



## **Final Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Academic Calendar**

April 15, 2016

Authority for establishment of the UW-Madison academic calendar is vested in the faculty (*FPP 1.20.C.3.*) and approved in 5-year increments by the Faculty Senate. Setting the calendar is bound by a number of constraints stemming from state law, UW System policy, UW-Madison faculty legislation, and established patterns of practice. At its October 2015 meeting, the Faculty Senate passed revisions to the 2016-2021 calendars that simplified logistics and enhanced educational offerings. Those revisions resulted in the following changes to what is herein referred to as the “approved calendar.”

1. Begin fall semester instruction on the Tuesday following Labor Day, except when Labor Day falls on September 7, in which case begin instruction on Wednesday, September 2. This change eliminates single class days before the Labor Day weekend.
2. Set the start date of the spring semester based on counting backwards from commencement set on the second Saturday in May. As a consequence, the first day of instruction falls on either the Monday preceding, or the Tuesday following, Martin Luther King Jr. Day. This change eliminates commencement conflicting with exams.
3. Creates a consistent 4-week window to provide an early summer session between the spring semester and the 8-week summer session. The 4-week summer term was created to offer additional student learning opportunities, allow greater flexibility to instructors, increase summer enrollments to a level commensurate with our peers, augment the visibility of UW-Madison during the summer, improve facility use, enhance revenue, and create strategies to attract new student audiences.

After the above changes, several issues remain unaddressed by the current method of creating the academic calendar. Some of the existing constraints date back several decades and thus predate online registration, changes in teaching and assessment, moving from labor intensive paper-based processes to electronic entry of grading, and so on. The Ad Hoc Committee on the Academic Calendar was charged with exploring additional opportunities to streamline the rules for setting the academic calendar and devising an academic calendar that best serves our academic goals. The committee was asked to submit a report with recommendations to the University Committee by April 30, 2016.

The committee met six times over the spring 2016 semester and considered federal financial aid and accreditation regulations, human resources (HR) and employment requirements, UW System policies, campus policies, state statutes, and other policies related to the academic calendar. Individual committee members also met separately to gather input from other stakeholders and campus community members.

The committee has come to agreement and has drafted the following six recommendations, to take effect with the 2017-2018 academic year, and believes these adjustments will provide greater consistency and predictability, allowing flexibility for emerging forms of instruction, bring us into better alignment with our peers and partners, and maximize summer learning opportunities and facility utilization. The recommendations are mostly independent of each other, though the calendar is more orderly if they act

*Ad Hoc Committee on the Academic Calendar*

*April 15, 2016*

together. Many of the following recommendations result specifically from the changes made to the calendar to accommodate a new 4-week early summer session, which would be in addition to the robust set of existing summer sessions. The goals of this new session – reduced time to graduation, increased enrollments, revenues and visibility for UW-Madison and its academic departments, and increased teaching and learning opportunities – are the primary beneficiary of most of the committee’s recommendations.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Adjust faculty contract to begin and end one week earlier, and shift the 4-week summer session to one week later.**
2. **Shorten semesters to 69 days of instruction and activity over 15 weeks.**
3. **Shorten the summary period by one day, and explore possible further adjustments.**
4. **Shorten the grade submission period to 72 hours after the last final exam day.**
5. **Clarify Wisconsin Statute s.36.11(16) to limit application to undergraduates.**
6. **Request that some or all sections of UWS document ACPS-4 be abolished.**

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Respectfully submitted by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Academic Calendar:

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**Recommendation #1. Adjust faculty contract to begin and end one week earlier, and shift the 4-week summer session to one week later.**

*Current contract:* usually the last Monday in August to late May

*Proposed contract:* usually the next-to-last Monday in August to mid-May

*Current 4-week:* starts immediately after commencement

*Proposed 4-week:* starts one week after commencement

The faculty contract year defines the period under which 9-month employees (faculty, academic staff, and graduate student assistants) are paid. The contract is defined as 34 weeks of scheduled activities and five weeks that “shall be used by faculty members for scholarly pursuits and instructional development as individual, self-directed professionals.” The faculty contract does not dictate when 9-month employees have to be physically present on campus or determine workloads or work schedules. Rather, the contract defines the beginning and end of the pay period. Traditionally, the faculty contract has started with welcome week and continued through fall semester, winter break, and spring semester, and concluded a couple of weeks after the spring semester. The committee proposes starting the contract one week before traditional welcome week and ending one week earlier. Just as the previous faculty contract did not mandate work or physical presence during certain portions of the period (such as welcome week, winter break, spring break, or the weeks after the end of the semester), the proposed faculty contract would not change timing or requirements of work.

The new 4-week summer session was originally planned to begin immediately after the spring semester. When the new 4-week summer session was approved, it had the unintended consequence of creating an approximately two-week overlap between the faculty contract and the new session. This will seriously impair the ability to pay 9-month employees who also want to teach during the 4-week summer session. This means that fewer people will be able to take advantage of the new summer session and is thus in direct conflict with a major goal of the new summer session, which was to increase the availability of learning opportunities and options, thus reducing time to graduation, improving facility utilization, and bringing our campus into alignment with peer institutions. The recommended adjustment to both the faculty contract and the 4-week summer session will eliminate the overlap, thus enabling 9-month employees to be paid to work the 4-week session and restoring the original intent of the 4-week summer session. *This recommendation affects all 9-month faculty, instructional staff, and graduate students.*

*Academic and administrative benefits:*

- Eliminates overlap between faculty contract and new summer session.
- Eliminates gap between 4-week and 8-week summer sessions.
- Expands available time for welcome week events in fall.
- Expands time for more robust employee training and orientation before fall semester.
- Allows additional time for spring semester grading, reporting, and processing academic actions (for example, dean’s list, academic standing, etc.)

*Downsides:*

- New employees will have to complete paperwork one week earlier (within 3 days of the start of the pay period) in order to be paid (federal guidelines). For many new employees, this will require being on campus one week earlier than currently.
- Employees with job responsibilities which typically require being on campus during welcome week may be required to begin the year one week earlier.

*Other considerations:*

- One week gap between spring semester and summer session.
- Job requirements which now start one week before classes may now start two weeks before classes.

*Action needed from:* Senate to change calendar

**Recommendation #2: Shorten semesters to 69 days of instruction and activity over 15 weeks.**

UW-Madison academic calendars have traditionally had 70-72 instructional days in the fall and 71-73 days in the spring. This is more than at many of our peer institutions and longer than required by accreditors and others. More importantly, we were at a level longer than required, which has caused problems due to our required start after September 1 and the Christmas Eve holiday. A consistent 69-day semester would mean a reduction of one to two Tuesday-Thursday (TR) class meetings and zero to two Monday-Wednesday-Friday (MWF) class meetings. *This recommendation links to Recommendation #3 and affects the entire UW-Madison community.*

*Fixed points:*

- Fall classes always start on Wednesday; spring classes always start on a Tuesday after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
- Convocation on the day immediately preceding instruction in fall (eliminates idle time before the holiday weekend).
- Undergraduate commencement is always the second Saturday in May.
- Independent of faculty contract.
- Independent of summer options.
- Within accreditation standards and peer practice.
- Within financial aid requirements (requires 15 weeks with at least one day of instruction and activities).
- Shortened semester.

*Teaching and student benefits:*

- Predictability of the start, end, and number of class days makes planning easier for all kinds of academic and co-curricular activities.
- Better balance between semesters, which would now always be of equal lengths.
- Aligns with peers, allowing for easier combined education opportunities.
- Fall semester typically ends a bit sooner, allowing more time between last exam and winter holiday.
- Restores almost all of previous winter break, which existed before the Faculty Senate enacted the academic calendar changes in fall 2015 for the 2016-2021 calendars.

*Administrative benefits:*

- Increases the time for financial aid processing, final grading, and end of semester academic actions.
- Schedule of classes would be easier to build, due to the consistency.
- Gains a business day between Labor Day and classes.
- Housing contracts starts may have more flexibility.
- Allows for regular “end of summer” SOAR schedule to be implemented.

*Downside:*

- Reduces instruction by one or two days per class.

*Additional considerations:*

- A fall break is not possible without changing the state-determined fall start of September 2 or reducing the winter break or extending fall semester into legal holidays.

*Actions needed:* Senate to change calendar; registrar to update future academic calendars in the student information system.

**Recommendation #3: Shorten summary period by one day, and possible further adjustments.**

Faculty legislation currently mandates an eight-day summary period, of which the first day is a study day and the remainder is “exam week.” As part of the latter, each section of courses that have indicated a final exam will be held during the course approval process is assigned an exam block. Based on conversations with faculty, students, and others, it is apparent that many of these exam blocks assignments are not used for traditional in-class exams. National trends, changes in pedagogy, and emerging forms of instruction all indicate that this alternative use of the summary period will continue and likely increase. Eliminating one of the seven exam days has already been piloted as part of the effort to eliminate conflicts between exams and commencement, with no negative effects reported. The extended exam period is particularly an issue in the fall semester, with exams currently ending two days before the winter holiday. *This recommendation links to Recommendation #2 and affects all students and instructors, as well as administrators who process end of semester grades, academic actions, and reports.*

*Teaching and student benefits:*

- More flexibility for departmental commencement events
- An additional reduction in the summary period beyond the initial one day reduction could lead to a corresponding increase in study days.

*Additional information/ study needed:*

- Re-think how exams are laid out; with current pedagogical trends, there are fewer cumulative exams in lieu of projects, etc.
- Consider adapting exams to accommodate seniors, to avoid bunch-up.
- Could affect University Housing requirements.
- Could lead to an increase in students experiencing “hardship” in the number of exams within a 24-hour period (Policy reference: [https://registrar.wisc.edu/documents/exam\\_policy.pdf](https://registrar.wisc.edu/documents/exam_policy.pdf)).

*Action needed:* During spring 2016 summary period, Office of the Registrar will determine exam period usage and consider possible additional changes. Evaluate how the need for a final exam block is conveyed as well as subsequent exam block assignment processes and consider possible changes.

**Recommendation #4: Shorten grade submission period to 72 hours after the last final exam day.**

Current policy is that all grades are to be reported no later than 144 hours after the assigned exam time for the course. However, this policy is not currently enforced and the de facto grade reporting deadline is 144 hours after the last exam. UW-Madison is a significant outlier in this regard when compared to peer institutions. Of the AAU institutions that responded to a brief and informal survey regarding final grading deadlines, 80% have a shorter grade submission period than UW-Madison. The extended grade reporting period dates to a time when workflows were paper-based; electronic reporting of grades allows for substantially reduced reporting windows. The current practice means that the administration cannot begin processing academic probations, deans' lists, other reports (or begin tracking down missing grade reports), and actions until well after the semester ends. Exam times are scheduled on a rotating basis across the summary period. In practice, exams are scheduled as much as possible so as not to be clustered for students or for instructors teaching multiple large classes. This recommendation would only affect those with exams assigned on the last day or two of the summary period, as the 72-hour deadline is after the last exam date, rather than after specific exams. Similar to current practice, instructors can consult with their department chair and/or school/college academic dean's office to explore alternatives when extenuating circumstances exist. If this recommendation is not adopted, at a minimum the current policy will have to be enforced in order to eliminate current practice of most grade reporting occurring after exams are over. *Affects all instructors, especially those with exams on the last day of the summary period, and academic administration.*

*Teaching and student advantages:*

- When grades are submitted quickly, students are able to make informed academic decisions about future course enrollments.
- Student demands for quicker actions, reporting, and degree clearance activities met.
- Instructor and teaching assistant workload over holiday eliminated.
- Enables earlier processing of the federally required Satisfactory Academic Progress calculations, which provides a longer window for students to submit appeals and the appeals to be reviewed by financial aid prior to the subsequent term's disbursements.

*Administrative advantages:*

- Allows more efficient processing of grades, end of term processing, and determination of deans' list and graduation status. Reduces stress on academic deans' offices and administrative staff.
- Enables quicker processing of withdrawals for the required Return of Title IV Funds (financial aid) calculations, federally mandated to be completed no more than 30 days from the end of term.
- Enables processing of academic actions and other matters prior to start of 4-week summer term.

*Action needed:* Senate to update Faculty Legislation II-105(6).

**Recommendation #5: Clarify Wisconsin Stat s.36.11(16) to limit application to undergraduates.**

When the Wisconsin legislature passed the requirement that classes could not begin until after September 1, exemptions were made for graduate-level programs that existed at the time that were not required to adhere to the new start date. Since that time, other graduate-level programs have been created, particularly in the health sciences, which operate under similar professional calendar structures to those specifically exempted in the statute. This has created a significant hardship on programs such as the Pharmacy doctorate, which are currently bound by the mandated start date rather than the calendar allowed for other similar programs. It has also put these programs at a competitive disadvantage to peer institutions with similar professional programs. Rather than add to the list of programs exempted, the committee believes it would be simpler to clarify the intent of the statute, which appears to have been to apply the mandatory September start date only to undergraduate-level classes. *Affects graduate-level and professional programs, especially in the health sciences.*

*Current language:* Commencement of fall semester. The board shall ensure that no fall semester classes at any institution, except medical school classes and 4th year classes at the school of veterinary medicine, commence until after September 1.

*Proposed language:* Commencement of fall semesters. The board shall ensure that no undergraduate fall semester at any institution commence until after September 1.

This would be more inclusive and would consider the needs of other professional schools such as Pharmacy, and it appears to be consistent with legislative intent. This enables flexibility, but most graduate programs would remain on the same calendar. This gives flexibility to programs like Pharmacy or MBA to start earlier, but most traditional programs would likely continue on as before.

*Additional considerations:*

- How it would affect classes which are mixed graduate/undergraduate.
- Many committee members suggested removing this statute altogether, as long as the K-12 school year was similarly scheduled.
- A fall break is not possible without changing the state-determined fall start of September 2 or reducing the winter break or extending fall semester into legal holidays.

*Action needed:* UW-Madison Chancellor and Faculty Senate would work with UW System to have legislation changed, or find an alternative solution for the professional programs.

**Recommendation #6: Request that some or all sections of ACPS-4 be discarded.**

Much of document *University of Wisconsin System Policy on Academic Year Definition and Assorted Derivatives. Academic Planning Statement No. 4 (ACPS-4)* (last updated by the Board of Regents 2/11/2000) is redundant or superseded by other policies and thereby create an audit risk. The terminology and processes are outdated, yet it determines the contract year and length. A new policy document should be created that is more narrowly focused. Some of this may be relevant for other UW System campuses but not UW-Madison. Specific sections are detailed below.

Preamble: ***This section could be in a revised document.***

- Clarify how the sections apply to all teaching staff categories (e.g., faculty, academic staff, and graduate student employees).
- 1. The academic year and calendar: ***This section could be in a revised document.***
  - Omit time allowance for registration, which is no longer in person and on-site
  - Omit reference to advising, which takes place all year.
- 2. The awarding of credit: ***Discard this section***
  - Superseded by the 2011 Federal Regulations on Credit
  - The Higher Learning Commission requirements include demonstration of compliance with federal regulations ([commission.org/Accreditation-Processes/accreditation.html](http://commission.org/Accreditation-Processes/accreditation.html)). It wouldn't be practical or possible to be in compliance with both federal policies and ACPS-4; it would be a liability during an audit.
- 3. The period of appointment for faculty: ***This section could be in a revised document.***
  - Update registration reference (“... scheduled campus registration for the fall term...”): registration for the fall term starts in the previous April.
- 4. Compensation adjustments for interrupted service or unanticipated termination of appointments: ***Discard this section***
  - Should be housed by UWSA/UW-Madison payroll services (Service Center: [uwservice.wisconsin.edu](http://uwservice.wisconsin.edu))
- 5. Eligibility--sick leave, teacher retirement, social security, unemployment compensation, etc.: ***Discard this section***
  - a. Sick leave: UWSA and UW-Madison have their own policies ([kb.wisc.edu/ohr/policies](http://kb.wisc.edu/ohr/policies)).
  - b. Retirement: Covered by other UWSA policies ([ohr.wisc.edu/benefits/retirement](http://ohr.wisc.edu/benefits/retirement)).
  - c. Unemployment compensation and social security: Covered by federal and state laws.
- 6. Unanticipated assignments for faculty members from University sources during the period of appointment: ***Discard this section.***
  - a. General policy: Out of date; UW-Madison follows the current policy on overloads: <https://kb.wisc.edu/ohr/policies/page.php?id=53140>
  - b. Mini-sessions during the academic year: Covered by other UWSA and UW-Madison policies. UW-Madison's policy is unique because of an 8/9ths pay policy over three years.
  - c. Summer session and post-commencement (-term) mini-session: same as b.
  - d. Interinstitutional instructional consulting, or technical service on an overload basis: reads in part: “... short-term, or nonrecurring in nature”; this is not followed in practice.
  - e. Off-campus credit instruction: Obsolete terminology and set of practices.
  - f. Non-credit continuing education and public service programs: reads in part: “... as outlined in the April 1982 Regent's Policy and as set forth in the ACIS-5.” If the Academic Information Series 5 (ACIS) has not been updated since 1982, it will also be out of date.
  - g. Monitoring of overload payments: Salary figures are wrong; should be moved to overload policies. UW-Madison may be exempt with new personnel system (clarify).

*Action needed:* UW System Administration (specifically, the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs) to update the policy document.