

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE

Senate Committee on Educational Policy

EP.03.05 Report of Information on the Academic Calendar

Introduction

This Report of Information from the Senate Committee on Educational Policy addresses concerns raised about the academic calendar at the final Senate meeting of the 2001-2002 academic year, and accompanies the presentation of EP.02.26, 2005-2006 Academic Calendar, for reconsideration.

The minutes of the April 29, 2002 Senate meeting record the following business:

The Chancellor presented for action EP.02.25, 2004-2005 Academic Calendar.... Senator Mark Roszkowski (CBA), moved to refer this item back to the Educational Policy Committee for further study because he felt that the Committee should consider revisiting some calendar practices of the past. Mortensen cited the need for this calendar to be approved to allow campus and community members to conduct advanced planning for events. Senator Fossum suggested the Senate should pass the 2004-2005 calendar and allow Educational Policy to consider calendar issues for subsequent years. By voice vote, Roszkowski's motion was lost. By voice vote, EP.02.25 was approved.

A motion to refer EP.02.26, 2005-2006 Academic Calendar and EP.02.27, 2006-2007 Academic Calendar, back to the Educational Policy Committee, with instructions for the committee to reconsider some calendar policy alternatives, was approved by voice vote.

Several specific complaints about the current calendar system were voiced during the meeting:

1. When the fall semester begins the Wednesday before Labor Day, it is difficult to make effective use of the three instructional days prior to the long weekend.
2. Fall and spring semesters are too long (because of the number of instructional days, because of the number of holidays, or both).
3. The campus academic calendar is not "family friendly" because it does not align well with local school district calendars.

Unspoken but clearly relevant is continuing opposition to the week-long Thanksgiving Vacation that the Senate approved in 1999.

Committee members have given serious consideration to these and other academic calendar issues. We have chosen to address them within the frame work of RS.99.09, Synopsis of Policies Governing the Academic Calendar at UIUC. (In the next section, the text of RS.99.09 appears in Arial; the committee's commentary appears in Times New Roman, with recommendations in **boldface type**.)

► **General Recommendation: Because it may take some years to implement the most consequential recommendations listed below, the committee urges the Senate to adopt EP.02.26, 2005-2006 Academic Calendar now.**

The 2005-2006 calendar is needed by a variety of constituencies on campus for long-range planning purposes. Such constituencies include departments and colleges that wish to host or sponsor national events, units engaged in staging pre-college orientation activities, units responsible for scheduling intercollegiate athletics events, and units planning for construction, renovation, and maintenance of instructional facilities. In the broader context of peer institutions, approving academic calendars through Summer 2006 moves us into the middle range between Michigan State University (last calendar posted: 2002-2003) and Indiana University (last calendar posted: 2009-2010).

Synopsis of Policies Governing the Academic Calendar at UIUC

Basic Pattern

The calendar is designed such that Fall Semester classes always begin on the Wednesday 13 weeks before Thanksgiving week, Spring Semester classes always begin on Monday 8 week after Thanksgiving week, Summer Term 1 classes begin on Monday 25 weeks after Thanksgiving, and Summer Term 2 classes begin on Monday 29 weeks after Thanksgiving week. The first day of class, a Wednesday, shall be defined as a Monday.

As long as the current pattern of academic holidays continues, calendars following the current policies will have, in each regular semester, at least 72 instructional weekdays plus at least 13 Saturdays on which classes may be scheduled. In each semester classes are to meet at least 14 Mondays (or days defined as Mondays), Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. There are to be at least 13 unbroken instructional weeks (i.e., M-F).

Policies

1 Fall Semester

- 1.1 Classes shall begin on Wednesday 13 weeks before Thanksgiving week.

