

## Reading Period Calendar Proposal

The calendar for most colleges at UK is currently divided into five terms: Fall (16 weeks), Winter intersession (2.2 weeks), Spring (16 weeks), Summer I (4 weeks), and Summer II (8 weeks). The Fall and Spring semesters both begin on Wednesdays, class instruction ends on Fridays, and the subsequent week is devoted to final exams.

Over the years, both students and faculty have proposed that the Fall term start on Monday and end on a Wednesday, providing a four-day weekend ("reading period") before the beginning of final exams. The advocates of this position argue that the two weekend days between the conclusion of instruction and the beginning of final exams is not nearly enough time for students to assimilate the most recent information and to prepare for their final exams. These proposals have always faltered due to objections from representatives of the "student life" sector of the University (housing, etc.), who argue convincingly that the Fall term Wednesday start date is invaluable to beginning students' adjustment to UK. No one has yet conceived of a calendar that would reconcile the competing priorities.

One solution that, to my knowledge, has not been considered, is **to compress the Summer I session from 4 to 2.2 weeks** (including one day for final exams). The University has now had several years' experience with the 2.2-week Winter Intersession. Whatever the pedagogical virtues and drawbacks of a 2.2-week term, I have difficulty imagining anyone arguing that the pedagogical value of the 4-week Summer I term would be significantly reduced by compressing it further to 2.2 weeks. However, compressing the Summer I term to 2.2 weeks would allow the following changes to the Fall and Spring term calendars:

Plan 1 (my preference):

(1) Begin the Fall term one full week earlier, end class instruction one full week earlier, and give final exams the following Wednesday through Tuesday; *and*,

(2) Begin the Spring term on Wednesday (as is done now), make the Monday and Tuesday following the end of class instruction into a reading period, and give final exams Wednesday through Tuesday.

Plan 2:

(1) Begin the Fall term one full week earlier (it will still begin on a Wednesday!), extend Thanksgiving break to a full week, and end class instruction on the Tuesday before final exam week, providing a full five days before final exams begin; *and*,

(2) In the Spring, make the Monday and Tuesday following the end of class instruction into a reading period, and give final exams Wednesday through Tuesday.

Plan 3:

(1) Begin the Fall term one full week earlier, end class instruction one full week earlier, and give final exams the following Wednesday through Tuesday; *and*,

(2) Begin the Winter intersession two or three days earlier; *and*,

(3) Begin the Spring term on Monday, end class instruction on a Wednesday, make the Thursday and Friday following the end of class instruction into a reading period, and give final exams the

subsequent week.

The **advantage** of these plans is that the introduction of reading periods in both the Fall and Spring semesters and providing a weekend break between final exams *should* (though is not guaranteed to) lead to a significant increase in end-of-semester student learning and performance on final exams, hopefully leading to increased retention rates and fewer repeated classes. Furthermore, because Fall classes would still begin on Wednesday, the change would not adversely affect Fall welcome activities, which are an important tool for helping new students acclimatize to life at UK.

**Objection:** Students who do not take Summer I classes will see their summer break shortened by 1.0 to 1.6 weeks. (The summer will end seven days earlier, and, under plans 1 and 2, it will begin four days later.) For some students, this change will mean less time to earn money for school.

**Response:** Yes, it will. The faculty will need to decide whether the academic imperative of trying to improve performance on final exams is worth the potential financial repercussions on students who work over the summer to earn tuition money. Perhaps someone at the University can tell us how many students might be adversely affected financially by the change. On the other hand, improved academic performance would mean earlier graduation, which would lead to much greater earnings in the long run.

**Objection:** Under plans 1 and 2, Commencement would either have to be postponed one week, leaving a three-day delay between the end of finals and the beginning of Commencement, or it would occur before final exams are finished. **Response:** Currently, Commencement occurs before all final exam grades are in, so holding it before final exams are completed wouldn't be a big change anyway. Postponing it a week would allow students to learn whether they had actually completed their courses successfully before Commencement. Besides, Commencement affects only seniors graduating that semester; final exams affect all students. We should not make academic decisions that affect all students based on a ceremony in which only a minority can participate in any one year. The three days after final exams and before Commencement could even be used for other activities such as departmental honors, public service, career fairs, academic enrichment, etc.

**Objection:** The plans will mean 1.4 more weeks of work for faculty. **Response:** Not really; we will trade summer days for reading period days, although, unlike summer, we will probably have students coming to talk to us over reading period. The plans do mean 1.4 fewer weeks of summer break for faculty who do not work over the summer. Again, we have to balance our interests with the academic interests of the students.

I do not pretend that I have thought of all potential objections, but I think I've hit the major ones. I would very much like to see these plans made the basis of a discussion among the faculty, the Dean of Students, the Provost, Student Government, and other relevant parties. Let me know if I can help in any way to move the discussion along.