy system upgrade.) Purchasing a new SIS suite is, of course, even more expensive and time-intensive, but overlapping new systems implementation with calendar conversion does offer some synergies and certainly avoids duplication of effort.

**Tasks.** IT tasks will include the loading of existing, non-legacy systems (degree audit, billing, financial aid, housing, transfer articulation, etc.); and either the upgrading and loading of legacy systems (STARS, myCourses, student registration, admissions, etc.) or the purchase and loading of selected

Banner/PeopleSoft products (admissions, financial aid, student records, registration, at a minimum).

**Personnel.** To some degree, the purchase vs. upgrade decision will dictate which and how many personnel are involved in re-loading and implementation. For example, a new SIS would be loaded as part of the purchase contract; degree audit could be re-loaded through a special contract with provider Sunguard or by RIT staff, and upgrade of legacy systems could be contracted out or done internally.

**Costs.** A complex decision tree is involved regarding conversion-related IT requirements. At this early consideration point, the safest approach is to represent a range of IT costs incurred by converted and converting institutions. Many schools do not include the purchase and/or upgrading of systems as strict conversion costs, reasoning that the costs were inevitable apart from a calendar conversion.

Table 7

School and timeframe	IT Approach	Approximate Total Cost (including personnel)
Northeastern (1999-2003)	Modification of conversion-affected legacy systems	~\$15M
Ohio State (2001 projection)	Systems modification	\$4-5M
University of Minnesota (1995-1998)	Purchased PeopleSoft	~\$20M
University of Cincinnati (2008-2012)	Legacy upgrade	\$3.77M

**Summary.** If replacement of legacy SIS is inevitable, the most economical IT approach could be to coordinate purchase of a new system with calendar conversion.

## 6. Publications

Many print publications and forms requiring conversion-driven revision are already regularly revised and reprinted, but there will be additional costs involved in the development of conversion-related publications and the more significant re-setting of templates necessary for representing new curricula, schedules, forms, etc. The former can be covered by the communication budget (see p. 14).

**Personnel.** University Publications would be responsible for the updating of all marketing materials they produce. The Communication specialist would coordinate the design, implementation, and dissemination of temporary calendar-specific publications, working with ETC, ITS, University News, and others on a chargeback basis.

**Costs.** While it is possible that calendar-driven revision costs for University Publications materials would exceed the typical costs for materials revision,

additional costs would likely be minimal and will not be included in the total projected conversion cost.

## 7. Committees

Inevitable to calendar conversion is the creation of numerous committees, particularly during the first half of the process, when curriculum revision, advising, and communication planning are heaviest. The number of committees can vary, but there is a consensus that in the second half of the process, it is better if the committee structure is “lean and mean.”

See Appendix B for examples of committee lists at the University of Cincinnati and Ohio State.

## 8. Policy Revision

The majority of the RIT’s Policies and Procedures will require revision that in most cases would be limited to a changing of deadlines and calendar-based processes. Depending upon the timing of calendar conversion, these revisions could be incorporated into the current work of the University Policy Review and Development Committee (UPRD).

# Total Conversion Costs

## Benchmarks

Total conversion costs incurred by other schools provide useful cost parameters, but as the foregoing discussion makes clear, each school had a different way of calculating these costs, with the biggest variable within the IT category. While many schools provide copious documentation of their conversion processes, costs are not always included in these materials. The following list represents what appear to be the most reliable and relevant cost summaries available.

Table 8

School	Conversion Period	Total Conversion Costs	SIS costs included?
University of Minnesota	1997-99	\$3.7-\$4M	N
Ohio State University	2008-2012	\$8.7-11.2M (\$3.7-4.2M)	Y (\$5-7M)
California State LA	2008-2012	\$4M	N
Ohio University	2007-2010	\$4.6M	N

## RIT Cost Range

This report is not expected to provide detailed cost projections for an RIT calendar conversion. However, a broad range of possible total costs is offered below, based upon data from other schools and current RIT staffing and compensation levels.

Table 9

Expense Item	3-year conversion	4-year conversion
Conversion administration	\$985K	\$1.48M
Curriculum	\$1.4M	\$1.4M
Advising	\$1.5M	\$1.5M
Communications	\$735K	\$988K
<b>Estimated Total</b>	<b>\$4.6M</b>	<b>\$5.4M</b>

These figures are probably high on advising and low on miscellaneous expenses (as covered in budget of conversion director), but the total number is in line with the experience of benchmark schools. Following the model of other schools, IT expenses have not been included, but could be significant—anywhere from ~\$5M-\$25M.

## Associated Costs (temporary enrollment; one-time upfront)

The costs cited above are the one-time costs of the three- or four-year conversion process. The following are additional categories of cost that while not, strictly speaking, conversion process costs, *are* associated with the calendar change.

### Conversion-Related Costs

These are incremental, usually ongoing costs resulting from the calendar change.

Campus Operations. Changes in the number of days and time of year students are on campus can have cost implications for utilities (increased air-conditioning, heating, electrical costs), parking, housing, and food services. The changes are typically minor, but should be planned for.

Bookstore. Many of the schools consulted for this report did experience a decrease in bookstore sales—with the University of Minnesota topping the list at an approximately 20% decline in bookstore sales (Zetterberg).

Faculty compensation. On a semester system, the cost to the university of faculty release time (including faculty sabbaticals) increases.

## Enrollment shortfalls

Full-time enrollment shortfalls. A significant number of q-2-s schools experienced temporary, sometimes serious, declines in full-time enrollment. This decline, if not carefully planned for, can end up being the biggest single “cost” of the conversion initiative. The following table represents the percent and duration of enrollment decline experienced by some q-2-s schools and systems.

School/System	% Net Decline	Decline Duration	
Alabama system	18.7%	2 years	
Georgia system	11.8%	1 year	
Utah system	5.8%	temporary	
Northeastern	0		
Minnesota	~5%	1 year	

The decline was most commonly experienced at schools whose student load was five 3-credit courses per semester (as opposed to four 4-credit courses). The consensus hypothesis is that students at the former schools believed their load would be heavier on semesters and were temporizing their re-entry.

Part-time enrollment shortfalls. The quarter calendar is particularly attractive to the part-time adult or employed student who takes courses intermittently. Schools with a high reliance on this student population should analyze and prepare for the likely decline in part-time enrollment. Mid-way through its conversion process, Northeastern University decided to keep its University College and law school on the quarter system so as to avoid decline of a student population critical to their budget projections (Northeastern Peer Review).

Some semester calendars arrange fall and spring semesters such that there is a shortened summer term. A number of schools adopting this calendar model experienced a drop in summer enrollment. q-2-s schools that retain a full summer term are less likely to see such declines, regardless of whether they offer two consecutive short terms or one semester-length term. Coop schools like Northeastern and Cincinnati made sure that their summer term is of equal length.

## One-time, upfront costs

There will be a number of timing shifts that may require the university to front certain costs or to disburse funds earlier than usual on a one-time basis. Two examples follow:

First-semester tuition. Although annual tuition will not be affected (every school consulted for this study cited 0 tuition increase as a first-principle commitment),

per-term tuition will increase. Prior to the first semester term of students transitioning from quarters, it may be necessary to make special short-term loan arrangements with students who are not able to pay with a full semester's bill.

One-time adjunct pay. Adjuncts will receive more pay in the fall semester than the university is used to paying for the quarter. Again, this will balance out, but is an initial expense that should be anticipated.

## *Chapter II*

### **Reaching the Conversion Decision**

The regular recurrence of inconclusive semester discussions at quarter schools could likely be avoided under two easily established conditions: 1) the development of a full (preliminary) conversion proposal addressing the questions that typically go unanswered in campus debates; and 2) clarity regarding the legitimacy of claims adduced in support of or opposition to a particular calendar model.

## Section A

### The Preliminary Proposal

Calendar discussions can be derailed by unanswered questions and undocumented back-of-the envelope projections. In the past 8-10 years, a number of schools have avoided these pitfalls by jump-starting campus-wide deliberations with a detailed preliminary proposal. Typically, these proposals recommend a particular calendar and credit conversion model; characterize the implementation process; and project costs.

Committee membership usually consists of faculty and administrators—the latter with the knowledge and/or authority to develop or obtain critical projections regarding enrollment, cost, and IT capability. In no case discovered by this author was the preliminary proposal treated as a *fait accompli*, but rather as the best thinking of the right people about the most appropriate models and processes. In the case of Ohio State (2001 proposal) and UCLA, the preliminary proposals recommending q-2-s were ultimately rejected—at OSU because of financial constraints and at UCLA because of strong faculty support of quarters.

Listed below are the charges that initiated the work of three preliminary proposal committees at Ohio State (2001 and 2008) and the University of Cincinnati (2007). Appendix C contains tables of contents from the preliminary proposals of Ohio State (2001) and University of Cincinnati.

Ohio State: *Ad Hoc* University Calendar Committee (2001):

“Examine the issues involved in a calendar conversion to semesters and...make a recommendation about whether to proceed” (OSU, 2001).

Ohio State, *Ad Hoc* Committee on Semesters (2008):

“Present a resolution to the University Senate...concerning whether the University should move forward with this conversion, as well as recommendations concerning key issues related to that conversion, such as the length of semesters and other aspects of the University calendar” (OSU 2009).

University of Cincinnati, Semester-Conversion Taskforce 2008:

“Develop a plan by which UC can transition from its current quarter-calendar system to a semester-calendar system” (Cincinnati, 2008).

## Section B

### Reliable and Suspect Assertions

Until recently, campus discussions about calendar were often characterized by undocumented and minimally anecdotal claims about the superiority of one calendar model over another. It is no wonder that calendar debates have tended to be at the same time inconclusive and recurrent.

One of the great advantages of the recent q-2-s migration is the availability from other institutions of carefully recorded projections, plans, and reports that justify some commonly asserted claims and seriously question others.

In the spirit of facilitating productive, conclusive, and civil debate, this section offers two sets of claims: 1) those that have been empirically justified through the experience of other schools and may be invoked with some confidence; and 2) those that remain undocumented (or have been disproven).

#### Claims you can feel good about.

1. *q-2-s conversion **positively** impacts student graduation and retention rates.*

There is abundant evidence of **temporary** improvement of graduation rates in the year before semester implementation. Many upper-class students increase their credit load in this year in order to avoid the transition completely. Northeastern, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Tennessee all experienced this temporary phenomenon.

A number of schools also experienced some improvement in first-year persistence as a result of the conversion. Just as RIT often waives 1<sup>st</sup>-quarter suspensions for 1<sup>st</sup>-year students, q-2-s schools often waive 1<sup>st</sup>-semester suspensions, which results in higher enrollment throughout the first year and possibly into the second year (if the summer term is used to get these students back on track). Cleveland State, Michigan State, and the University of Tennessee all experienced improved 1<sup>st</sup>-year retention.

2. *q-2-s conversion **negatively** impacts student graduation and retention rates.*

The flip side of accelerated graduation is lower enrollment the following year. More significant than this drop is the tendency of existing students not to enroll during the first and sometimes second semester immediately following transition. This trend appears to be more pronounced in schools using the constant content conversion method, where students tend to be apprehensive about taking five courses instead of four, even though the credit load does not increase (Northeastern).

4. *Changing to a semester calendar reduces the total number of courses offered.*

This is true, although the credit conversion method used will affect the extent of the reduction (constant content vs. constant format). Most converted schools reporting a drop experienced an 11-38% reduction of “on-the-book” courses (Minnesota, OSU 2001).

5. *Students pay less money for textbooks on semester calendars.*

Documented by Wright State, University of Minnesota, and Northeastern. Of course the flip side of this is that the bookstore brings in less income. The University of Minnesota’s bookstore revenues decreased by 20% (Zetterberg).

6. *The early-start semester model allows students to enter the summer (and permanent) job market earlier.*

A true statement, and students do find this to be an advantage (Wright State, OSU 53.)

7. *Students at semester schools have more opportunities to study abroad.*

Virtually all colleges and universities outside of the U.S. are on semester calendars, as are the U.S. schools offering the most comprehensive study abroad portfolios to U.S. students (Syracuse, Butler, Arcadia, for example). Ohio State found considerable data to support the “hypothesis that studying abroad is hampered by the quarter system” (OSU 2001). California State Los Angeles determined that “A semester calendar will facilitate study-abroad options...and other forms of experiential learning” (CSLA).

8. *Conversion to semesters can negatively impact part-time enrollment.*

This is a legitimate concern. After an analysis projecting an 11% decline in its “one-course customers,” Northeastern decided to keep its continuing education unit and its law school on semesters.

When q-2-s conversion results in a summer term of shorter length than fall and spring semesters, schools can see a decline in summer enrollment as well (OSU 2001, 31ff).

**Suspect Claims.** As appealing and/or intuitive as the following claims may be, they should not be set forward as definitive.

1. *Semesters are more conducive to student learning than quarters.*

This assertion may appeal to the common sense of semester proponents, but it has never been inductively legitimized. While outcomes assessment plans designed in the past few years may provide the data necessary to prove or disprove this claim on a widespread level, at present there is no defensible,

widely applicable proof of the educational superiority of one calendar over another.

If one accepts the Ohio State position that “experience, anecdotal information, and common sense allow some claims to be made about each model,” one might concede the following:

- Semesters “are *perceived* [emphasis added] as preferable for courses that involve extensive reading and/or require the development of substantial research projects or papers”—advantages that are “seen as being even greater for graduate education than for undergraduate.”
- Quarters “are *perceived* [emphasis added] as preferable for courses that emphasize the acquisition of factual data or discrete skills” (OSU 2001).

But even these judgments—however sensible and intuitive—remain hypothetical.

2. *Converting to semesters has a long-term positive effect on retention and graduation rates.*

There is as yet no conclusive evidence in either direction that the semester calendar impacts long-term retention and graduation rates favorably. Only a few schools have attempted longitudinal studies of the conversion-retention association, and their findings vary considerably.

3. *Moving to a semester calendar results in substantial annual cost savings.*

The validity of this claim depends upon one’s definition of “substantial,” but it is unlikely that annual savings gained through the elimination of one set of start-up/wind-up costs would exceed ~\$500-600K per year (the conversion savings that do occur are usually limited to the registrar’s, bursar’s, and financial aid offices).

Donald Dedmon, President of Virginia’s Radford University during that school’s q-2-s conversion, observed that “many institutions, mine included, have realized significant savings by reducing the amount of paperwork required for administrative processes” (Dedmon). He does not, however, specify the amount of savings realized at Radford nor the other schools referenced.

The safest proposition is that confirmed by the University of Tennessee: that there are not so much post-conversion operational savings or additional costs, as there are timing shifts that balance out.

4. *The semester calendar negatively impacts faculty research.*

There are no studies that support greater faculty productivity under either calendar.

This claim could be plausible at schools where the quarter calendar allowed faculty the flexibility to distribute their annual course load such that they taught fewer or even no courses during fall or spring quarter, leaving six continuous months for research.

5. *Schools on a quarter calendar have a more difficult time recruiting faculty.*

There is no support for this claim.

6. *Moving to a semester calendar will increase average class size and place additional stress on classroom scheduling.*

Increased class size (and the resulting requirement for additional large classrooms) *can* result from q-2-s conversion, but it certainly *need* not and can be managed with prudent foresight. The following schools did see a 10-15% increase in the number of classes over 50 students: Minnesota, Georgia Tech, Utah State.

7. *Coop works better on a quarter calendar.*

A number of coop schools have converted to semesters (Georgia Tech, Tennessee, Northeastern, for example). There appears to be no basis for the claim that quarters are friendlier to coop schools. The University of Tennessee has observed that coop employers were “delighted” with the change to semesters.

One of the main reasons Northeastern converted was to “strengthen” coop and “more closely align” the coop experience with students’ on-campus instruction. A survey of admitted-non-enrolling students revealed that the 5-year coop plan was an important reason for their *not* attending NEU. In a 1999 survey, 76% of Northeastern students thought an advantage of the semester calendar would be the ability to graduate in four years with two coops (Northeastern, 12).

## Afterword

This report is only a partial representation of the materials accumulated and consulted in the past months. Inevitably, it will have omitted information that some readers deem critical. In all likelihood that omitted information resides within the files and can easily be shared with the disappointed reader.

Should President Destler decide to form a preliminary proposal committee, these files also contain an abundance of sample forms, schedules, student guides, and faculty handbooks. In the spirit of efficiency and expedition, the author suggests that she be consulted for the desired information before a new search is begun.

Every attempt has been made to be ruthlessly objective in this report. This commitment to impartiality has resulted in the omission of a particular genre of calendar proposal literature: contrapuntal lists of the advantages and disadvantages of each academic calendar model. Because it is often in these allegedly impartial lists of pro's and con's that one finds the most egregious instances of suspicious reasoning, their omission is fully appropriate.

It did not lie within the purview of this report to *recommend* a particular calendar model, so the report is free of argument. I will take the liberty of using these last words to suggest that if calendar change cannot be demonstrated to be a means to a set of desirable ends, the effort could outweigh the outcomes.

Katherine J. Mayberry, Ph.D.  
Vice President for Special Projects

22 June 2009

[Appendix A]

**AFFECTED ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES**

(Northeastern University)

**Admissions/Recruitment/Enrollment Management**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
Recruitment Date	Review dates and share with financial aid office.
Admission application deadlines	Review and communicate any changes
Early admit dates	Review and communicate any changes
Admit decisions	Review and communicate any changes
Intent to register dates	Analyze numbers
Orientation dates	Review and change accordingly
Transfer credit evaluations	Review and coincide with orientation or other events
Scholarship awarding	Coordinate with colleges and the financial aid office
Residence Halls	Work closely with residence hall staff on numbers
Parents	Address parent concerns
Prospective Students	Address concerns/give accurate information
Retention	Monitor retention closely

**Student Records/Registrar Functions: End of Term Processes**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
Final Exam Schedule	
Grade Deadlines	No Change
Degree Clearance	Look at dates to avoid conflicts with state boards or exams
Degree Posting	End of term only, may get asked to post during a term or monthly
Deadline Dates	Example: Degree information
Report Timing	Grades, Academic Probation, Dean's List, Honors, Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)
NCAA Certification	Notify NCAA and review timelines

### Student Records/Registrar Functions: Academic Record/Transcript

Item	Suggestions
Conversion Term	Decision on how the conversion to semester will look on the academic transcript
Transcript Paper Changes	Change transcript paper if needed to reflect any changes and indicate conversion to semesters
Majors/Minors pre/post semesters	Address in system changes – curriculum tables
Early converts to semesters	Do not allow some areas to convert to semester early
Degree Inventory	Address if needed for reporting purposes and curriculum review

### Student Records/Registrar Functions: DARS/Degree Audit

Item	Suggestions
Articulation Tables	
Requirements Programming	Get reports out to colleges for review soon
Report Changes	Create process for report changes/curriculum changes between colleges/departments and registrar's office
Interfaces	Test interfaces completely
Exception Processing	Put processes in place to handle exception processing
Advisor Training	Develop and implement training for advisors
Student Communication	Responsible party identified to assist students
User groups/communication for colleges	Creation of a user group may be needed for updates and communication purposes

