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IF YOU SHRINK IT, WILL THEY STILL SUCCEED? COMPARING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PEDAGOGICAL MODELS FOR ACCELERATED LEARNING IN AN ONLINE MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM

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Abstract

Distance education has been a common program modality in Library and Information Studies for well over two decades. Multiple universities have offered fully online or hybrid Master's of Library and Information Studies degrees in the traditional academic calendar (e.g., semester or quarter). In Fall 2021, the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Library and Information Studies launched the first accelerated online Master's of Library and Information Studies degree in the United States. All courses are offered in seven-week sessions, with a total of six of these sessions offered each academic year.

This paper will detail one faculty member's process of converting semester-long (14-week) courses to the accelerated calendar. Three models were employed: (1) using half-weeks so that a course could retain 14 topics with multi-week projects, (2) collapsing topics to focus on key content areas in a weekly format with weekly activities, and (3) using project-based modules where students engage with learning materials for 1-2 weeks then have a dedicated week to complete a project. Each model is discussed in detail, including what the model entails, how the model was implemented in the course(s), and the pros and cons of the model for instructors and students.

This paper is of interest to anyone working in distance learning modalities, especially in higher education. The three pedagogical models employed in converting courses from 14-week semesters to 7-week sessions can be applied in a variety of disciplines, and in different semester lengths.

Keywords: distance learning, online learning, accelerated online education, library and information studies, master's degrees

1 INTRODUCTION

Distance education has been a common program modality in Library and Information Studies for well over two decades. Multiple universities have offered fully online or hybrid Master's of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) degrees in the traditional academic calendar (e.g., semester or quarter). These programs tend to take 1-2 years to complete if a student is enrolled full-time, or 2-4 years if a student is enrolled part-time.

In Fall 2021, the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Library and Information Studies (URI GSLIS) launched the first accelerated online MLIS degree in the United States. All courses are offered in seven-week sessions, with a total of six of these sessions offered each academic year. The accelerated calendar allows students to complete the entire 36-credit program in one year if they enroll full-time, taking two courses concurrently in each of the six sessions. Alternatively, students can complete the entire 36-credit program in two years if they enroll part-time, taking one course at a time in each of the six sessions.

Over a two-year period, URI GSLIS faculty converted all existing courses from the traditional 14-week semester to the 7-week session. This required substantial effort to review course learning outcomes, topics, readings, assignments, and lectures to ensure that courses still met the university requirement of 135 hours of student work for a 3-credit graduate course but were also manageable for students to complete all work and achieve the course learning outcomes by the end of seven weeks. Faculty took multiple approaches to converting their courses. All courses underwent a Quality Matters review prior to being run.

This paper details one faculty member's process of converting 14-week courses to the accelerated calendar. Three models were employed: (1) using half-weeks so that a course could retain 14 topics with multi-week projects, (2) collapsing topics to focus on key content areas in a weekly format with weekly activities, and (3) using project-based modules where students engage with learning materials

for 1-2 weeks then have a dedicated week to complete a project. Each model will be discussed in detail, including what the model entails, why the model was selected for the specific course, how the model was implemented in the course, the pros and cons of the model from an instructor perspective, and success rates for students in the model.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Literature review: Accelerated online education

While this is much literature related to online learning, there is little focused on online learning in an accelerated academic calendar. This is likely due to the newness of the approach. Some literature does exist, primarily in accelerated online nursing programs. The literature discusses a variety of best practices: flexibility [1], [2]; use of tools to improve student engagement, such as discussion boards [1]; incorporation of reflective learning activities [1]; quick feedback on assignments and to student inquiries [2]; active faculty participation in the online course and with students [1], [2]; provision of constructive feedback with examples [2]. Two different papers discuss the application of the First Principles of Instruction model to accelerated online Master's of Business Administration (MBA) programs [3] and an accelerated online course in a Master's in Instructional Design [4]. Both papers discuss the need to incorporate problem-based learning in which students tackle real-world tasks drawing upon their prior experiences and course content to demonstrate their knowledge through examples, apply their knowledge through a problem-based task assignment, and reflect on their learning. What does not seem to be discussed in the literature are how to take a traditional calendar online course and turn it into an accelerated calendar online course, especially without reducing learning outcomes, course topics, or expectations for work quality.

2.2 Description of the courses

This paper discusses three courses that were converted using three different models. The courses were two required courses and one elective course, all converted by the same course designer/instructor and run by that person. Two of the courses were also run by a second instructor using the same format, including the same schedule, content, lectures, and assignments.

LSC 502: Lead, Manage, Connect Library & Information Services is a required course that all students must take; most students take this course in their first or second session in the program when they are new to graduate coursework and to online learning. This course is a survey of management topics and skills necessary for LIS professionals. The course designer/instructor has taught this course 11 times total since 2012 (hybrid, online with synchronous meetings, asynchronous online, and asynchronous online in the accelerated calendar). This course has gone through multiple textbooks and iterations of the assignments, but the topics have remained similar over the 10 years. Assignments have followed a problem-based approach using case study libraries (from a packet associated with the textbook), shifting from a long-time focus on strategic planning to a more recent focus on budgeting and program planning. This course was taught three times in AY 2021-22 by two different instructors using the same format.

LSC 508: Introduction to Information Science and Technology is also a required course that all students must take; most students take this course in their first or second session. This is also a survey course; this one focuses on theories of Information Studies (IS) and application of various Information Technology (IT) tools. The course designer/instructor has taught this course 16 times total since 2018 (hybrid, online with synchronous meetings, asynchronous online, and asynchronous online in the accelerated calendar). This course has used one textbook for 10 years; a new edition was just released in summer 2022. Most topics had remained from the first iteration of the course until the conversion, with a few removed over the years due to lack of student interest. Primary course assignments have been weekly technology labs and a final project web site where students demonstrated their knowledge of course concepts and showcased their technology skills. This course was taught twice in AY 2021-22 by two different instructors using the same format.

LSC 517: Community Relations for Libraries is an elective course. It was required for the Libraries, Leadership, and Transforming Communities track, so all students in that track had to take this course, but other students enrolled based on their interest in the topic. Students generally fit two categories: newer students in their second session, taking this course immediately after completing LSC 502, and students in their second, third, or later semester in the program who had begun the program in the 14-week format and shifted to the 7-week format in Fall 2021. This course builds on topics introduced in

LSC 502: needs assessment, marketing, public relations, outreach, and advocacy. The course designer/instructor has taught this course 8 times total since 2016 (hybrid, online with synchronous meetings, asynchronous online, and asynchronous online in the accelerated calendar). This course never used a textbook, with many readings remaining from the first iteration of the course to the conversion. Assignments have remained similar: community needs assessment and planning for communications, marketing, outreach, and advocacy. This course has always used a problem-based approach, sometimes based on actual libraries, and sometimes based on the case study libraries also used in LSC 502. This course was taught once in AY 2021-22 by one instructor.

3 CONVERSION OF THE COURSES

3.1 Half-week style: LSC 502.

Prior to conversion to the accelerated calendar, this course had seven learning outcomes:

1. Define and explain the key concepts of management and leadership.
2. Identify management theories, principles, and practices and apply them to making informed decisions in managing library and information services.
3. Develop a personal philosophy of management of libraries, supervision of staff, and leadership based on sound theory.
4. Produce and defend an operational plan for a program or service.
5. Produce and defend a department-level line-item budget.
6. Apply effective oral, written, and visual communication skills.
7. Interpret information laws and the ALA Code of Ethics to solve ethical dilemmas faced in managing libraries and information organizations.

Students were expected each week to complete the readings, view the lesson in the Learning Management System (LMS), post to the discussion board, take the quiz, and work on or complete any projects upcoming or due that week (See Table 1 for topics and assignments).

Table 1. LSC 502 schedule in traditional calendar.

Week	Topic	Weekly Assignments	Multi-Week Projects
1	Introduction to Management	Discussion Board; Quiz	
2	Legal and Ethical Issues	Discussion Board; Quiz	
3	Planning and Assessment	Discussion Board; Quiz	
4	Change Management	Discussion Board; Quiz	Program Plan Pitch
5	Power and Decision-Making	Discussion Board; Quiz	Voting on Classmates' Pitches; Written Program Plan
6	Managing Money	Discussion Board; Quiz	
7	Leadership	Discussion Board; Quiz	
8	Supporting Staff	Discussion Board; Quiz	Budget Pitch
9	Communication	Discussion Board; Quiz	Voting on Classmates' Pitches; Written Budget Proposal
10	Marketing and Advocacy	Discussion Board; Quiz	
11	Managing Technology	Discussion Board; Quiz	
12	Managing Facilities	Discussion Board; Quiz	
13	Managing Your Career	Discussion Board; Quiz	Final Presentation

There were three main projects. The first was a program plan in which students conducted an environmental scan of a case library and its community to identify service gaps, then proposed one new service or program via two formats. They produced a 3-minute recorded pitch to the library director/school principal (represented by their classmates) who then voted on whether to fund and provide staffing for the program. They then wrote a 10-page proposal to their library director/school principal (represented by the instructor) as a second chance to convince them to fund the program. The second project was a line-item departmental budget request for the coming fiscal year. Mirroring the program pitch, students produced a 3-minute budget request to the library director/school principal (represented by their classmates) who then voted on whether to fund the budget fully or partially. They then wrote a 10-page budget proposal to their library director/school principal (represented by the instructor) as a second chance to convince them to fund the budget. The third project was a final presentation where students prepared a 5-minute multimedia presentation on management in the library and information professions including: what management is and what it means to manage in a library or information service environment; their personal philosophy of management; how they see themselves as a manager, including skills they have, need to work on, and particular challenges they will face in managing library and information services; and the differences and similarities between managers and leaders and whether someone can be both a manager and leader.

Because this was an introductory survey course tied to departmental learning outcomes, the course designer/instructor felt that no topics could be deleted when converting to the accelerated calendar. The accelerated version of the course maintained all seven learning outcomes and added an eighth: support and evaluate the work of colleagues. Managing technology and facilities were combined into one topic, allowing room to add a review and reflection topic in Week 7. All other topics were retained, but the schedule of topics was rearranged to match the order of projects (See Table 2 for topics and assignments). Assignments mostly remained the same. Because being a library manager means using communication skills to give constructive feedback to both subordinates and peers, instead of voting on whether to fund program and budget proposals, students viewed specific classmates' program plans, budget pitches, and final presentations and provided constructive feedback on each.

Table 2. LSC 502 schedule in accelerated calendar.

Week	Topic A (Tue-Thu)	Assignments due Thu	Topic B (Fri-Mon)	Assignments due Mon
1	Course Introduction and Introduction to Management	Discussion Board	The Operating Environment	Discussion Board; Quiz
2	Planning and Assessment	Discussion Board	Managing Money	Discussion Board; Quiz
3	Legal and Ethical Issues	Discussion Board	Change Management	Discussion Board; Quiz; Program Plan Pitch
4	Leadership	Discussion Board; Peer Review of Program Plan	Power and Decision-Making	Discussion Board; Quiz; Written Program Plan
5	Supporting Staff	Discussion Board; Outline of Final Presentation	Communication	Discussion Board; Quiz; Budget Pitch
6	Marketing and Advocacy	Discussion Board; Peer Review of Budget Pitch	Managing Technology and Facilities	Discussion Board; Quiz; Written Budget Plan
7	Managing Your Career	Discussion Board; Final Presentation	Review and Reflection	Discussion Board; Quiz; Peer Review of Final Presentations

3.2 Collapsed topics: LSC 508

Prior to conversion to the accelerated calendar, this course had four learning outcomes:

1. Explain information and its essential nature.
2. Recognize and distinguish historical debates in the field as to the essential nature of information, theories of information, theories of information behavior, organization of information, and ethics of information.
3. Describe and differentiate various technology tools.
4. Apply technology skills to present information in varied formats and tools.

Students were expected each week to complete the readings, view the lesson in the LMS, post to the discussion board, complete the labs, take the quiz (if applicable), and work on or complete any projects upcoming or due that week (See Table 3 for topics and assignments).

Table 3. LSC 508 schedule in traditional calendar.

Week	Topic	Assignments
1	Information Science	Discussion Board; Select Topic
2	Information Technology	Discussion Board; Lab 1: Welcome to the Web and HTML; Quiz 1
3	What Is Information?	Discussion Board; Lab 2: Word Processing
4	Student-Led Topics	Discussion Board
5	IS and Information	Discussion Board; Lab 3: Spreadsheets; Quiz 2
6	Communicating Information	Discussion Board; Lab 4: Slideshows
7	Information Society	Discussion Board; Lab 5: Online Presentations; Quiz 3
8	Student-Led Topics	Discussion Board
9	Information Policy and Information Ethics	Discussion Board; Lab 6: Graphic Design and Visualizing Information
10	New Literacies	Discussion Board; Quiz 4; Outline of Final Project
11	Future of IS	Discussion Board
12	Information Redux	Discussion Board; Quiz 5
13	Student-Led Topics	Discussion Board; Final Project

There were three main projects. The first were the six technology labs designed to help students to become comfortable using technology and self-sufficient in learning to use new tools. Each lab had specific learning outcomes and tasks to complete in order to achieve those outcomes. The second project was selecting and presenting on a topic of interest to the student within the broad discipline of Information Science. Each student selected two readings or videos to assign to their classmates on the topic, planned a prompt for a discussion board thread on the topic, and gave a 5-minute presentation on their topic in a synchronous online class. The third project was a web page on Information Science in which students incorporated media they had created either in the labs or new for the project to address the following topics: introduction; compare and contrast definitions of information, concluding with their own definition of information; describe the historical and contemporary transitions in the field, concluding with a prediction of where IS will be in 20 years; explain how they will work with information in their career; and conclusion. An outline was submitted in week 10 to ensure students had begun this project and were on track to complete it on time.

The accelerated version of the course maintained all four learning outcomes. The student-led topics were the first ones removed in the conversion (See Table 4 for topics and assignments). These topics had varied, and the content was not required or tied to course learning outcomes., making this an easy way to remove three weeks of content without removing any content linked to course learning outcomes. Some topics were collapsed that complemented each other (See Table 4): Information Technology and New Literacies became one week; What is Information and IS and Information became one week, called What is Information, and How Does IS Use It; and Information Society was combined with Information Policy and Information Ethics into one week. In collapsing topics, some

readings were removed or became optional in order to balance the workload for each week. With the removal of the student-led topics, all other assignments remained: weekly discussion boards, five quizzes, six labs on the same topics as before, and the final project, with an outline due ahead of time and all the same required topics. Students did lose some time in completing the labs: they had previously had two weeks each for Labs 1, 3, and 6; all of these were shortened to one week.

Table 4. LSC 508 schedule in accelerated calendar.

Week	Topic	Assignments
1	Information Science	Discussion Board; Lab 1: Welcome to the Web and HTML
2	Information Technology and New Literacies	Discussion Board; Lab 2: Word Processing; Quiz 1
3	What is Information, and How Does IS Use It?	Discussion Board; Lab 3: Spreadsheets; Quiz 2
4	Communicating Information	Discussion Board; Lab 4: Slideshows
5	Information Society, Policy, & Ethics	Discussion Board; Lab 5: Online Presentations; Quiz 3; Outline of Final Project
6	Future of IS	Discussion Board; Lab 6: Graphic Design and Visualizing Information; Quiz 4
7	Information Redux	Discussion Board; Quiz 5; Final Project

3.3 Project-based modules: LSC 517

Prior to conversion to the accelerated calendar, this course had eight learning outcomes:

1. Define and differentiate the key concepts of marketing and public relations.
2. Describe library marketing, public relations, and outreach efforts.
3. Conduct a community needs assessment.
4. Develop a communications plan, including marketing, PR, promotion, and branding.
5. Develop an outreach and advocacy plan.
6. Prepare a multimedia presentation to convince supervisors to support a community relations plan.
7. Demonstrate effective communication skills.
8. Support and evaluate the work of colleagues.

Students were expected each week to complete the readings, view the lesson in the LMS, post to the discussion board, and work on or complete any individual or team projects upcoming or due that week (See Table 5 for topics and assignments).

Table 5. LSC 517 schedule in traditional calendar.

