**Sessions Offerings Working Group: Discussion Paper**

**Purpose**

This discussion paper has been prepared by the **Sessions Offerings Working Group**, which was established by the authority of a Senate/SLTC Resolution.

Feedback is sought from individuals, Departments, Centres and Faculties. Please provide feedback in writing by **October 23rd** to Mitch Parsell: [mitch.parsell@mq.edu.au](mailto:mitch.parsell@mq.edu.au)

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# Executive Summary

This paper presents four teaching sessions models:

1. 2.5 Semester model
2. Trimester
3. Mixed-Modules model
4. Four Semester model

The models embody (to varying degrees) three guiding principles:

* **Consistency**: A consistent approach to processes and governance;
* **Efficiency**: Efficient utilisation of the infrastructure; and,
* **Flexibility**: The flexibility to accommodate alternative teaching pedagogies, multiple entry points and accelerated progression.

Feedback is sought from individuals, Departments, Centres and Faculties on whether these models are appropriate, to what degree they overcome problems with the present system and to what degree they embody the guiding principles.

## Consultation Process

An earlier version of this paper was presented to the July Senate Learning and Teaching Committee. The following offices were consulted prior to the submission of the paper:

* Faculties
* DVC Students and Registrar
* Property (Timetabling)
* PVC, Learning & Teaching
* Macquarie University International College

# Background

Macquarie University has a number of official sessions during which teaching occurs. The key sessions are two 13-week sessions (Session One and Session Two) and a compressed session of approximately 6 weeks (Session 3). In addition to the 13 teaching weeks, Session One and Session Two each have a 2-week mid-session break and a 3-week examinations period for a total of 18 weeks. This structure is shown in Figure 1. The structure for Session 3, with the break spread over the Christmas and New Year period, is provided in Figure 2.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Teaching | | | | | | Break | | Teaching | | | | | | | Exams | | |
| **Weeks** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | B1 | B2 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | E1 | E2 | E3 |

**Figure 1:** Structure of Sessions 1 and 2

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Teaching | |  | | Teaching | | | Exam |
| **Weeks** | 1 | 2 | B1 | B2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |  |
| **Dates** | Dec. 8 | | Dec. 20 | | Jan. 5 | | | Jan. 27 |

**Figure 2:** Structure of Session 3 (2014 Dates)

While this structure looks acceptable, there are at least five substantive problems.

1. The actual situation is far more complex with different areas of the University offering a range of competing sessions. Appendix 1 provides a more comprehensive picture, but even this is incomplete as it does not include, for example, the sessions offered by Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. This complexity can create confusion for students.
2. Only Sessions One and Two have formally integrated timelines for results assurance and approval.
3. The present structure makes inefficient use of the University’s teaching resources, especially physical spaces, which are in high demand during both Session One and Two, but remain essentially unused for large periods of the year.
4. The present system is inflexible forcing a majority of offerings to conform to a 13-week teaching. Some areas of the University have requested a more flexible approach to delivery. In particular, there has been an expressed desire to enable an intensive mode of delivery. For example, MMCCS in Arts have requested the ability to teach video production in ‘block mode’ and FBE are keen on teaching the MIB in intensive mode online.
5. It is also becoming increasingly important to enable both multiple points of entry as well as accelerated pathways for some students. By introducing a selection of targeted accelerated programs, our Future Students, Pathways and International teams may be able to direct-market to prospective students. More flexible offerings, and particularly more intensive modes of teaching, will also allow academics a greater ability to structure their time in a manner that enables them to be more effective in their research. For example, some academics may choose to teaching in intensive blocks to enable a more focused period of research, while others may opt to spread their teaching more evenly to enable more sustained and continuous focus on research throughout the year. Many competitor universities are also reconsidering and offering alternative models for session delivery including: UTS, Sydney, Deakin, ANU and UNSW.

## Principles

The problems with the present structure suggest three high-level principles, which any alternative structure should attempt to satisfy:

* **Consistency**: The structure should enable a consistent approach in terms of administrative processes and governance: results assurance and approval processes.
* **Efficiency**: The structure should enable the University to utilise its infrastructure more efficiently.
* **Flexibility**: The structure should enable more flexibility to accommodate alternative teaching pedagogies (where suitable), multiple entry points and accelerated progression, and alternative workload models for our academic staff (balancing research and teaching expectations).

# Alternative Models

In identifying alternative models for consideration, the Working Group has sampled the offerings of appropriate comparator institutions and explored a range of proposals from Group members and the broader academic community. Four models have been selected for discussion:

1. The 2.5 Semester model
2. Trimester
3. Mixed-Modules model
4. Four Semester model

None of the proposed models will impact staff or student workload (see Appendix 2).

## The 2.5 Semester Model

The 2.5 semester model with dates for the 2016 calendar year is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1:** The2.5 Semester Model with 2016 Dates

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Currently planned /approved by Senate** | **2.5 Semester Option** |
| **Monday** | **Public Holidays** | **North Ryde Campus** | **North Ryde Campus** |
| 4-Jan-16 | New Year's Day | S3 Week 3 | S3 W2 |
| 11-Jan-16 |  | S3 Week 4 | S3 W3 |
| 18-Jan-16 |  | S3 Week 5 | S3 W4 |
| 25-Jan-16 | Australia Day Tuesday 26 Jan | Exams | S3 W5 |
| 1-Feb-16 |  | Exams/Recess | Exams |
| 8-Feb-16 |  | Recess | Exams/Recess |
| 15-Feb-16 |  | Recess | Recess |
| 22-Feb-16 |  | Recess | Recess |
| 29-Feb-16 |  | S1 W1 | S1 W1 |
| 7-Mar-16 |  | S1 W2 | S1 W2 |
| 14-Mar-16 |  | S1 W3 | S1 W3 |
| 21-Mar-16 | Good Friday 25th Mar | S1 W4 | S1 W4 |
| 28-Mar-16 | Easter Monday 28th Mar | S1 W5 | S1 W5 |
| 4-Apr-16 |  | S1 W6 | S1 W6 |
| 11-Apr-16 |  | Recess | Recess |
| 18-Apr-16 |  | Recess | Recess |
| 25-Apr-16 | Anzac Day 25th Apr | S1 W7 | S1 W7 |
| 2-May-16 |  | S1 W8 | S1 W8 |
| 9-May-16 |  | S1 W9 | S1 W9 |
| 16-May-16 |  | S1 W10 | S1 W10 |
| 23-May-16 |  | S1 W11 | S1 W11 |
| 30-May-16 |  | S1 W12 | S1 W12 |
| 6-Jun-16 |  | S1 W13 | S1 W13 |
| 13-Jun-16 | Queen's Birthday 13th Jun | Exams | Exams |
| 20-Jun-16 |  | Exams | Exams |
| 27-Jun-16 |  | Exams | Exams |
| 4-Jul-16 |  | Recess | Recess |
| 11-Jul-16 |  | Recess | Recess |
| 18-Jul-16 |  | Recess | Recess |
| 25-Jul-16 |  | Recess | Recess |
| 1-Aug-16 |  | S2 W1 | S2 W1 |
| 8-Aug-16 |  | S2 W2 | S2 W2 |
| 15-Aug-16 |  | S2 W3 | S2 W3 |
| 22-Aug-16 |  | S2 W4 | S2 W4 |
| 29-Aug-16 |  | S2 W5 | S2 W5 |
| 5-Sep-16 |  | S2 W6 | S2 W6 |
| 12-Sep-16 |  | S2 W7 | S2 W7 |
| 19-Sep-16 |  | Recess | Recess |
| 26-Sep-16 |  | Recess | Recess |
| 3-Oct-16 | Labour Day 3rd Oct | S2 W8 | S2 W8 |
| 10-Oct-16 |  | S2 W9 | S2 W9 |
| 17-Oct-16 |  | S2 W10 | S2 W10 |
| 24-Oct-16 |  | S2 W11 | S2 W11 |
| 31-Oct-16 |  | S2 W12 | S2 W12 |
| 7-Nov-16 |  | S2 W13 | S2 W13 |
| 14-Nov-16 |  | Exams | Exams |
| 21-Nov-16 |  | Exams | Exams |
| 28-Nov-16 |  | Exams | Exams |
| 5-Dec-16 |  | S3 W1 | Recess |
| 12-Dec-16 |  | S3 W2 | Recess |
| 19-Dec-16 |  | Recess | S3 W1 |
| 26-Dec-16 | Christmas Day 25th Dec Boxing Day 26 Dec Public Holiday 27 Dec | Recess | Recess |

The primary focus of the 2.5 semester model is to solve the problem of Session 2 results not being available before Session 3 starts. It adopts the University of New South Wales approach where Session 3 will start in the last week of the year instead of earlier. Although this model does not imply a major change, it will solve the existing problem and accommodate Faculties that have requested 2 weeks within Session break to undertake fieldwork and/or on campus sessions either for internal or external students.

*Optional Changes*:

1. There is a possibility to fit all the Sessions in one calendar year: that is, Session 3 could be at the beginning or at the end of the year.
2. It is also possible to increase the teaching weeks for Session 3 from 5 weeks to 6 weeks without any problems.

**Discussion**

The 2.5 semester model involves minimal change and merely attempts to provide a framework that will allow a consistent approach to results assurance and approval processes. It does not provide a more efficient or flexible model of teaching.

## The Trimester Model

The Trimester model with 2016 dates is provided in Table 2. The presented version is based in the model proposed by UTS for 2016 and includes options using the current Macquarie timing for the beginning of Session 1 and the equivalent UTS start date (which is 3 weeks later).

**Table 2:** TheTrimester Model with 2016 Dates

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Currently planned /approved by Senate** | **(A) MQ timing**  **2-week mid-session breaks** | **(B) MQ timing, 1-week mid-session breaks** | **(C) UTS timing, 2-week mid-session breaks** | **(D) UTS timing, 1-week mid-session breaks** |
| **NSW School Terms & Holidays** | **North Ryde Campus** |  |  |  |  |
| School Holiday | S3 Week 3 | S3 W8 | S3 W9 | Recess | S3 W6 |
| School Holiday | S3 Week 4 | S3 W9 | S3 W10 | S3 W6 | S3 W7 |
| School Holiday | S3 Week 5 | S3 W10 | S3 W11 | S3 W7 | S3 W8 |
| School Holiday | Exams | S3 W11 | S3 W12 | S3 W8 | S3 W9 |
| School Holiday | Exams/Recess | Exams | Exams | S3 W9 | S3 W10 |
| School Holiday | Recess | Exams | Exams | S3 W10 | S3 W11 |
| School Holiday | Recess | Recess | Recess | S3 W11 | S3 W12 |
| T1 starts 27 Jan | Recess | Recess | Recess | Exams | Exams |
|  | S1 W1 | S1 W1 | S1 W1 | Exams | Exams |
|  | S1 W2 | S1 W2 | S1 W2 | Recess | Recess |
|  | S1 W3 | S1 W3 | S1 W3 | Recess | Recess |
|  | S1 W4 | S1 W4 | S1 W4 | S1 W1 | S1 W1 |
|  | S1 W5 | S1 W5 | S1 W5 | S1 W2 | S1 W2 |
| T1 ends 8th Apr | S1 W6 | S1 W6 | S1 W6 | S1 W3 | S1 W3 |
| School Holiday | Recess | Recess | Recess | S1 W4 | S1 W4 |
| School Holiday | Recess | Recess | S1 W7 | S1 W5 | S1 W5 |
| T2 starts 26 Apr | S1 W7 | S1 W7 | S1 W8 | S1 W6 | S1 W6 |
|  | S1 W8 | S1 W8 | S1 W9 | Recess | Recess |
|  | S1 W9 | S1 W9 | S1 W10 | Recess | S1 W7 |
|  | S1 W10 | S1 W10 | S1 W11 | S1 W7 | S1 W8 |
|  | S1 W11 | S1 W11 | S1 W12 | S1 W8 | S1 W9 |
|  | S1 W12 | Exams | Exams | S1 W9 | S1 W10 |
|  | S1 W13 | Exams | Exams | S1 W10 | S1 W11 |
|  | Exams | Recess | Recess | S1 W11 | S1 W12 |
|  | Exams | Recess | Recess | Exams | Exams |
| T2 ends 1 Jul | Exams | Recess | Recess | Exams | Exams |
| School Holiday | Recess | S2 W1 | S2 W1 | Recess | Recess |
| School Holiday | Recess | S2 W2 | S2 W2 | Recess | Recess |
| T3 starts 18 Jul | Recess | S2 W3 | S2 W3 | Recess | Recess |
|  | Recess | S2 W4 | S2 W4 | S2 W1 | S2 W1 |
|  | S2 W1 | S2 W5 | S2 W5 | S2 W2 | S2 W2 |
|  | S2 W2 | S2 W6 | S2 W6 | S2 W3 | S2 W3 |
|  | S2 W3 | Recess | Recess | S2 W4 | S2 W4 |
|  | S2 W4 | Recess | S2 W7 | S2 W5 | S2 W5 |
|  | S2 W5 | S2 W7 | S2 W8 | S2 W6 | S2 W6 |
|  | S2 W6 | S2 W8 | S2 W9 | Recess | Recess |
|  | S2 W7 | S2 W9 | S2 W10 | Recess | S2 W7 |
| T3 ends 23 Sep | Recess | S2 W10 | S2 W11 | S2 W7 | S2 W8 |
| School Holiday | Recess | S2 W11 | S2 W12 | S2 W8 | S2 W9 |
| School Holiday | S2 W8 | Exams | Exams | S2 W9 | S2 W10 |
| T4 starts 10 Oct | S2 W9 | Exams | Exams | S2 W10 | S2 W11 |
|  | S2 W10 | Recess | Recess | S2 W11 | S2 W12 |
|  | S2 W11 | Recess | Recess | Exams | Exams |
|  | S2 W12 | Recess | S3 W1 | Exams | Exams |
|  | S2 W13 | S3 W1 | S3 W2 | Recess | Recess |
|  | Exams | S3 W2 | S3 W3 | Recess | Recess |
|  | Exams | S3 W3 | S3 W4 | S3 W1 | S3 W1 |
|  | Exams | S3 W4 | S3 W5 | S3 W2 | S3 W2 |
|  | S3 W1 | S3 W5 | S3 W6 | S3 W3 | S3 W3 |
|  | S3 W2 | S3 W6 | S3 W7 | S3 W4 | S3 W4 |
| T4 ends 20 Dec | Recess | S3 W7 | S3 W8 | S3 W5 | S3 W5 |
| School Holiday | Recess | Recess | Recess | Recess | Recess |

To allow for the usual 2-week mid-session break, sessions need to be reduced to 11 weeks (Option A). An alternative 12-week option (Option B) means reducing the mid-session break to 1-week. On both options, the exam periods are limited to 2 weeks and 2-hour time limits will be mandatory for exams to make a 2-week exam period feasible. To accommodate 3-week exam periods would necessitate further reductions of mid-session breaks.

**Discussion**

This models involves substantial changes in return for the delivery of the required consistency, flexibility and efficiency:

* **Consistency**: The structure enables a consistent approach to results assurance and approval processes;
* **Efficiency**: The structure enables a moderately more efficient utilisation of the University’s infrastructure; and,
* **Flexibility**: The structure enables more flexibility to accommodate innovative pedagogies, with multiple entry points and the potential for accelerated progression.

## The Mixed-Modules Model

This model has six modules of 6 weeks spread throughout the year. Each module has an associated 2-week examination period. This leaves 4 weeks a year as scheduled holidays from **all** teaching from late December to early January. The general structure with possible dates for 2016 is provided in Figure 3.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Break | Module 1 | | Module 2 | | Module 3 | | Module 4 | | Module 5 | | Module 6 | | Break |
|  | Teaching | Exam | Teaching | Exam | Teaching | Exam | Teaching | Exam | Teaching | Exam | Teaching | Exam |  |
| Jan. 1 | Jan. 25 | March 7 | March 21 | May 5 | May 16 | June 17 | July 11 | Aug. 22 | Sept. 5 | Oct. 17 | Oct. 30 | Dec. 12 | Dec. 19 |

**Figure 3:** General Structure of Mixed-Modules Model with Potential 2016 Dates

Actual sessions can be made from modules in flexible combinations. Where a session extends across modules, the examination period becomes a break. Figure 4 presents an example that closely mirrors the current two main sessions system. Figure 5 shows an example pattern with a standard session and two compressed sessions, while Figure 6 shows a pattern with a long-session and 2 compressed sessions. Other structures are possible.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Session 1** | | | | Long-Break | **Session 2** | | | | Long-break |
| **Weeks** |  | 6 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| **Dates** |  | 25/2 | 7/3 | 21/3 | 2/5 | 16/5 | 11/7 | 22/8 | 5/9 | 17/10 | 31/10 |

**Figure 4:** Example of Two Sessions Structure using the Mixed-Modules Model

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Break | **Session 1** | | | | Break | **Compressed 1** | | Break | **Compressed 2** | | Break |
| Jan. 1 | Jan. 25 | March 7 | March 21 | May 5 | May 16 | July 11 | Aug. 22 | Sept. 5 | Oct. 30 | Dec. 12 | Dec. 19 |

**Figure 5:** Example of Standard Session and Two Compressed Sessions using the Mixed-Modules Model

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Break | **Long-Session** | | | | | | Break | **Compressed 1** | | **Compressed 2** | | Break |
| Jan. 1 | Jan. 25 | March 7 | March 21 | May 5 | May 16 | June 17 | July 11 | Sept. 5 | Oct. 17 | Oct. 30 | Dec. 12 | Dec. 19 |

**Figure 6:** Example of Long Session and Two Compressed Sessions

**Discussion**

In this model, each session would have a corresponding entry and census date, as well as an examination and results reporting period. This model entails substantial change to University processes, but can accommodate minimal change in the delivery of units and programs. Indeed, the model is extremely flexible, allowing minimal to radical change depending on pedagogical and practical requirements at the discretion of unit convenors and program directors. Where change is thought necessary, careful consideration would need to be given to program design to ensure that students were limited in the number of intensive units they could do (as per Session 3). The model provides a consistent, efficient and flexible framework for teaching delivery:

* **Consistency**: The structure enables a consistent approach to results assurance and approval processes as each module has an associated entry, census date, examination and results reporting period, and all Macquarie Teaching (including pathway colleges, MGSM, The Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, etc – and OUA if possible) would align to the agreed term dates for each academic year;
* **Efficiency**: The structure enables a more efficient utilisation of the University’s infrastructure by spreading teaching load more evenly throughout the year; and,
* **Flexibility**: The structure enables more flexibility to accommodate innovative pedagogies, multiple entry points and accelerated progression, together with greater flexibility for staff in structuring their work commitments.

The model achieves these outcomes while enabling minimal change to units and programs if convenors and program directors see no need for change. Indeed, Faculties can use combinations of modules as appropriate such that existing practices could continue with little amendment to offerings. Where change is thought necessary, careful consideration would need to be given to program design to ensure that students were limited in the number of intensive units they could do (as per Session 3).

## The Four Semester Model

Table 2 provides a four-semester option where each semester is 9 weeks long. In this model, the standard pattern of study would be two units a semester for a total of 8 units per year, with an accelerated option allowing three units per semester for a maximum of 12 a year.