### Student Records/Registrar Functions: Course Catalog/Bulletin Production Schedule

Item	Suggestions
Production Cycle	Review and adjust
Policy Changes	Edit and change
Degree Requirement Changes	Disclaimer for semester
Quarter/Semester Requirements	Decide if printing quarter information to assist in planning
Disclosure Statements	Review and update
Communication Plan	Distribution plan communicated

### **Student Records/Registrar Functions: Class Schedule Production**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
Operational Calendar	Review and adjust
First Semester Data	Production cycle will take longer due to review and entry. Nothing to rollover from a previous year.
Transition Documents	Prepare for students and advisors immediately to guide them
Communication Plan	Communicate the change of cycle to the departments and colleges
Quarter/Semester Prerequisites	Decide if printing quarter prerequisites or just semester and for how long
Conversion Information	Where is the conversion information going to be for students and advisors – web, DARS, hardcopy
Special Term Indicators	Prepare for printing special term courses

### **Student Records/Registrar Functions: Classroom Scheduling/Facilities Planning**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
Classroom Utilization	Discussed
Course Inventory	Review sunset policies
Technology Requests	Faculty will demand rooms with more technology

### **Student Records/Registrar Functions: Registration**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
Dates	Review and update
Adjust queue	Complete
Non-degree students	Review any policies and update

### **Student Records/Registrar Functions: Drop/Add Deadlines**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
Refund Dates	Review and update
Billing Dates	Review and update
Relates to academic policies	Review and update
Interfaces to systems	Review and test

## Financial Aid

Item	Suggestions
Table setup	Address any term or data changes in the table setup
Cost of attendance	Adjust for cost of attendance for on campus vs. co-op students for time periods
Scholarship Changes	Address any scholarship changes with departments, colleges or foundation
Packaging	Adjust packaging for terms and summer sessions
Disbursement	Adjust disbursement calendar for terms
Federal Reporting	Address workload demand with the change in academic calendar
Audit	Address workload demand with the change in academic calendar
Title IV Processes	
Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)	Coordinate report timing with end of term processing

## Bursar/Student Accounts

Item	Suggestions
Tuition and Fee Setup	Address timing of setup and packaging
Billing Dates	Timing of bills
Special Session Classes	Address of refunds
Late Fee Penalties	Address the timing of assessment of relevant
Fee Waivers	Address time and deadline date to receive information
Hospitalization Insurance	Address plan and timing of refunds

## Continuing Education

Item	Suggestions
Non-degree Students	Marketing strategy
Tuition Rates	In process
Course Length	In review
Course Start Dates	In review
Grades	Complete
Certificate Programs	In review

## Facilities

Item	Suggestions
Number of Students on Campus at a Given time	Model and prepare for the projected numbers
Class Sizes	Model class size and prepare the campuses
Class Offering Numbers	Model and address issues
Hours of Offerings	Model and address shortages
Time Patterns	Model and review offerings
Final Exam	Not an issue
Mid-term Exams	Model and review for problems

[Appendix B]

## **Subcommittees and Task Forces**

### **University of Cincinnati**

Semester-Conversion Task Force  
Advising Subcommittee  
Calendar Subcommittee  
Communications Subcommittee  
Curriculum, Pedagogy and Course Subcommittee  
IT Subcommittee  
Infrastructure Subcommittee  
Policies and Procedures Subcommittee

### **Northeastern University**

Semester Transition Steering Committee  
Curriculum Transition Committees (3) (undergraduate;  
graduate, University College)  
Advising Transition Committee (3 as above)  
Cooperative Education Transition Committee  
Publications Committee  
Communications Committee  
Research Transition Committee  
Academic Policies Transition Committee  
Student Steering Committee  
Administration Transition Committee