Module	Weeks	Topic	Assignments
1	1	Understanding and Assessing the Community	Discussion Board; Teamwork Quiz
	2		Discussion Board; Team Contract; Team Eval #1
	3		Discussion Board
	4		Discussion Board; Interview Paper #1
2	5	Telling the Library's Story	Discussion Board; Community Needs Assessment; Team Eval #2
	6		Discussion Board

	7		Discussion Board
	8		Discussion Board; Interview Paper #2
3	9	Building Community	Discussion Board; Communications Plan; Team Eval #2
	10		Discussion Board
	11		Discussion Board
4	12	Wrap-Up	Discussion Board
	13		Discussion Board; Outreach/Advocacy Plan; Team Eval #3; Final Paper

There were four main projects. Three were team projects, presented live in class, starting with a Community Needs Assessment. Each team was required to pick a library and assess its community's needs, minimally describing the community and organizational profiles, analyzing gaps in service needs, and summarizing the community's service needs. The second project was a Communications Plan for the library that included marketing and branding, public relations, and promotion. The third project was an Outreach and Advocacy Plan that included a plan to develop a community partnership, a program that would result from that partnership, and one advocacy story each for the library and for the community. The other major project was a series of interviews culminating in a final paper. Each student completed two interviews with a librarian (or librarians) of their choice, prepared a 5-page paper from each interview, then wrote a final 10-page paper on community relations and their importance for libraries based on their interviews and the course readings.

For the accelerated version of the class, the concept of the modules and projects was maintained, but the appearance shifted to a weekly format, for students' navigational ease (See Table 6 for topics and assignments). Module 1 became Weeks 1-2, Modules 2 and 3 were collapsed into Weeks 4-6, and Module 4 was condensed into Week 7. There were two weeks of readings, followed by a week to concentrate on working on the major module project. Instead of the three team projects, there were two individual projects: a Needs Assessment (similar to the Community Needs Assessment) and Community Relations Plan (combining both the Communications Plan and Outreach/Advocacy Plan assignments). Worksheets were provided to assist the students in working alone to complete what had been a team project. The interviews were dropped because of the time constraints. The Final Paper became a Final Presentation that covered the same topics as before but was a 10-minute recorded audiovisual presentation instead of a 10-page paper.

Table 6. LSC 517 schedule in accelerated calendar.

Week	Topic	Assignments
1	Course Intro/What Is Community	Discussion Board
2	Needs Assessment	Discussion Board
3	Working on Needs Assessment	Discussion Board; Needs Assessment
4	Marketing, Public Relations, and Communication	Discussion Board
5	Community Outreach and Advocacy	Discussion Board; Annotated Outline of Final Presentation
6	Working on Community Relations Plan	Discussion Board; Community Relations Plan
7	Moving Forward	Discussion Board; Final Presentation

4 RESULTS

Each course ran in the described format during AY 2021-2022. See Table 7 for the schedule.

Table 7. Implementation of the courses in AY 2021-2022.

Course	Fall 2021 instructor(s)	Spring 2022 instructor
LSC 502	Course designer/instructor Second instructor	Second instructor
LSC 508	Second instructor	Course designer/instructor
LSC 517	Course designer/instructor	n/a

Students averaged a grade of A in all the courses, regardless of conversion model. But the final grade does not show the whole picture, and overall, the Collapsed Topics model worked the best. It is not that the half-weeks did not work for the content of LSC 502, but the multi-week-spanning projects in both LSC 502 and LSC 517 were challenging for students to manage in the accelerated 7-week course schedule and created a more burdensome grading workload for the instructors.

The program and budget pitches in LSC 502 had to be graded in 3-4 days so students could incorporate feedback into their written plans, which put enormous pressure on instructors. Students also had trouble keeping track of what was due when because of the added layer of complexity from the half-week topics, a quiz at the end of each week covering both of the week's topics, and a multi-week-spanning project. Plus, students had the peer review and the follow-up written projects. This proved frustrating to manage for a group of students who were primarily brand new to both graduate education and online learning. They still excelled in their work, showing the determination of Master's students, but it came at a cost to their stress levels. Students also commented in their evaluations that they lacked time in the course for analysis and reflection.

In January 2022, the course designer/instructor and second instructor of LSC 502 discussed changing the course format to make it easier for students to achieve the learning outcomes and complete the assignments without being confused by the complicated schedule. They agreed to shift from the multi-week projects to weekly assignments that divided the larger projects into manageable chunks.

It was somewhat easier for students to manage multi-week-spanning projects in LSC 517 than LSC 502 because of the module format. In that format, students had two weeks to do the readings and discuss the topics, then a full week that was dedicated to working on a project. That, plus the guiding worksheets, helped the students complete the projects at a high-quality level without added stress. LSC 517 is not being offered again until Fall 2023, so no changes have yet been made to the course.

The weekly lab format of LSC 508 worked better overall than multi-week-spanning projects, regardless of half-week, collapsed, or project-based topic arrangements. Most weeks had the same items due every week, and the regularity helped students manage their time more effectively than in either LSC 502 or LSC 517. This was also the format most closely resembling the course's schedule in the traditional calendar. Both instructors felt there was no need to make any substantial changes to the course format after the first year.

5 CHANGES TO LSC 502

Discussion between the course designer/instructor and second instructor of LSC 502 led to the following changes in the course (See Table 8 for course schedule, topics, and assignments):

1. Return to a weekly topic schedule to minimize confusion over the course calendar. This was achieved by concatenating each week's A and B topics from Table 2.
2. Shift from multi-week projects to weekly activities to make the course more manageable for both students to complete and instructors to provide feedback.
3. Add detail in the weekly activity assignment worksheets to facilitate students' work.
4. Modify the budget activity to be more realistic: instead of creating a complete budget from scratch, students create level-funded, 3% increase, and 6% decrease budgets based on a prior year's budget that is provided to them.

Table 8. LSC 502 revised schedule for accelerated calendar, beginning Summer 2022.

Week	Topic	Assignments due Friday	Assignments due Monday
1	Course Introduction and the	Week 1 Activity: Key Concepts	Discussion Board; Peer

	Operating Environment		Review; Quiz
2	Managing Planning, Assessment, and Money	Week 2 Activity: Environmental Scan	Discussion Board; Peer Review; Quiz
3	Laws, Ethics, and Managing Change	Week 3 Activity: Strategic Planning	Discussion Board; Peer Review; Quiz
4	Leadership, Power, & Decision-Making	Week 4 Activity: Budget Exercise	Discussion Board; Peer Review; Quiz
5	Supporting Staff & Communication	Week 5 Activity: Propose a New Program or Service	Discussion Board; Peer Review; Quiz
6	Managing Marketing, Advocacy, Technology, & Facilities	Week 6 Activity: Create an Action Plan	Discussion Board; Peer Review; Quiz
7	Managing Your Career and Reflecting on the Course Topics	Week 7 Activity: Reflections	Discussion Board; Peer Review; Quiz

This new approach was implemented in Summer 2022; it resolved all the student complaints from the Topic A / Topic B schedule and the multi-week project approach. Because the same type of assignment was due on the same day each week, students were able to get into a rhythm with the schedule and focus on their work instead of constantly trying to figure out the schedule. Instructors had a more regular schedule for grading and were able to provide timely feedback. Students had more time to focus on each activity since Tuesday-Friday of each week was dedicated to reading only those materials required for the activity and completing the activity, as well as posting once or twice to the discussion board on topics related to the activity. Then they had more time to reflect on the readings and course concepts since they had Saturday-Monday to complete additional readings, review their peers' work, and reflect on the week's topic. The Week 7 activity bookended the Week 1 activity so there was a guaranteed time for reflection on the main course concepts. The weekly peer review also helped students build a sense of community in the course, which had been lacking.

6 CONCLUSIONS

By now, the course designer/instructor has taught LSC 502 twice, LSC 508 twice, and LSC 517 once in the accelerated format, along with having taught three other courses in the accelerated format. Two of those three other courses also used the weekly activity approach. The weekly activity approach has been the most successful by far. It was already the model in LSC 508 and is now the model in LSC 502. It is likely to be adopted in LSC 517 the next time that course is offered (not until Fall 2023). The weekly activity approach allows the instructor to break down larger assignments into manageable chunks that are tied to weekly topics, readings, discussion, and peer review. This ensures higher quality work, increases time for reflection, and builds a sense of community in an accelerated online course where such community is vital for student success. It also helps the instructor maintain a regular schedule for grading to students know when to expect and look for their feedback. While there are many models for organizing an accelerated online course, this course designer/instructor now prefers a weekly schedule with uniform due dates in each week to allow both students and instructor to get into a rhythm of work. This way, the schedule is not an added stressor in an accelerated course.

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