**Table 2:** Four-Semester Option with 2016 Date

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 25 Jan – 25 March  **Term 1** | 28 Mar – 8 Apr  **Assessment** |
| 11 Apr – 10 Jun  **Term 2** | 13 Jun – 24 Jun  **Formal Exams** |
| **Mid Year Break**(2 weeks) | 27 Jun – 8 Jul |
| 11 Jul – 9 Sep  **Term 3** | 12 Sep – 23 Sep  **Assessment** |
| 26 Sep – 25 Nov  **Term 4** | 28 Nov – 9 Dec  **Formal Exams** |
| **Christmas/January break** | ***12 Dec – 20 or 27 Dec***  ***6 or 7 weeks*** |
| **Re-commence** | ***23 or 30 January 2017*** |

This model entails substantial change to University processes and to the delivery of units and programs.

**Discussion**

This model entails substantial change to University processes and to the delivery of units and programs, more so than any of the other models. The Four Semester model is currently offered by MGSM and differs slightly with 10-week terms. Formal exam times are currently both time and resource expensive. Also there is a move away from assessment **of** learning to assessment **for** learning, helping with the issues of cheating and exam identity fraud . Those units that continue with formal exams would be offered in Semesters 1 and 3. This model would also be effective for the adoption of a programmatic approach to degrees. The model also provides an efficient and flexible framework for teaching delivery:

* **Consistency**: The structure enables a consistent approach to results assurance and approval processes;
* **Efficiency**: The structure enables a more efficient utilisation of the University’s infrastructure by spreading teaching load more evenly throughout the year; and
* **Flexibility**: The structure enables more flexibility to accommodate innovative pedagogies, multiple entry points and accelerated progression, together with greater flexibility for staff in structuring their work commitments.

# Appendice

## Appendix 1: Macquarie Session Offerings

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Session 1, North Ryde, Day | S1, Day |
| Sessions 1 and 2, February to November, North Ryde, Day | FY1 Day |
| Sessions 2, North Ryde, Day | S2, Day |
| Sessions 2 and 1, August to June, North Ryde, Day | FY2 Day |
| Session 3, North Ryde, Day | S3 Day |
| Winter vacation session, North Ryde, Day | WV Day |
| Macquarie City Campus Study Period 1, Day, March to June | MQC1 Day |
| Macquarie City Campus Study Period 2, Day, July to October | MQC2 Day |
| Macquarie City Campus Study Period 3, Day, November to February | MQC3 Day |
| MGSM Term 1 North Ryde, January to March, Day | Term 1 NR Day |
| MGSM Term 2 North Ryde, March to June, Day | Term 2 NR Day |
| MGSM Term 3 North Ryde, June to September, Day | Term 3 NR Day |
| MGSM Term 4 North Ryde, September to December, Day | Term 4 NR Day |
| Applied Finance Centre January North Ryde, November 2013 to June 2014 | AFC Jan NR |
| Applied Finance Centre July North Ryde, May to November | AFC Jul NR |
| OUA SP1 | OUA SP1 |
| OUA SP2 | OUA SP2 |
| OUA SP3 | OUA SP3 |
| OUA SP4 | OUA SP4 |
| OUA Session 1 | OUA Session 1 |
| OUA Session 2 | OUA Session 2 |
| OUA Session 3 | OUA Session 3 |

## Appendix 2: Workload

Workload for students will remain at 150 hours per unit per 3CP or 4CP based on 10 hours per week per unit X 12 weeks + 2 weeks break and one week exam preparation. For example:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Week |  | Session |
| Learning and teaching activities: in class or online | 3 hours | Eg 2 hours: lecture, 1 hour: tutorial | 36 hours |
| Learning and teaching activities: outside class | 4 hours | 12-15 pages reading per week, self-study activities, reflective activities, discussion or consultation with tutors | 60 hours |
| Assessment preparation | 3 hours | Including time for research and delivery, to find references and resources, and undertaking group activities | 54 hours |
| **Total hours per week** | **10 hours** |  | **150 hours** |

The total teaching weeks for staff will not increase in any model. A typical 4 units per year workload can be retained in all of the proposed models (e.g. staff could teach in two trimesters or 4 terms in 6 X 6).