Issue: Day of the Week on Which the Semester Begins

The fall semester begins on Wednesday after the following pre-semester events:

- a. *Sunday*. Most students move into campus dormitories on Sunday before the start of school. A weekend date accommodates parents who accompany students during move-in, and it avoids the problems that ensue when move-in and regular weekday traffic mix. (It should be noted, however, that other public CIC institutions [e.g., Wisconsin] stage move-in on weekdays.)
- b. *Monday*. New Student Convocation is held from 4:30 to 5:15 p.m. in the Assembly Hall. (Participating faculty members are asked to arrive by 4 p.m.) First Night activities follow at Memorial Stadium.
- c. *Tuesday*. Quad Day, which debuted in 1971, typically runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. It is sponsored by the Illini Union Board and involves many Registered Student Organizations.

This pre-semester configuration is being scrutinized by a campus Orientation Review Committee that reports to William Riley, Dean of Students. The Senate Committee on Educational Policy will keep abreast of the Orientation Review Committee's deliberations; the Senate committee has a keen interest in seeing Tuesday and perhaps even Monday made available for instruction. (Indiana, Iowa, Michigan State, and Purdue usually start the fall semester on a Monday; Michigan and Penn State usually begin the academic year on a Tuesday. Only Illinois begins consistently on a Wednesday.)

If classes were to begin Tuesday 13 weeks before Thanksgiving week, it would be possible to schedule a Reading Day on Friday before final examinations. However, under current calendar policy, it would still

be necessary to count the first Wednesday of instruction as a Monday (in order to satisfy the rule that there be 14 Mondays or days defined as Mondays in the semester). Also, there would have to be an exception to the rule stipulating that there must be 13 weeks that have five full days of instruction (see 5.1, below). If classes were to begin on Monday 13 weeks before Thanksgiving week, it would no longer be necessary to define the first Wednesday of instruction as a Monday, and the number of full weeks in the fall semester would conform to current guidelines. Instruction would end on a Wednesday, followed by Reading Day on a Thursday, followed by final exams on Friday and the next Monday through Friday.

Issue: Instructional Days before Labor Day

It appears that there is no way to begin the semester after Labor Day. Following the provisions of RS.99.09, fall semesters in 2002, 2003, and 2008 will have three instructional days before the long Labor Day weekend. In 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, and 2010, there will be eight instructional days before the long weekend. Moving the start of the semester to the Tuesday after Labor Day would, in most years, put the end of finals week too close to the Christmas holiday—assuming no change to the number of days scheduled for instruction (see section 5.1), vacation (see sections 7.1-7.3), and final examinations (see sections 1.2 and 6.2). Only the University of Michigan and the University of Minnesota manage consistently to begin terms after Labor Day. Michigan does it by having only 68 instructional days during the fall semester; Minnesota does it by keeping fall semester holidays to three: Labor Day and a two-day break at Thanksgiving (see Appendix 1).

Issue: Alignment with School District Calendars

The Illinois State Board of Education stipulates that school years must have at least 185 days, including 176 pupil attendance days. Because the campus calendar runs for roughly 168 days (including instruction, finals, and vacation), it is not possible to align both the beginning and end of terms in the school district and campus calendars. The committee has initiated contact with officials in the Champaign and Urbana school districts so that they are aware of campus academic calendar policy. In future years, this may assist in the alignment of winter break and spring vacation periods.

- 1.2 Final examinations shall end on Saturday 3 weeks after Thanksgiving week.

Issues: Length of Finals Week and Duration of Final Examinations

The foregoing implies that it is policy to have a six-day finals week. Changing policy to shorten finals week to five days would open a weekday that could be designated a Reading Day. Unfortunately, this solution is not practical. As documented by Mark Netter, Director of the Office of Facility Management and Scheduling, facility limitations make it impossible to compress the three-hour finals in the current six-day finals period into five days. And there appears to be little support on the committee for trimming finals from three hours to two-and-a-half or two hours, thus creating a fourth period for finals each day; committee members contend that shorter finals would be academically unsound in some disciplines. Also, Netter points out that shortening exam duration to increase the number of exam periods per day might increase the number of students seeking special conflict exam scheduling under Rule 82.A.4 of the *Code of Policies and Regulations Applying to All Students*, which states that students cannot be required to sit for more than two consecutive final exams.

