

Australia: Western Sydney University students not told about block teaching plan

A WSU Rank-and-File Committee member
20 October 2026

Students at Western Sydney University (WSU), one of the largest in Australia and with a predominantly working-class student population, have not been informed of a proposed plan to switch all WSU's courses to modular or block teaching by 2029.

The "Western Momentum" model, revealed to academic staff last month, has serious implications for students and staff alike. For educators and professional staff, it would mean even more intensive workloads, with all assessment and marking for each subject to be completed in just four weeks, rather than a 13-week semester.

For students, it would mean completing four blocks each semester, instead of four subjects over a semester, leaving no time for deeper or reflective learning, nor for in-depth feedback.

According to a Western Momentum YouTube presentation: "Students complete a 10-credit subject in four weeks by attending classes for roughly 3 hours a day, 3 days a week, finishing and assessing the subject completely before moving to the next block."

Management has given academic staff less than two months, until November 6, for nominal consultation on this wholesale restructuring, with the WSU Board of Trustees to make a final decision next March.

Last month's management email announcing the plan claimed: "Students say they like the modular model because it offers them a better use of their time and enhances the campus experience." But students know nothing about the proposal!

A Western Momentum site states: "Students will be extensively consulted prior to any decision to implement." Yet the timetable of making a final decision by March renders meaningful consultation impossible. Most students will be on the summer break from early December to late February.

After being informed about the plan by the WSU Rank-and-File Committee, one student said: "This came as a shock to me. We have not been informed about the changes being placed on the education style of teaching. In my own experience as a master's student in counselling, it is impossible to teach these concepts without requiring time for absorption of information and reflection.

"I am very concerned about the feedback process they say

they have done. We are completely uninformed. Even now, it is hard to complete a unit within six months, and if anything I believe we need more time, rather than less."

The student said the first four weeks of a subject was "usually just an introduction" and it took time for students to decide whether to continue a subject before the four-week census date to withdraw from a subject without incurring fees. Under the block model, students might have only 24 hours to decide.

"Interestingly, I have been aware of this block model of learning at other universities, but it is usually for online courses, and each unit has an eight-week period. When applying for my postgraduate studies I specifically picked Western Sydney University because it was face-to-face and uses a traditional learning model. My opinion hasn't changed."

Another student agreed, saying: "It takes us 4 weeks just to settle in the unit. Census is also after four weeks of study so how would that affect fees for students who drop units or swap their courses?"

Alongside students, many casual educators have been told nothing also. One told the WSU Rank-and-File Committee: "I teach casually, and I hadn't heard anything about it either. I don't think any casuals will be able to do that, honestly."

For casuals, who do a substantial amount of the teaching at WSU and other universities, the model would effectively mean working full-time during each four-week block. That would make it difficult to juggle other commitments, including the extra work on which they often depend financially.

The management claims that modular learning means "smaller class sizes and increased face-to-face time in class" and "also helps to assure learning through in-class assessment."

But the proposed model would deliver less in-class time—nine hours a week, or 36 hours a block—compared to the usual three hours a week over a 13-week semester, or 39 hours a subject. Plus, it would cram assessment into that class time, with teachers having to assess and return results before the start of the next week.

Peer-reviewed research has raised concerns about superficial learning at the expense of deep learning. According to one study, the problems include "decrease in time students spent studying outside of class time," "students needing to juggle caring responsibilities" and "inadequate time for students to

revise papers or for instructors to provide feedback on assessment.”

This cramming of subjects is designed to discourage critical thought and instead impart narrow skills, as required by employers.

WSU management claims that modular learning improves subject pass rates by 10 percent to 15 percent, leading to higher student satisfaction and retention rates, “particularly among student groups like ours, in Western Sydney.”

It cites two other predominantly working-class universities, Victoria University in Melbourne, where block teaching was imposed in 2018, and Southern Cross University in northern New South Wales, where it was inflicted in 2021.

This implies that Western Sydney students and “groups like ours” should be subjected to more vocational education than students at more elite institutions.

Management claims positive shifts in student outcomes from WSU’s The College, a feeder college where block teaching was inflicted [word used above] from the start of last year, accompanied by job cuts. Supposedly, student retention and completion rates increased from 56 percent to 86 percent and student satisfaction rose to 94 percent.

But educators at The College have reported onerous conditions for staff and students. Staff must teach nine hours of face-to-face classes per week and mark assessments continuously.

The WSU management is promoting the prospect of students completing their courses more quickly or obtaining “stackable credentials,” so they are never more than 12 months away from completing a qualification.

The Albanese Labor government’s cuts to international student numbers, as part of an anti-immigrant campaign, are intensifying the financial pressure on Australia’s 39 public universities, forcing them to fight each other for enrolments, including by offering students vocational “micro-credential” courses.

The government is starving the universities of adequate funding, along with public schools, public hospitals, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and other social programs, while allocating hundreds of billions of dollars for AUKUS and other preparations for a US-led war against China.

Labor’s 2024 Universities Accord is reshaping tertiary education to satisfy the employment and research needs of big business and the military at the behest of a government that has already backed the criminal US-Israeli war on Iran, the escalating US-NATO war on Russia and the US-armed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The WSU management says the switch to block teaching is in line with the Statement of Strategic Priorities issued by the government’s new Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC). All funding is now tied to universities signing “Mission Based Compacts” with ATEC to align with these priorities.

The national priorities are focussed on meeting corporate- and government-driven “labour market demand” in listed industries, such as war-related “sovereign capability and food security, including advanced manufacturing and critical minerals.”

The WSU Rank-and-File Committee was established in mid-2024 to oppose this agenda. We correctly warned that the block teaching blueprint at the WSU’s The College would be proposed throughout WSU and across the university sector unless there was a unified struggle by staff and students and the broader working class against it.

But the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) opposed any organised struggle and this year joined the other main campus trade union, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), in pushing through new enterprise agreements at WSU that pave the way for further restructuring, on top of the 4,000 jobs eliminated nationally over the past 18 months.

As well as sub-inflationary pay rises and more intensive workloads, the agreements provide for a closer partnership between the unions and the management in “Managing Change.”

Labor’s agenda also includes wartime-like measures such as banning any research or teaching cooperation with individuals or institutions in countries deemed to be threats to Australian national security or foreign relations, particularly China, Russia and Iran.

To fight this agenda, university workers and students must build new genuine democratic forms of organisation—rank-and-file committees, totally independent of the trade unions—to fight for first-class public education based on the needs of working people and society as a whole, not the dictates of capitalist governments, the corporate ruling class and the plunge into war.

We urge students, as well as staff, to contact us to report on and discuss these developments. Contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the educators’ rank-and-file network initiated by the Socialist Equality Party:

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: [CFPE_Australia](https://twitter.com/CFPE_Australia)



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact