# Faculty Speak on the Impact of Time in Accelerated Courses

## Carrie Johnson

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**Abstract.** Eighteen faculty members participated in this qualitative study to determine the impact of reduced seat time in accelerated courses. The findings challenge critics who believe the accelerated delivery format compromises academic quality. The participants noted the importance of students in the learning process, emphasizing the significant workload outside of class. In addition, they described the high attendance rates and energy level that is typically sustained in accelerated courses. The participants learned to design their curriculum to focus on key learning outcomes.

Although accelerated courses and degree programs have existed for more than 30 years, critics often question how a quality course might be delivered in so few direct classroom instruction hours. Many believe that academic rigor is being sacrificed for student convenience and higher enrollments (Scott, 2003). While some perceive less time in the classroom equates to less learning, the research in this area is inconclusive (Seamon, 2004; Wlodkowski, 2003). Walberg (1988) stated that although time can contribute to learning, there were other variables that also need to be considered. These include previous experience, motivation, and quality of the learning experience.

Despite the growing popularity of and controversy surrounding accelerated courses, there is limited research in this area of adult and higher education. While accelerated programs have been the subject of more research within the past several years, studies remain limited, given the growth and popularity of these programs (Wlodkowski, 2003).

This study expands the research on accelerated courses by gathering data on the perceptions of faculty who teach both traditional and accelerated courses. While students frequently identify faculty as a key component to their learning in accelerated courses, faculty perceptions of these courses have not been studied often.

## Research Question

The research discussed in this article is part of a broader study that looked at faculty participants' views of accelerated courses and the changes they made in instructional strategies due to teaching them. This article focuses on the following research question: *How does reduced class time impact class instruction and learning?*

## Related Literature

In the early 1970s, colleges and universities were challenged by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education to increase accessibility of post-secondary education. During that time, higher education began experimenting with alternative delivery models. One of these alternative delivery models was accelerated courses (Caskey, 1994).

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Accelerated courses are designed to provide students with the opportunity to earn college credits, a certificate, or a college degree in less time than a traditional program. These courses are offered with fewer contact hours of instruction than a traditional-length course. For example, a typical three-credit class that meets for an entire semester might convene three times per week for an hour over a 15-week period, for a total of 45 classroom instruction hours, while an accelerated course might meet for five or eight weeks, one session per week, for four hours per session. These examples of accelerated courses would provide 20 or 32 hours of in-class instruction (Wlodkowski, 2003). One of the greatest challenges to those working in accelerated programs is responding to critics who question how adequate learning can take place in a course that is delivered in a shortened period of time with reduced in-class seat time.

In 1992, Scott and Conrad completed a comprehensive analysis of the literature on accelerated courses. They concluded that these courses do not compromise the educational outcome of the learners. In fact, when comparing the learning outcomes of the students enrolled in accelerated versus traditional length courses, they found the learning to be comparable and sometimes superior in the accelerated courses. These findings were found to be true across content areas. While Scott and Conrad concluded that the literature indicates that intensive courses might be effective alternatives to traditional length courses, they identified design flaws in some of the research. These studies were limited in their scope and duration, focused only on traditional college age students, and used grades, final exam scores, and pre-and post-tests as indicators of learning.

Responding to a study on intensive courses that concluded that quantitative courses were not suited to the accelerated delivery mode, Caskey (1994) conducted a quantitative analysis of students enrolled in accounting and algebra. Random samples for both content areas included equal numbers of students who had completed each course in an accelerated and traditional format. Students had self-selected which section of the course they would take. Enrollment in the accelerated courses was not limited to adult learners. Caskey studied accounting and algebra because these subjects had sequential courses. The data were analyzed using a two-tailed *t*-test. No significant difference was found between the grade point averages of students enrolled in the two different delivery modes. The only significant difference found was in the students' ages, with the average age ranging between three to six years older for the students in the intensive courses. This led

Caskey to conclude that students, especially adult students, can do well in accelerated courses.

Wlodkowski and Westover (1999) conducted a two-year evaluation of six undergraduate courses. Responding to several of the design flaws in previous studies that Scott and Conrad identified in their 1992 analysis of the literature on intensive courses, Wlodkowski and Westover utilized summative, performance-based measures of learning in an effort to more clearly assess student learning and mastery of course content. Students were evaluated on their responses to authentic case studies and problems, which required answers that reflected the general objectives of each course. In addition, faculty experts in each subject area designed and evaluated a summative evaluation for the courses studied. These faculty experts were unaware of the student demographics or the course delivery format the students had completed. When the accelerated courses were compared to the traditional courses, no significant differences were found in learning with one exception: Accounting II, which favored the accelerated format. While this difference was significant, it was small, and was thought by the researchers to be by chance (Wlodkowski & Westover, 1999).

Daniel (2000) summarized the research on the impact on short-term and long-term learning in traditional and accelerated courses. These studies showed that there was not a significant difference in the short-term or long-term learning based on the course delivery model. Students also appreciated being able to focus on a single or small number of courses, which allowed them to schedule their time more efficiently. Daniel also found that the longer class sessions of the accelerated courses encouraged more in-depth discussions, and required more intellectual investment and commitment. Daniel concluded that while the literature strongly indicated that accelerated courses produced satisfactory learning outcomes when compared to traditional-length courses, further research needed to be done addressing research methodology concerns.

Kasworm (2001) examined students' experiences in an accelerated degree completion program in applied management. The participants appreciated the practical application of their learning, believing that connecting their classroom learning to their work place made it relevant and exciting. There was some concern expressed, however, over the intensity of the classes. This caused the students stress and anxiety. Several participants expressed concern that some family members and co-workers perceived the accelerated degree program as being less demanding than a traditional degree. The participants responded that while their degree was "different," it was not any less rigorous.

## Research Methodology

This basic interpretive qualitative study was designed to add to the limited research on accelerated courses by obtaining the perceptions of faculty who teach both traditional and accelerated courses. "In conducting a basic qualitative study, you seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and world-view of the people involved, or a combination of these" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 6). Qualitative methods of research are well suited to uncovering the meaning of an experience for those involved, making such methodology especially appropriate for an applied field such as adult education. A basic assumption of qualitative research is that individuals construct their own reality based on their interaction with their social worlds (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

Data collection included semistructured interviews with 18 participants, lasting between one and two hours. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The interviews did not progress in a structured format, but rather evolved from the participants' comments. While a set of potential questions was created prior to the interviews to provide a starting point, a general open-ended interview approach was utilized to provide for flexibility while covering the research questions (Patton, 2002).

I conducted interviews until the data reached saturation. I felt that I reached saturation after 16 interviews and five class visits. At this time, however, I had not interviewed any English instructors. Because I had often heard from colleagues that writing cannot be taught in an accelerated manner, I was interested in speaking with a faculty member who taught writing. A colleague recommended an English professor who was willing to participate in this study; this participant recommended a second English instructor who was willing to participate. After interviewing the two individuals and not identifying any new themes from the data they provided, I concluded the data collection phase of the study.

Data were analyzed and coded for emerging themes. I used the constant comparative method, continually comparing individual units of data with each other seeking similarities and differences (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Member checks were done to help confirm the validity of my analysis. This involved seeking clarification from the participants during the interview and during the data analysis process to make sure that I had understood what they were telling me.

Class observations were used to triangulate the data. Observations provided two elements that could not be gained from an interview alone. First, the observations took place in the natural setting. For this study, that was accelerated classes. In addition, the observational data provided a direct experience with what was being studied rather than the interview alone, which provided a secondhand account of the situation being studied (Merriam, 1998).

## Participants

I solicited participants through an e-mail sent to program administrators and faculty who were members of the Illinois Consortium for Adult Accelerated Programs (ICAAP). Some participants volunteered, while others were nominated by their colleagues. Participants from diverse academic disciplines were enlisted for this study.

