

A Report from the Calendar Working Group
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Preface

In August 2016 the provost organized a calendar task force to review the academic calendar. This task force was charged with identifying the faculty, staff, and student concerns with the current calendar, considering the strategic advantages and disadvantages of multiple calendar models, and gauging the community responses to these same models. The task force submitted a report to the Strategic Planning Committee before the committee's May 2017 retreat.

After considering the suggested models, the Strategic Planning Committee charged a small team to fully develop an academic calendar that created three (fall, spring, and summer) equal terms. The committee viewed this model as the option that (a) was easily implemented, (b) would increase the strategic value of the summer term, and (c) addressed the concerns raised with the current calendar. Chief among these concerns were establishing a consistent three week period between the fall and spring terms and ending the spring semester as early as possible so as to increase student opportunities for employment and internships.

In August 2017, the Strategic Planning Committee reviewed the detailed model and decided that the model deserved a broad review by the campus community. The present calendar working group was charged with gathering campus feedback on the model and proposing a final model for consideration by the Faculty Senate and the President's Council.

Over the course of the fall 2017 semester, the representatives of the calendar working group met with Administrative Services leadership, Athletic Department coaches, CAA, CCPC, Department of Theology, Department of Music, EPC, GEPC, SEAC, Student Affairs leadership, and Student Senate. It received emails from a few faculty and from eight students. It also received longer formal responses from the College of Engineering and the College of Nursing and Health Professions.

Ultimately, for reasons detailed below, the working group determined that the three equal term model was probably not feasible at this time. In response, and with the endorsement of the Provost's Council, it is bringing forward an academic calendar model which maintains the basic structure of the current fall, spring, and summer terms while addressing the key concerns with the current calendar.

The governing guidelines for the proposed calendar are at the end of the report, as are the resulting calendars for the next five years. After a brief digression concerning terminology, a section of this report addresses the concerns raised by the three equal terms model and why that model was rejected. The final section of the report addresses the problems solved and

concerns raised with the attached model being proposed.

Terminology

Unfortunately, there are three different definitions of a week used in this discussion.

There are actual calendar weeks (52 in a year).

There are instructional weeks, which refer to any calendar week in which there is at least one day of classes. This latter definition is critical to calculating federal financial aid, which specifies that an academic year must consist of at least 30 instructional weeks.

Then there are semester weeks, which are actually defined by Carnegie hours (which are 50 minutes in duration.) The federal guidelines for a credit hour require approximately 15 “weeks” of instructional contact. By this, it actually means that a credit hour is approximately 14 Carnegie hours of instruction plus 1 Carnegie hour of final exams plus 30 Carnegie hours of independent student work. With the advent of online courses, this has further evolved to effectively mean that one credit hour requires approximately 45 Carnegie hours of time on task by the student. Thus a three credit course in a “14 week semester” consists of 39 instructional Carnegie hours plus a three Carnegie hour final exam. This semester is spread over 15 instructional weeks and spans 16 calendar weeks to include breaks. Similarly, a three credit course in a “15 week semester” consists of 42 instructional Carnegie hours plus a two Carnegie hour final exam. This semester is spread over 16 instructional weeks and spans 17 calendar weeks to include breaks.

The following sections identify key topics and issues raised by members of the campus community about the proposed calendar and offers responses to them.

The three equal term model:

1. Required faculty and student participation in summer sessions.
Many people conflated a decision to consider changes to the academic calendar, which enabled more robust summer programs, with a decision to actually require summer course work for students. While the academic calendar change would likely enable a more efficient use of the summer term, the change itself does not mandate changes to the current summer academic program. This was one advantage of selecting it over a J-term or May-mester.
2. Resulted in a loss of pay.
Currently, the faculty handbook says that faculty on academic year appointments work approximately nine months. For payroll and government purposes, this is specifically 39 weeks, or 195 days. The reduction of each of the fall and spring terms to 14 weeks would have reduced this to 37 weeks, which is still approximately nine months. The working group anticipated that the 37th week, after the end of the spring term, would be used to conclude non-teaching activities such as the organizational meeting of the

Faculty Senate, the last CAPS, CELT, and CWR meetings, assessment activities, and evaluation activities.

There would have been no reduction in work for hourly staff with the three equal term model. All of the administrative leadership that spoke with the working group were confident that there would be plenty of work to keep these staff employed during the three weeks made available by a reduction in the academic calendar year.

3. Reduced administrative work.

As noted above, while the three equal term academic calendar lengthens the summer term, it does not require that all courses taught in the summer fill the entire length of a summer session or both summer sessions (any more than it does during the fall or spring.) For example, courses offered in the first summer seven-week term could still be taught in a four or six week compressed format rather than spread over the entire seven weeks. Still the advantage of the three equal term model was that it standardized the summer term consistently with the fall and spring terms, and reduced variation in terms across the university. This standardization would have provided the opportunity for significant simplification in terms of faculty preparation and in terms of administrative overhead, particularly for federal reporting purposes in the Office of Registrar.

On the other hand, Dean Ziegler reports that, across the country, few institutions are standardizing their summer sessions but are rather using them to offer courses in many different formats than are used during the fall and spring terms. For example, she references Purdue University's summer schedule as an example for having three week, four week, six week, eight week, and twelve week courses running in the summer. However, a significant side effect of offering courses in these many different formats is an increase in faculty preparation time and administrative overload (i.e. they run counter to the efficiencies the university was hoping to gain.)

4. Reduced content coverage.

The predominant concern with a 14 week term, as argued strongly by the COE, with similar concern shared by the science departments and the CONHP, is the loss of significant content in courses. Although one might argue that the success of Valpo graduates is more contingent on the quality of our teaching and the depth of their understanding rather than the breadth of content learned, the concern is significant. With this in mind, the following were potential responses to the concern

- a. Adjusting the daily class schedule to build in the lost time,
- b. Adding new courses to cover lost content,
- c. Shifting a portion of the content to the student outside of class,
- d. Simply reducing the content coverage in a course, and/or
- e. Being more efficient with the time available.

Fourteen week (39 instructional hours + 3 hour finals) terms are allowed by government regulations and accreditation bodies, which usually describe a term as "approximately

15 weeks.” The exception to this is the ABA which specifically requires a 15 week (45 Carnegie hours for 3 credits) term; other accrediting bodies such as ABET prescribe content coverage but not how the calendar is arranged. However, 14 week terms are rare. They are generally found at liberal arts colleges that also have January or May terms. The 15 week (42 instructional hours + 2 hour finals) term is much more common and, in some states, mandated for public institutions. All of our peer institutions use this model as well as the principal public institutions throughout the Midwest.

5. Had no financial impact.

It is difficult to precisely determine the financial impact of a change to a 14 week term. It is reasonable however, to presume that it will cost the university money since the calendar change itself is not a revenue generating activity. Examples of costs are provided here.

Currently, instructors are paid per credit in the summer, not for the number of days of work. This approach would have continued to be in place for the foreseeable future; therefore faculty would have had greater flexibility about how to schedule this summer work than they do now. However, if the university began to require more faculty to have twelve month appointments, there is already language in the faculty handbook covering their benefits. Faculty members currently on twelve-month appointments have salaries commensurate with that workload.

Although most employees will have Labor Day as a paid holiday in the new model, essential services employees in FM, building services, dining services, and residential life will still need to work. They will need to be compensated for this with extra payment for the day or an alternative holiday.

The university could lose revenue on room and board for the reduced three weeks of housing. However, much of this lost revenue will be balanced against a corresponding reduction in services provided.

The longer summer session may provide greater opportunities for revenue from summer camps and conferences. However, since these will not happen in May when we've added the time, any significant gain in auxiliary revenue would require that we front-load summer classes into the first seven weeks of the term.

The one unit for which the university can estimate additional costs is in the Athletics Department. Reducing the academic calendar by three weeks would require Athletics to provide room and board for students during those additional weeks (primarily football in the fall and baseball in the spring.) An estimate of this cost is \$140,000. Because more events will be outside of the academic year, there could be further additional costs related associated with event workers.

The shorter calendar change might have positively impacted retention, but there is no way to quantify this impact. The longer break between fall and spring allows students to make mid-year corrections, the shorter spring break may help students maintain momentum throughout the spring, and a robust summer option might allow students to catch up on missing or failed courses. If students are not enrolled in the summer, the longer summer would provide more employment opportunities, enabling them to remain in school from a financial perspective.

The proposed modified 15 week model:

1. Resolves the following concerns with the current calendar:
 - a. Labor Day will be a holiday for most university employees (an often voiced concern.)
 - b. The beginning of the fall term is moved from a Tuesday to a Wednesday (an advantage for fall welcome programming.)
 - c. Fall commencement is after fall exams (more efficient for families and campus.)
 - d. There is a guaranteed three week break between the fall and spring terms (very much needed for administrative purposes.)
 - e. The spring finals period is reduced to one week (desired to reduce pressures on the residence halls and student affairs staff.)
 - f. The spring term ends, generally, 12 days earlier than the current calendar.

2. Results in each fall and spring term being short a Monday.

This is true, but each term has an extra Wednesday. Therefore the problem can be resolved by using the Monday class schedule on the first Wednesday of the term.

On a related note, the spring term will have an extra Thursday. This day could be used for “engaging” programming such as a day-long celebration of academic, scholarly, and creative achievement by the faculty, staff, and students. It has also been suggested, but is not part of this proposal, that we actually take MLK Day as a university holiday and use the extra Thursday to hold our MLK celebration. If the proposed calendar is adopted, the campus will need to return to this topic.

3. Eliminates the spring reading day.

Since finals will always begin on a Monday, this gives students the weekend before to prepare. This is consistent with our current fall term practice.
4. Could impede music performances.

There are concerns that there will not be enough time between the Thanksgiving break and the Christmas break to rehearse and stage performances. The specific calendars can be arranged so that in five of six years there are two weeks of classes plus finals week, consistent with the current calendar. A side effect of this is that in one of the six years, the three week break will be in the pattern of (closed, business, business) rather than (business, closed, business) and grades will be due on December 23.

By leaving spring break earlier in March and by retaining a 15 week term, other concerns about Easter celebrations and the Liturgical Institute have been resolved.

5. Schedules finals on four days.

Starting finals on Monday reduces the time between the end of exams and commencement and, therefore, significantly reducing pressure on student affairs staff in ensuring that students have constructive activities in which to engage. The proposed model also provides faculty with an extra business day to complete their grading.

Concerns have been raised about proposing that finals be reduced to 100 minutes (2 Carnegie hours) from the current 120 minutes. To preserve the longer length, the university would either need to eliminate special exam periods or extend finals to a fifth day.

More generally, there are two concerns with reducing the final exam period from five days to four: (a) it reduces the time between exams for students, and (c) it reduces the amount of time that can be allocated to comprehensive exam material. Adding a portion or all of a fifth day of exams addresses at least one these problems, but not necessarily both. Simply expanding the schedule to more days allows for longer exams, but does not necessarily spread exam taking out more for the student population. Additionally, using the fifth day for exams also reduces the window of time that faculty have for grading exams.

As with a discussion of how to use the extra Thursday, the University can have a separate discussion about how to schedule finals.

6. Reduces spring break to one week.

There are many intertwined claims and issues related to this proposed change.

a. Two weeks of spring break has pedagogical value.

To the contrary, since many, if not most, schools do not have a full week break in the fall term (i.e. a week at Thanksgiving), it may be conjectured that replacing spring break with a short break might improve student learning. Further, since Valpo is the only school known to have a two week spring break, it may also be conjectured that having it has no additive pedagogical value. Finally, anecdotal evidence from Valpo faculty strongly suggests that the two week break has a negative effect on student knowledge retention.

b. Two weeks of spring break enables study abroad.

It does. However, we may have maximized our ability to use spring break as a study abroad opportunity. One college, CONHP, has extensive successful programming, but programming in other colleges is ad hoc at best. In contrast, schools that have

highly successful study abroad programs generally use either a January term or a May term.