- **Recommendation I: Establishing a weekday Reading Day before fall final examinations is a priority for the committee, as is eliminating the first Wednesday-as-Monday conundrum inscribed in current policy. The best way to achieve these educational goals is to reconfigure pre-semester activities for students such that the fall term may begin on a Monday. The Senate Committee on Educational Policy therefore urges student services administrators to work toward this crucial reconfiguration.**

2. Spring Semester

- 2.1 Classes shall begin on the Monday 8 weeks after Thanksgiving week. If Monday 8 weeks after Thanksgiving week is a holiday, classes will begin on the Tuesday 8 weeks after Thanksgiving week.
- 2.2 Final examinations shall end on Friday of the 24th week after Thanksgiving week.

3. Summer Term 1

Issue: Summer School Schedule

Currently, courses are scheduled in the two official summer terms, as well as in unconventional terms that span all of Summer Term 1 and 2, and portions of Summer Term 2. SCT Banner provides the functionality to recognize these arrangements. The committee is currently working with Karen Carney, Associate Director of the Office of Summer Session and Special Programs, to identify ways of bringing policy and practice into alignment while best serving students' educational needs. Banner scheduling will be implemented consistent with current academic calendar policy; the number and length of summer terms can be modified once consensus is reached on how summer session offerings should evolve.

► **Recommendation II: Forthcoming.**

- 3.1 Classes shall begin on the Monday 25 weeks after Thanksgiving week.
- 3.2 Final examinations for Term 1 shall end on or before Saturday of the 28th week after Thanksgiving week.

4. Summer Term 2

- 4.1 Classes shall begin on the Monday 29 weeks after Thanksgiving week.
- 4.2 Final examinations for Term 2 shall end on Saturday of the 36th week after Thanksgiving week.

5. Instructional Days

- 5.1 There shall be no fewer than 14 of each instructional day per semester and no fewer than 28 days in the MW sequence, 28 days in the TuTh sequence, and 42 days in the MWF sequence, and 13 weeks that have five full days of instruction (M-F).

Issue: Number of Instructional Days in Fall and Spring Terms

The length of the fall and spring terms is of concern to some faculty members. Length is a consequence of the number of scheduled vacation days (see sections 7.1-7.3), Reading Days (see section 6.1), final examination days (see sections 1.2 and 6.2), and—pertinent to this section—instructional days. The number of instructional days in a semester is governed by a rule-of-thumb that assigns 50 minutes per credit per week in relation to a standard of 750 minutes per credit each semester. The provisions of section 5.1 ensure that this standard is met. At 72 days per term, fall and spring, the campus sits slightly below the mean and at the median for instructional days among public CIC institutions that operate (or, in the case of Michigan, effectively operate) on a semester basis (see Appendix 1).

► **Recommendation III: The campus should not decrease the number of instructional days in order to shorten the fall and spring semesters.**

6. Reading Day and Final Examinations

- 6.1 A reading day, not a Sunday, shall immediately precede the first day of Final Examinations.

Issue: Fall Reading Day

See discussion under section 1.1, above. The committee acknowledges the Illinois Student Government position on this subject (Assembly Resolution 02-08-09, "ISG Support for a New Reading Day Policy") and agrees in principle that establishing a weekday Reading Day in the fall semester is educationally sound. (Current academic calendar policy already provides for a weekday Reading Day in the spring.)

► **Recommendation IV:** As discussed above, the campus should reconfigure pre-semester student activities to accommodate a fall semester that begins on a Monday. In light of the analysis presented in sections 1.2 (on final exams) and 5.1 (on instructional days), this appears to be the only way to implement a fall semester weekday Reading Day. If implemented, fall Reading Day could occur on a Friday (i.e., not immediately preceding the first day of final examinations that would begin on a Monday); the language of section 6.1 would have to be amended to account for this possibility.