I communicated with each prospective participant by phone or e-mail to assure that he/she met the criteria for the research study. Full-time and adjunct faculty members who had taught at least five classes in the traditional delivery model and at least five courses in the accelerated delivery method at four-year institutions were invited to participate. The rationale for this requirement was that faculty must have had the opportunity to reflect on their instruction and make and test modifications to their teaching techniques in order to understand the differences in their approaches to instruction and the differences between these two delivery modes. These courses were all offered in a face-to-face classroom environment. Online courses were not included in this study. Faculty from a variety of academic disciplines and multiple institutions were included. Because the traditional and accelerated courses were not directly compared in this study, it was not necessary for the participants to have taught the same courses utilizing the traditional and accelerated delivery methods.

Of the 18 participants, ten had earned their doctoral degrees, four were ABD (all but dissertation), and four held master's degrees. They had an average of 20.4 years of teaching experience. The group included full-time and adjunct faculty.

## Study Limitations

The study was limited to a small sample of faculty in a limited geographical area.

While it begins the conversation of how faculty perceive and adjust to the reduced instructional time in accelerated courses, there are possibilities for future research. Additional research should broaden the sample size and expand the geographic region from which the participants are selected.

The participants in this study were required to have taught at least five sections of both an accelerated course and at least five sections of a traditional course. While this requirement was intended to engage participants who had enough experience with both delivery models to have a deep understanding of the learning process in both course formats, it eliminated faculty who may have taught accelerated courses and chosen not to continue teaching them.

## Findings

All of the participants stated that they enjoyed teaching the accelerated courses and, for the most part, did not believe that reduced instructional time compromised academic quality. Although participants occasionally mentioned the challenge of the reduced class time, many of them actually preferred the accelerated delivery model to the traditional length course. Several reasons were given for why these faculty members considered the adult accelerated classes to be a viable, and often preferable, alternative to the traditional delivery model. These are explained in the following section.

**Increased Learner Responsibility**

The participants frequently mentioned the increased attendance in their accelerated courses. These faculty members typically set clear expectations in this area with the students in the accelerated classes. In addition to the increase in class attendance in an accelerated course over a traditional course, the faculty members also commented on the additional time the students in the accelerated courses put into preparing for class.

Ryan, an accounting professor, stated that the increased pace of the accelerated courses led to higher attendance rates. Ryan found that the higher attendance rate added to the class interaction. In addition, the pace of the course led the students to stay on track and come to class prepared. When teaching traditional-length courses, Ryan typically assigned one chapter from the textbook per week. In the accelerated courses, however, it was common to cover at least two chapters per week. Ryan stated that he found the acceleration kept both him and the students focused on what they were there for—learning.

Debbi also saw a higher attendance rate in the accelerated courses she taught than in her traditional courses, stating that she rarely had students absent in the accelerated courses unless there was a family emergency. Debbi believed that the students in the accelerated courses saw the value of the class interaction. Allison concurred, stating, "The accelerated students are always there, and the

traditional students have the attitude that 'I don't have to come to class. I'll just read the book."

The increased attendance and student preparation had an impact on the faculty members who participated in this study. The faculty members appeared to have great respect for the students in their accelerated courses, frequently commenting on their commitment to their education.

Attendance was often an expectation that was not negotiable with the faculty members when they taught the accelerated courses. Rebecca stated, "Class attendance is one of the requirements of my intensive courses. I don't allow students to miss more than one session or they know it will impact their grade." Rebecca stated that she had not been successful with the same requirement in the traditional length courses. Her students in those courses often did not see the benefit of coming to every class session because they were not missing the same amount of course material as those participating in an accelerated course. In addition, Rebecca stated that she often had student athletes in her traditional courses that needed to miss class for games. She found that having high attendance in the accelerated courses added to the continuity of the course and made it easier for her to plan instruction. Cindy stated that she had almost perfect attendance in her accelerated courses. She added that the importance of attendance is emphasized in the program's recruiting process, giving the students a clear idea of the requirements before they enroll. Cindy teaches in a cohort model; in this setting the group stays together for over a year to complete their major courses together. She declared that it was impressive how the students in the accelerated courses would arrange their lives around that one class session each week and not allow anything to interfere with their time in class.

In addition to the participants' comments on the higher class attendance in the accelerated classes, they were also impressed with the out-of-class preparation from the students in their accelerated classes. Many accelerated programs require the students to have their books and complete an assignment prior to the first class session. Pat shared an experience of how, after not teaching an accelerated course for a while, she forgot to send her students a pre-class assignment. Instead of letting this slide, students enrolled in the class began calling her seeking this information.

Pat saw the skills of the students in her accelerated courses as developmental and directly related to their previous experiences with other accelerated courses. Pat teaches an accelerated math course that students may enroll in prior to, during, or after going through their accelerated degree-completion program. Pat observed a difference in

the classroom actions and attitudes of the various students, depending on where they were in their program. She indicated that the students who were enrolled in or had completed their degree program prior to taking her class seemed to understand the effective use of class time and prior class preparation better than the less experienced adult learners. Pat attributed this to the group work that was done in the degree completion program that encouraged the students to actively engage in their learning. Pat indicated that she found that she needed to be more in tune with the group process when teaching the accelerated courses, stating that if she taught the accelerated courses on a more regular basis, she would feel the need to get some training in group dynamics.

Pat works at a university where students complete their major courses in a cohort. She applauded the work of the faculty members who taught the major courses, explaining that she believed they were skilled in creating a team environment where the students supported and challenged each other throughout the program. Pat credited those faculty members with setting the students up to be successful in the accelerated program.

Pat's comments certainly give adult educators an opportunity for reflection. While much of the research in adult education discusses the intrinsic motivation of the adult learners to actively engage in the classroom, Pat's insights suggest that this might be a developmental process. While all adult learners may not have an innate ability to be actively engaged in the learning process, the expectations and modeling of instructors and other students in the accelerated courses might cultivate this skill in their students. If this is the case, the faculty member's ability to set clear expectations and create a collaborative learning environment might contribute to the learning in the accelerated courses.

Rick, a philosophy instructor, explained that the content from his courses is often difficult to comprehend. While his traditional students frequently chose not to read the materials and opted for lectures in the classroom to cover what they had not read, the adult learners typically tackled the readings. The students in the accelerated courses used their class time to seek clarification from the instructor and each other. Rick described the devotion of the students in the accelerated courses, stating that although the accelerated courses had less in-class time, he usually assigned more reading to the students in those classes, knowing they would do the reading and come prepared with questions and comments. Rick had discovered that the adult students' motivation and desire to learn compensated for the lack of instructional time within the classroom.

I had the opportunity to observe Rick's class. This group had been meeting for three or four weeks when I visited. It was obvious that the students had attempted to comprehend the assignments, as they came prepared with questions for Rick. It was a fascinating discussion which brought the complicated philosophical theories to life. The entire group was engaged; every student participated in the discussion. As Rick told me in our interview, these students did appear devoted to mastering the material.

While many of the participants indicated that they found the students in the accelerated classes came to class prepared, Amy did not find this to always be the case. She explained:

> I found that I have to rely on the fact that they [the students] have read the material before they come to [the accelerated] class. That isn't always the case, but nevertheless, you have to expect that or you just can't get anything done … I don't change my expectations. … I don't expect them to cover any less. So, if they didn't read it, they are going to have to make sure that they read it after the class because there are going to be some things based on that, that they have to know.

Allison described experiences similar to Amy, stating:

> Even though we say we are putting the responsibility of learning on the students and there is more preparation outside of class, sometimes that does not happen. When that happens [unprepared students], how do you still address the learning outcomes, when you don't have that luxury to say, "You know, we're just not going to be able to get to it tonight? We are going to have to do it on Friday, whatever." But there isn't a Friday.

In these cases, Allison is forced to give the students additional work to prepare outside of class for the following session.

These participants' comments suggest that there is an expectation of preparedness on the part of the learner in the accelerated courses that does not always exist in the traditional classes. Even when the students do not fulfill that expectation, the instructors who participated in this study continued as planned in the accelerated course, not waiting for the students to catch up. They were very conscious of the limited time they had with the learners and were not willing to allow a few students who came to class

unprepared impact the planned instruction or learning outcomes for the course.

### Sustaining Course Energy

Many of the study participants mentioned the level of energy maintained during the accelerated courses, indicating that there were often lulls in the traditional-length courses that did not happen in the accelerated courses. Amanda commented on the consistent energy she experienced in the accelerated courses compared to the traditional-length courses that impacted not only the students but also impacted her as an educator. She called her traditional length courses "a long haul." Amanda continued:

> It's wearing on the class and it's wearing on the instructor, too, when, at least for me, when I try to keep this high-energy intense thing going … It kind of slumps in the middle [of the traditional term] and the group dynamics change … It's like I'm out in the front there and I turn around and there is nobody behind me. That impacted me.

Amanda was distracted by the students and their lack of attention in the traditional-length courses; that in turn impacted her interaction with the learners. Amanda stated that she preferred teaching the accelerated courses because the students… "are there with you. They never leave you out there hanging." The interaction with the learners was something that Amanda obviously valued. She appeared to be drained when she spoke of the traditional classes she taught and the lack of engagement she often experienced from many of the students taking those courses. Amanda needed to interact with the students, and not simply provide them with the course content.

Stating that he preferred teaching accelerated courses over traditional courses "without question," Reuben elaborated:

> It's quicker, both for me and the students. There is a sense of moving through the material. There is a sense of urgency to get through the material, not in a bad way. You really have to stay on track, we have to stay focused. We can certainly get this done, it's not insurmountable.

Reuben continued:

> When the 16-week students start, they are happy to be there, they are looking forward to it. By the seventh or eighth week, it's "We've been doing this for a while and we are not even done." They kind of run out of gas. My accelerated students, they never run out of gas.

As the students' enthusiasm waned, so did Reuben's. The lack of energy from the learners affected class attendance as well as class participation, taking its toll on Reuben and his attitude about teaching. As Reuben described teaching a semester-long course, it appeared that not only did his students "run out of gas," but so did Reuben.

Rebecca made similar comments, mentioning that a full semester is a very long time. She talked about the sports activities and other events that seem to take priority in the lives of the students in her traditional classes. Rebecca appreciated the intensity of the accelerated courses and the focus that the learners had on the classes because they frequently enrolled in only one course at a time. She described the intensity of the accelerated course, comparing it to teambuilding, explaining:

> All the methodology around teamwork in the corporate world says the best teamwork comes when you have tight time requirements and there's an intense strong need to deliver. That's team methodology. That's a part of what I see the accelerated courses based on. If you take that away, you decrease momentum, you decrease the urgency, the quality.

In Rebecca's opinion, this individual focus of the learners and the demand to accomplish something in a brief period of time enhanced the learning experience. As a business instructor, Rebecca believes that the expectations in the accelerated courses mimic the business world, creating a more realistic setting for the adult learner.

The participants believe the motivation of the learners often declines as the courses lengthened. The learners had numerous distractions that required their attention during a semester-long course that were not present during a shorter time frame. This decrease in motivation, as the course continued, was also distracting to some of the faculty members. The participants often stated that they appreciate the brevity and intensity of the accelerated courses. They believe that the students are more focused on the learning when they felt the pressure to complete the course in a shortened period of time.

### Is There Really Less Time?

The participants expressed different views of the reduced time in the accelerated courses. While some of

them expressed concern over the lack of instructional time, others dismissed this as a concern.

Joel described his experience teaching accelerated courses and traditional courses, stating that he found himself better prepared when teaching the accelerated courses. Because of the shortened time period involved in delivering an accelerated course, Joel explained that he was very focused on the learning outcomes from the beginning of the courses. Not only did Joel find this focus necessary, but he also found it easier to plan the accelerated courses, stating that he found the traditional length course to be "much more fragmented." Joel believes the shortened time of the course helps him see the landscape of the entire course and allows him to clearly structure things before the course begins. Joel also stated that after teaching accelerated courses he found that he changed the way he taught the traditional courses as well. From his experience teaching accelerated courses, Joel learned to focus clearly on learning outcomes. He explained that prior to teaching accelerated courses, he included items in courses simply because he found them interesting. Joel now carefully designs his courses to concentrate on the desired learning. Rather than finding the shortened class detrimental to learning, Joel believed that it helped him focus on what he needed to cover in his all his courses, actually enhancing his instruction and the student learning in all the classes he teaches.

The study participants expressed different views of the reduced time in the accelerated courses. While some believed the structure of the accelerated courses actually provided a more efficient delivery model, others acknowledged the challenge the condensed class time presented.

Amy shared her thoughts on the lack of efficiency of the time format in the accelerated courses:

> When we talk about clock hours, yes, it is reduced by one-third, but when I think about it, it's reduced in another way. A four-hour block is not going to be as efficient as if you break that down into three smaller blocks. So, you just can't get through it; it's just not as efficient of a use of time.

Amy finds it challenging to deliver courses with less contact time. She also believes that the shorter periods of time devoted to each session in a traditional-length course provides a more productive use of time.

Rebecca's thoughts in this area directly contradict Amy's comments. Describing the accelerated courses, Rebecca stated:

> We take a concept and we work it and manipulate it and we play with it and we do all kinds of things with it before the end of a particular class session. I feel like with the traditional undergrad it takes time to bring them back to speed from the last session and the class is almost over again already.

Several other participants commented on the structure of the class, with some perceiving the long blocks of time in the accelerated courses as positive to learning, while others see it as a detriment to learning. These conflicting views might exist for a number of reasons. First, instructors' teaching styles might influence their preferences for longer or shorter class sessions. Instructors' personality types or learning styles might also impact their perceptions. For example, a more extroverted teacher might find the longer class sessions energizing, while someone more introverted might find them exhausting. An instructor who is a more kinesthetic learner might find it easier to engage the students in a four-hour session, while a more reflective learner might desire shorter sessions where there is time between classes to build on previous class interactions. Finally, the academic discipline might impact the effectiveness of the different course formats.

There is some research that supports the notion that more time is spent on task in accelerated courses. Often less time is spent on "start-up" and "wind-down" activities in the classroom due to the sense of urgency that students and faculty experience in accelerated courses (Donaldson & Graham, 2002).

Cindy shed some additional light on the use of class time in the accelerated courses. Describing the program content and the careful design of the two accelerated programs in which she taught, Cindy explained that these adult accelerated programs made sure that the courses were not repetitive. The books are selected for the faculty, and the curriculum is designed so the courses do not overlap and cover the same material. Cindy's comments are relevant not only to administrators and course designers, but for the faculty who teach accelerated courses. While administrators of accelerated programs can and typically do monitor course development to ensure that the required learning objectives are built into each course, it is important that the instructors be familiar with the program goals and the portion of these goals that the course or courses they are teaching should fulfill. Teachers in accelerated courses do not have the luxury of wasting classroom time; therefore, they must be consistent in achieving course objectives. Ryan, an accounting instructor, discussed the importance

of the instructors teaching accelerated business courses knowing something about the other courses, explaining that students should be able to connect course concepts not only to their work places, but also to their other classes. He suggested the teacher be the "golden thread" saying to the students, "I'm going to weave you through all these classes." By taking the time to explain how the courses were related and concepts interacted with or build on each other, Ryan felt that students' learning could be stronger.

### Is There Ever Enough Time?

Regardless of the amount of time allotted for a course, some faculty members believe they never have enough time, whether the course is accelerated or not. They have learned to adapt to the time they do have, however. Joel, an English instructor, discussed the writing courses he teaches:

> I think you could say that for any given period of time that if the class is productive there is always the sense that if only we had a little more time to cover this. And I've had that experience even in traditional, 16-week classes–if we could just spend more time on this, but we've got to move on to something else. I've felt that as a frustration, but I don't see that as a real problem, because any teaching is going to involve a time constraint and it's a matter of how you use that time constraint.

Laurel, another writing instructor, shared her thoughts on the different amounts of time she has in the traditional and accelerated courses:

> In the 16-week program I have more time to develop. We can take more time to read through the whole essay in class and analyze it and diagram it and pull it apart and then I can put them in the small groups. … Whereas with adults [in the accelerated courses], a lot of times I would just hand them a document and say, "Here are the highlights. You can go read this because we just don't have the time to go through those things." On the other hand, the adult students are much more motivated and I think they're much more likely to see how what we do in the academic setting can serve them in other places.

Laurel explained that frequently, adult students in the accelerated courses realize that their writing is improving during the course and share this with her. She believes

it is the direct practical application of their new skills in the workplace that provides them with an opportunity to practice and develop their writing in a meaningful way despite the reduced instructional time.

Both Joel and Laurel acknowledged the issue of time in the classroom, suggesting that although they would always like to have more time with the students, they had learned to work around this. Even when teaching the traditional-length course, both of these faculty members often find themselves wanting more time. Regardless of the course length, they learned to realize that they could encourage learning to take place beyond the course, hoping that this would lead to lifelong learning on the part of the student.

Designing the accelerated courses seemed to challenge the faculty participants in a way that encouraged them to renew their practices. "In the traditional [class] it seemed like teachers were filling hours with possible unnecessary work," Ryan stated. Ryan indicated that he was very strategic in planning the accelerated courses to cover the most significant items and things that students really needed to learn. He appreciated the focus and the fact that time was not being filled with insignificant information.

## Implications for Practice

Wlodkowski and Kasworm (2003) stated, "Probably the most productive and effective role that accelerated learning can play in higher education is as an ally with traditional education." The participants of this study are doing exactly this. They are willing to teach traditional and accelerated courses. As a consequence of teaching accelerated courses, they reflected on their successes and challenges, and adjusted their instruction appropriately.

While several of the participants faced some challenges adjusting to the lack of classroom instruction time, they all felt positive about their experience teaching accelerated courses, challenging the belief that increased instructional time equates to increased learning. They also provided several suggestions that might be helpful to faculty who teach accelerated courses:

• In an accelerated course, there is a great deal of work that takes place outside of the classroom and without guidance from the teacher. Faculty must be clear in setting such expectations and remain consistent with these expectations. Instructors should expect learners to complete reading and other assignments prior to class. While students might not always fulfill these requirements, instructors should not react to this by lowering expectations.

- A clear and strict attendance policy should be established from the beginning of the course, emphasizing the requirement and significance of attending all class sessions.

- Although faculty should set high expectations and stick to them, they must also be cautioned that not all adult learners enter the classroom with the same skills and abilities to be self-directed. This might be a developmental process. Instructors might be able to cultivate self-directed learning in their students by providing clear expectations, modeling, and creating a collaborative learning environment.

- Faculty should be strategic in designing accelerated courses. They must carefully align their instruction and assignments with the desired learning outcomes. Faculty must define in their own minds what the goal of each course will be, and accept the limitations of the learning that will take place in the classroom. By trying to cover too many concepts, students might be overwhelmed. This does not mean that learning outcomes should be compromised, but faculty might select depth over breadth, with the goal of providing students with the desire to engage in additional learning on their own in the future. This suggestion has been made previously. Donaldson and Graham (2002) recommended that educators working with students in accelerated programs should emphasize that these programs focus on depth over breadth, stating, "Adults tend to be motivated to learn at a deep rather than a superficial level" (p. 9). Brookfield (1990) concurred indicating that students' most common complaint in learning situations is too much information being packed into a course.

- Student-centered learning is important. The instructor should welcome questions from the students and engage the students in learning through class discussions and activities.

- When teaching in a degree completion program where all students have the same degree requirements, faculty might benefit from being aware of the content in the other courses. This could eliminate duplication of course content, as well as allow the individual faculty members to assist students in making connections between the courses.

Although accelerated courses have been a part of higher education for over 30 years, they continue to be criticized for their lack of academic rigor. Accelerated courses have been referred to as "McEducation" and "Drive-Thru U" to emphasize what some academics consider the inferior quality of these courses due to the speed in which they are delivered (Wlodkowski, 2003). The participants of this study, however, challenge such perceptions. The suggestions they offer can assist others as they prepare to teach accelerated courses.

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