The proposed calendar envisions moving study abroad to May. The simplest way to do this would be for students to sign up for their study away course during the spring term and for faculty to be assigned TLC during that term. Any preparatory work would occur during that term, but an Incomplete grade would be assigned until the class returns from its May travel. This puts the cost of the course in the spring tuition and possibly provides a potentially helpful reallocation of the instructor's time.

It is also true that the spring sports use the long break to schedule extra games so that participants will miss fewer classes, so the shorter spring break will likely require student-athletes to miss additional classes.

c. A two week spring break helps recruiting.

Some claim that having the two week spring break is a recruiting asset. The most vocal supporters of this claim are faculty and staff in CONHP, which uses spring break for its trips and promotes this at college level recruiting events. However, enrollment management reports that it does not include mention of the two week spring break in any of its recruiting materials.

Further, enrollment management reports that the two week spring break actually reduces opportunities for campus visits and other programming during the key recruitment season because there is an additional week during which students and many faculty/staff are absent from campus. From this perspective, the ideal time for a one week spring break is immediately after the end of the first seven-week term of the spring and before regional high schools begin their spring breaks.

We are likely to lose some students if we shorten the spring break, but this is offset by the fact that we gain a week of on-campus visit opportunities. Both the loss and the gain are difficult to estimate.

On a related note, the working group discovered that the university cannot align our spring break with the Valparaiso Public Schools. They plan their calendar only one year out at a time, while the university's is planned three years out.

Attachments

1. Proposed calendar guidelines
2. Draft calendars for six years
3. Proposed schedule of final exams
4. Table of comparisons

ACADEMIC CALENDAR GUIDELINES

Overall Guidelines

1. The Valparaiso University academic calendar is comprised of fall, spring, and summer terms.
2. The fall and spring terms shall be 15 weeks in length, including the final exam period. This allows for 42 MWF instruction periods, plus a 2 hour (100 minute) final exam period for each course.
3. The fall, spring, and summer terms shall span at least 15 instructional weeks. An instructional week is one containing at least one day of classes or exams.
4. Each term shall contain two mini-terms. During the fall and spring, the mini-terms will be seven calendar weeks long, and during the summer they will be six calendar weeks long. The final exam for any mini-term course will be scheduled during the last regular period of the term. (i.e. there will be no dedicated final exam sessions.)
5. Final exams will be scheduled over four days, Monday through Thursday.

Fall Term Guidelines

1. The fall term shall generally begin the Wednesday a week and half before Labor Day; however it may begin on a different day in particularly unique calendar years.
2. Classes shall not meet on Labor Day, which will also be a university holiday.
3. There shall be a two-day fall break, typically a Thursday and Friday, immediately after the end of the Fall 1 mini-term.
4. There shall be a one-week Thanksgiving break, Monday through Friday of Thanksgiving week.
5. The last day for the fall final examination period shall be no later than December 19th.
6. Fall commencement shall be held the Saturday or Sunday after the final examination period.

Spring Term Guidelines

1. The spring term shall begin on a Wednesday no earlier than January 8th, ensuring a minimum three week break after the fall term ends; however it may begin on a different day in particularly unique calendar years.
2. Classes shall not meet on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Although attendance at events may be required of students, it is not counted as an academic day. This day is not a university holiday.
3. There shall be a one week spring break, scheduled immediately after the end of the Spring 1 mini-term.
4. Classes shall not meet on Good Friday, which is also a university holiday.
5. The last day of the spring final examination period shall be no later than May 10th.
6. Spring commencement shall be held the Saturday or Sunday after the final examination period.

Summer Term Guidelines

1. The summer term shall generally begin the Thursday after Spring Commencement; however it may begin on a different day in particularly unique calendar years.
2. Classes shall not meet on Memorial Day, which is also a university holiday.
3. There shall be a two day break during the week containing Independence Day; there is no full week academic break during the summer term. Only July 4 will be a university holiday.
4. If desired, summer commencement may be held the Saturday or Sunday after the end of classes.

