

## MEMORANDUM

To: Senate Council  
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From: Michael T. Nietzel  
Provost

Subject: Proposed Winter Intersession

Date: December 21, 2003

Thank you for your December 18, 2003 response to my proposal for a 2004-05 winter intersession. I am pleased that the Senate Council is interested in helping implement an intersession. Below I respond to the concerns and questions that were raised in your letter. I am available to meet with you further on this issue and hope that the Senate Council will forward a positive recommendation to the Senate at its February 9, 2004 meeting.

As you know, this proposed winter intersession is intended as a small pilot project, not to exceed twelve courses, which would be followed by a rigorous evaluation that would allow us to learn how to maximize the term's potential over time.

Based on extensive data that we have collected from other institutions, I am confident that the proposed intersession can provide a learning experience that will not be inferior to any of the other terms currently offered at UK.

I would like to share some data relative to Council's concerns about the brevity of the session. We have responses from more than 15 colleges/universities that address this issue, and we have not found a single institution that reports a decrement in learning outcomes or student satisfaction with intensive terms, including some that are shorter than that proposed by UK. For example, Colorado College, an outstanding, selective liberal arts college, now offers most of its courses throughout the curriculum in 3.5- week blocks, one course at a time. At SUNY-

Potsdam, 86% of students reported being very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of instruction they received in a term briefer than the one proposed for UK. In a recently conducted survey of University of Montana students, 140 of 165 students responded that they would enroll for future intersession courses. Respondents from the University of Scranton, University of Idaho, Providence College, Ohio University, and UNC-Greensboro report that student grades and faculty evaluations are consistent across the winter intersession and other semesters. Based on an outstanding response from students, the University of Iowa has greatly expanded its winter intersession, which is less than three weeks in length.

Fairfield University tested the hypothesis that shorter terms equate with diminished learning. They used the same examinations in the intersession as in other semesters and reported that the students score as well in the intersession as in other semesters.

Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio performed internal evaluations to assure itself that intersessions would provide quality education. Three outside evaluators were brought in to make assessments without any indication whether the student products they evaluated had been done in the intersession or traditional semester. They found either no significant differences or that the outcomes from the immersion approach were superior. Anecdotal responses from several schools indicated that faculty who teach the same course during the intersession and in other semesters felt that the level of student performance in the intensive term was equal to or better than during the regular semester.

I appreciate the Senate Council's interest in ensuring student learning and success. I share that interest and am committed to enhancing educational outcomes throughout the year. However, it is not clear that any given term length is best for all purposes and all students. Neither is it the case that the ideal amount of study time per credit hour is a challenge for only a winter intersession; UK's own survey data show that 72% of our first-year students and 66% of our seniors study 10 hours or less per week, and the vast majority of those respondents are full-time students taking at least 12 credits per term.

Pedagogical concerns are best answered by data, and while we must be diligent in considering potential negatives for students, evidence does exist that, for the right courses, accelerated sessions can be better than traditional semester-based delivery. Immersion in the topic and focus on a single course are positives. The short duration of the proposed winter intersession offers opportunities for concentrated study or mastery of a skill. Concentrated schedules also make it possible for faculty to take students on educational trips, providing guided access to and interpretation of otherwise inaccessible sites. Many schools report the term as a venue for faculty to try new approaches and for students to experience enrichment opportunities otherwise not possible. Each of these experiences—particularly adapted to the brief intersession—offers special promise of learning outcomes we can all support.

Academic departments and colleges would nominate specific courses for this initial pilot, but we've already discussed the need to select courses in which students can learn effectively and

succeed in compressed periods. Some courses are more likely to produce positive outcomes than others. I would expect to see workshops, group interaction courses, enrichment courses that students would not normally be able to work into their schedules, educational trips, immersion experiences including language experiences, online courses, courses that students often have difficulty getting into by virtue of limited faculty, lab, or other facilities, performance courses (speech, photography, etc., particularly those with final projects), workshops, graduate courses for international students and for teachers, and internships. Dean Greasley and the Senate Council could screen nominated courses rigorously for those likely to produce quality learning and positive student outcomes.

Regarding the instructors for these courses, I strongly prefer that they be tenure track faculty, but I see no reason to not offer a desirable course should there be no regular faculty who are interested in teaching it.

Remediation courses must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Schools that offer remediation in intersessions do so to keep students on track for graduation, particularly where there is a course sequence involved and failure to complete the sequence would result in a loss of student progress. Even there, students enrolling for remediation might be limited to those who have been through the first course in the normal semester and were close to passing.

I want to begin the process of soliciting course nominations earlier than the time in which departments would normally build schedules. The advance schedule is designed to provide opportunities to review course nominations, consider their appropriateness for intensive delivery in an intersession, allow faculty to revise their syllabi for presentation in an intensive format, and post course policy statements, syllabi and assignments on the Web well in advance so students will know course expectations and requirements.

Logistical issues can be addressed. Web posting of syllabi and other course information well before the start of the intersession should clarify instructor expectations in advance and help students prepare. I anticipate no late-enrollment option. The withdrawal schedule will be very rapid; to that end, we will encourage advisors to counsel students on the rapid pace and the need to be prepared and to attend class every day. Financial aid will not be available during the winter intersession. It is available only in theory during summer terms because UK students typically use their entire financial aid allocation during the fall and spring semesters, leaving none available for summer. However, students who sign up for only one course can do it more cheaply during a winter intersession than during the summer 4- or 8-week sessions because the compressed time period means decreased nonacademic costs.

Although my preference would be to run the pilot on the schedule I have proposed, if the Senate Council desires to have additional time available during a 2004-05 Winter Intersession, we certainly could use an alternate schedule. The intersession as originally proposed contains a ten-day period without classes (December 24 through January 2) as a time during which students can complete assignments and study for exams as well as progress through web-based courses. If we

wanted to add days to the winter intersession calendar, I think the best option would be to start the fall semester one day earlier and eliminate the Fall break day, thereby adding two days to the intersession. We could also eliminate the extra MWF class period in Fall semester.

Making all three changes would provide three class periods, two on MWF schedules and one on TR schedules, so that the last day of fall semester classes could be a Tuesday followed by a Wednesday study day. Exams could be held on Thursday, December 9, Friday, December 10, and Monday through Wednesday, December 13 – 15.

The resulting Fall 2004 semester would have MWF classes meet 43 times plus the final exam, for a total of 2,270 minutes. Spring 2005 MWF classes are already scheduled for the same number of meetings and total time. Fall 2004 TR classes will meet 29 times plus the final exam, for a total of 2,295 minutes. Spring 2005 TR classes are already scheduled for the same number of meetings and total time.

Making these changes in fall dates would require fall semester “finals week” to be split into two calendar weeks; Senate Rule 2.1.2 A, states, “The last day of classes will be on a Friday. Examinations will run for 5 days, Monday through Friday.” I would think that rule could be suspended for this pilot.

A shift to a later start date for spring semester is more problematic. Spring semester 2005 is hemmed in by the dates of graduation weekend, and changes in the spring schedule would reduce the number of contact hours below current UK levels.

If we keep the dates of the Winter Intersession schedule as I have proposed, Winter Intersession classes will meet for **2,520** minutes—225 to 245 minutes more than now currently in spring or proposed for fall. Furthermore, the ten-day Winter Intersession class hiatus will provide significant additional class preparation and study time for students.

I appreciate Senate Council’s interest in working out the details of a pilot winter intersession. UK is already a bit late to address this time as an opportunity for achieving a number of desirable outcomes, and with your support, we can add significant new resources for our students.

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cc: Lee T. Todd, Jr.  
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