- 6.2 There shall be no more than 19 3-hour Final Examination periods scheduled each semester, with 3 periods each day and none on Sunday. There shall be 9 2-hour Final Examination periods scheduled in the Summer Session 2 with 4 periods on the last day.
- 6.3 Final examinations for Summer Term 1 shall be held during the final meeting of the class or on the day immediately following the final class meeting at the scheduled meeting time for the class. There is not a designated reading day for Summer Term 1.

7. Holidays and Vacations

- 7.1 Classes shall not be held on Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Martin Luther King Day, Memorial Day, or Independence Day.

Issue: Labor Day and the Start of Fall Semester

Following the guidelines in RS.99.09, fall semester will always begin before the Labor Day holiday. Some years it begins the week before Labor Day (with three instructional days before the long weekend); most years it begins two weeks before (with eight instructional days before the holiday).

► **Recommendation V:** Beginning the fall semester on Monday 13 weeks before Thanksgiving week (see Recommendation I) is the most desirable solution to the problem. In the absence of this solution, faculty members are urged to work with college Teaching Academies and the Office of Instructional Resources to develop strategies for sustaining excellent teaching in the face of challenges posed by the occasional short week before the long Labor Day weekend.

- 7.2 A one-week Spring Vacation shall be scheduled during the ninth or tenth week of the Spring semester and if possible shall not include a local or State election day.

Issue: Spring Vacation and Spring Elections

According to the Champaign County Clerk, spring elections are conducted as follows: in odd years, consolidated elections for cities, school boards, etc., fall on the first Tuesday in April; in even years, general primary elections for statewide offices, etc., fall on the third Tuesday in March.

► **Recommendation VI:** To support students who wish to vote in person locally, the campus should continue to observe the guideline suggesting that Spring Vacation and spring voting should not coincide.

- 7.3 A one-week Thanksgiving Vacation shall be scheduled for the week in which Thanksgiving occurs.

Issue: Thanksgiving Vacation and Alternatives

Several members of the committee articulated a strong desire to return to a three- or two-day holiday during Thanksgiving week. There was a stronger sentiment voiced—by faculty and students alike—for maintaining the week-long Thanksgiving Vacation. No interest was expressed in combining an abbreviated Thanksgiving week vacation with a two-day October break on Columbus Day and the following Tuesday, as is done at Michigan, Purdue, and Penn State (see Appendix 1).

- **Recommendation VII: Preserve the five-day vacation during Thanksgiving week.**

Appendix 1

Characteristics of Public CIC Academic Calendars Compared

Institution	Instructional Days in Fall Semester	Instruction Typically Begins on a . . .	Does Fall Semester Begin After Labor Day?	Days Off for Labor Day Holiday	Days Off for Fall Break in Mid-October (Mo-Tu)	Days Off during Thanksgiving Week	Declared Reading or Study Days after End of Instruction	Days for Final Examinations	Saturday Finals?	Sunday Finals?
Illinois	72	We	Never	1	0	5	1	6	Yes	No
Indiana	72	Mo	Sometimes	0	0	3	0	5	No	No
Iowa	76	Mo	Never	1	0	3	0	5	No	No
Michigan*	68	Tu	Always?	1	2	2	3	6	No	No
Mich. St.	72	Mo	Never	1	0	2	0	5	No	No
Minnesota	72	Tu	Always?	1	0	2	0	6	Yes	No
Penn St.	73.5	Tu?	Never?	1	2	2.5	2	5	No	No
Purdue	74	Mo	Never	1	2	3	0	6	Yes	No
Wisconsin	72	Varies	Usually	1	0	2	1	7	Yes	Yes

*Michigan offers Fall, Winter, and Spring/Summer terms of roughly equal length, but the majority of classes are scheduled during the first two terms.