Abstract Title:
Blocked scheduling in Physical Therapist education as a curricular adjustment in response to COVID-19

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Purpose/hypothesis: COVID-19 caused widespread modifications in DPT education, requiring adoption of
remote and hybrid instructional models and course scheduling alterations. To decrease student burden
and cognitive load associated with managing multiple, simultaneous hybrid courses, our entry-level DPT
education program implemented a blocked schedule format for the Spring 2021 semester. A retrospective
evaluation based on the Kirkpatrick Model and implementation science principles was performed to
assess student and faculty perspectives for the Spring 2021 blocked schedule.

Subjects: 53 (79%) first-year students and 21 (77%) faculty who participated in the Spring 2021 blocked
schedule completed the survey.

Materials/methods: Anonymous, electronic student and faculty surveys were distributed upon semester
completion. Surveys collected quantitative and qualitative data in domains of satisfaction, fit,
sustainability, benefits, challenges, and recommendations. Descriptive statistics were used for
quantitative data and qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis. All data from both surveys were
integrated via matching through joint display analysis.

Results: Of survey respondents, the majority were satisfied (students: 75%, faculty: 66%), felt benefits
outweighed challenges (students: 75%, faculty: 52%), and welcomed future opportunities for a blocked
schedule (students: 87%, faculty: 67%). However, only 47% of faculty deemed blocked schedule to be
sustainable. Fit varied widely between courses (students: 56%-98%, faculty: 40-81%). Qualitatively
students felt better able to “focus” and achieve school/life balance with less “juggling” of other course
demands. Faculty observed benefits in student “engagement” and “recall”, however, also expressed
challenges of limited “wiggle room” for absences and technology glitches, “providing timely feedback and
intervention for struggling students”, obtaining work/life balance and concerns of insufficient student
long-term retention and burnout. Recommendations included varying length of the block by course and
optimizing consistency between courses.

Conclusions: Faculty and student perspectives differed, but overall satisfaction with the blocked schedule
was positive. Findings support the decision to adopt a blocked schedule to address students’ cognitive
load of managing multiple courses and support existing evidence outside of physical therapist education
of high student satisfaction. However, results suggest the need for less aggressive blocking of higher credit
hour courses. Additional work is critical to better understand the benefits and challenges of a blocked
schedule in DPT education by evaluating learning outcomes and strategies for optimal execution,
sustainability, and satisfaction. This study was a crucial first step in the process of understanding
implementation of alternative scheduling structures and providing options for future curricular
modifications, while also providing a model for development of an evaluation plan assessing educational
innovation in entry-level DPT education.
References:


