

Semester vs. quarter system

Currently under a partial quarter system – only 3 required terms per year, each 10 weeks, with underused summer that is misaligned with most foreign universities. Only 20% of US colleges operate on a quarter system. Not common in Europe (although there is a lot of variation, the semester system dominates in higher education, primarily because it is more efficient and alignment permits easier transfer between institutions, or continuation of education at other institutions). In either system students are in class 30 weeks, either 10-10-10 (quarter), or 15-15 (semester) for roughly the same number of hours per week.

Many universities have made this transition over the past several decades for the reasons set forth above. Almost none have gone from a semester to a quarter system.

Semester Pros

1. **More efficient** – 1/3 less administrative overhead (grades, contracts, registrations). Winter-Spring Term turnaround time is short and falls in the middle of admissions/recruitment. Instead of this additional administrative burden, the Registrar/Admissions staff could be focusing on admissions. Even more relevant with undergraduate with 4-times the students and 3-times the faculty as our current programs.
2. **Schedule better fit** for incoming students as well as graduates seeking further education – problems with recruitment, deferments for doctoral students
3. **Longer terms** – more sustained skills development – particularly for u-grad, more depth (?)
4. **Increased course capacity** – 20% more courses can be offered simultaneously in the same facilities (3 credits vs. 4 credit) (semester (40 hr./3 cr. = 13 courses/wk), quarter (40hr./4 cr. = 10 courses/wk), which is an advantage since u-grad requires a greater variety and utilizes more of our classroom capacity.
5. **Visiting faculty** often on semester system – all the same for them whether it is quarter or semester; also most visitors come for less than a quarter now – 5-week modules can fit in either semester or quarter system (2-2-2 for quarter or 3-3 for semester)
6. **Longer summers** for summer courses for study abroad (expected to increase with U-grad) – current overlap with spring term – better aligned with u-grad semester programs. The typical summer student comes in mid-May through mid-August, but because of our quarter system, our summers are July through mid-September. Basically mid-August through mid-September are lost months (except for students on quarter or trimester systems, e.g., Michaelmas term, etc.)
7. **Junior term abroad** – for u-grad a large draw, but out of synch for students on semester system.
8. **Simplify u-grad design and course catalog, faculty recruitment and curriculum by 1/3**
9. More family friendly for faculty (esp. local faculty) whose children/spouses are on the semester system, which predominates in Armenia.

Quarter Pros

1. current arrangement – institutional custom – curriculum design
2. shorter terms – more frequent feed back, more subjects – more breadth (?)
3. visiting faculty may be able to come for 10 weeks rather than semester – compressing 10-weeks into 5 weeks more feasible than 15 weeks into 5 weeks

Semester Cons

1. visiting faculty may be able to come for 10 weeks, but not a full semester, esp. at the end of Spring Term, and compressing 15 weeks into 5-6 weeks (May 1 through June 15) less feasible than compressing 10 weeks into 5-6 weeks at the end of the term.

Transition costs – Minimal

1. AUA is not a large university (many huge systems have made and are making this transition because the benefits outweigh the costs).
2. The main cost is converting the current curriculum from quarters to semesters, which in AUA's case, is not very complicated.

In most instances, the conversion will mean reallocating topics between 3 related courses – turning 3 quarter courses into 2 semester courses, or stretching a 40 hour quarter course (4 credits) into a 45 hour (3 credit) semester course. In rare instances, it may require entirely new courses. Most of our degrees have fewer than 40 courses in their catalogs, so while not trivial, it is not an overwhelming burden to convert 40 courses into 26 courses.