

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

Office of the Chair
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December 18, 2003

Michael T. Nietzel, Provost
106 Gillis Building
CAMPUS 0033

Dear Mike,

The Senate Council met this past Monday to consider your proposal for a Winter Intersession. As you recall from our breakfast meeting, the initial reaction to your idea was positive, and Council members are very interested in helping this idea along. At the Monday meeting, we had the chance to discuss the Intersession idea in greater detail, and the Council wanted me to share with you the questions and concerns that arose.

The primary concern of the Council members was the brevity of the pilot intersession. When considering the number of study hours students are asked to spend in relation to their class hours (2 to 3 hours of study time for every hour spent in class), literal interpretation would indicate that the students, who would be in class 20 hours per week, would be expected to study between 40 and 60 hours per week, totaling up to 80 hours of academic work per week – Council members felt this would be excessive and unrealistic. There were also pedagogical questions raised about this short session, with certain types of courses that would not easily permit students to achieve mastery within a highly compressed format.

There were some logistical questions that arose, for example the add/drop periods that would be identified, withdrawal dates, the effect of absences on student performance, and financial aid availability, to name a few.

There was some confusion related to the stated goals in your letter. During the breakfast meeting you described the intersession as a potentially advantageous time for faculty to teach experimental courses, thereby permitting faculty and students to “stretch” outside the usual curriculum. In the proposal, however, you mentioned the goals of improving time to degree and aiding in remediation, thus implying that the courses taught during the intersession would be the same required courses taught during the conventional semester. As one Council member asked, if a student was unsuccessful in a required course during the traditional semester, is it reasonable to believe that remediation through a highly compressed course over a two-week period would help the student succeed? Therefore, Council members wondered what types of courses you envisioned being offered during the intersession.

Along the same lines, if the intent is to teach many of the same basic courses (e.g. USP courses) during such an intersession, realistically speaking they would end up being taught predominantly by TA's and PTI's rather than by tenured or tenure track faculty. These concerns, I believe, were already discussed at the breakfast meeting.

The Council understood that the proposal recommends a pilot year. The primary suggestion offered by the Council was to increase the length of the proposed pilot intersession. This could be accomplished, for example, by beginning Fall classes on Monday rather than Wednesday and abolishing fall break, thus freeing up three additional teaching days at the beginning of the semester which would allow for more time at the end of the semester for the intersession.

It is our understanding from the Registrar's office that we must approve the 2004-05 calendar no later than the February 9 University Senate meeting. Council members felt it important for the Senate to consider the proposal and therefore voted to place the intersession proposal on the Senate agenda and, in view of the concerns above, with a negative recommendation. However, if there is any opportunity to address these concerns with you prior to the Senate meeting, the Council is certainly willing to reconsider its recommendation to the Senate. Again, permit me to reiterate the Council's interest in helping to implement a Winter Session.

A related and positive outcome from the intersession discussion was a motion passed by the Council to create an ad hoc committee of the Senate that will be charged with considering alternative calendar configurations, including ones that would more easily accommodate proposals such as this and ones that may better align with academic calendars of other higher education institutions in the state. We look forward to your advice and guidance as that committee begins its work in the Spring. We also look forward to continuing to work with you on the intersession proposal.

Sincerely,

Jeff Dembo
Chair, University Senate Council

cc: Kris Hobson