Table Comparing the Current Academic Calendar with the Proposed Calendar

	Current Calendar	Proposed Calendar
Labor Day	<u>Regular Class Day</u>	No classes, essential services needed
Number of Class Periods - Fall	M- 14 T- 14 W-15 R-14 F-14	M-13 T- 14 W-15 R-14 F- 14
Fall Break	Th/F in October	Th/F in October
Thanksgiving	Full week of Thanksgiving	Full week of Thanksgiving
Final Exam Period - Fall	5 days (M-F) 120 minute exam period 30 minutes between exams Special Exam Period Usually 2 weeks after Thanksgiving	4/5 days (M-Th/F) 100 minute exam period for 4-day model 20 minutes between exams for 4-day model Special Exam Period 5/6 years 2 weeks after Thanksgiving
December Graduation	Before final exams start	After final exams are complete
Christmas Break	Minimum: 2 weeks Difficult to complete administrative book-keeping, dorm clean-up, etc.	Minimum: 3 weeks Sufficient time to complete administrative book-keeping, dorm cleanup, etc.
University Holiday Closure	Week between Christmas and New Year's	Week between Christmas and New Year's
Number of Class Periods - Spring	M – 14 (w MLK) T - 15 W - 15 Th - 15 F - 14	M - 13 T - 14 W - 15 Th - 15 F - 14
Spring Break	2 weeks At the end of the first 7 weeks Extended sport/music/ international/intercultural opportunities	1 week At the end of first 7 weeks Reduced sport/music/ international/intercultural opportunities
Good Friday	No classes	No classes

Reading Day	Wednesday before finals	None (weekend before final exams start)
Final Exam Period - Spring	5 days (Th-W) 120 minute exam period 30 minutes between exams Special exam periods Weekend available when trouble can happen indorms	4/5 days (M-Th/F) 100 minute exam period for 4-day model 20 minutes between exams for 4-day model Special Exam Periods Reduces weekend time for campus trouble
May Graduation	3-4 days after last finals on Wednesday Lots of time for trouble in dorms	1-2 days after last final on R (F) Reduced time for trouble
End of Spring term	Second/Third week of May	First week of May
Summer Term	Starts on a T	Starts on a R
	Full 12 week session 2 six week mini-sessions	Full 12 week session 2 six week mini-sessions
Memorial Day	University holiday	University Holiday
Independence Day	2 day academic holiday 1 day university holiday	2 day academic holiday 1 day university holiday
August "gap"	1.5 – 2 weeks	2.5 – 3 weeks

FALL TERM (Approx 17 weeks or 116 days)		2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
classes begin	Wednesday	8/21/2019	8/26/2020	8/25/2021	8/24/2022	8/23/2023	8/21/2024
Labor Day off	Monday	9/2/2019	9/7/2020	9/6/2021	9/5/2022	9/4/2023	9/2/2024
Fall 1 term Ends	Friday	10/11/2019	10/14/2020	10/13/2021	10/12/2022	10/11/2023	10/9/2024
fall break for two days	Thursday	10/17/2019	10/15/2020	10/14/2021	10/13/2022	10/12/2023	10/10/2024
Fall 2 term Begins	Monday	10/14/2019	10/19/2020	10/18/2021	10/17/2022	10/16/2023	10/14/2024
full thanksgiving break	Monday	11/25/2019	11/23/2020	11/22/2021	11/21/2022	11/20/2023	11/25/2024
classes resume	Monday	12/2/2019	11/30/2020	11/29/2021	11/28/2022	11/27/2023	12/2/2024
Last day of classes	Friday	12/6/2019	12/11/2020	12/10/2021	12/9/2022	12/8/2023	12/6/2024
finals begin for four days	Monday	12/9/2019	12/14/2020	12/13/2021	12/12/2022	12/11/2023	12/9/2024
semester ends	Friday	12/13/2019	12/18/2020	12/17/2021	12/16/2022	12/15/2023	12/13/2024
Commencement	Sunday	12/15/2019	12/20/2020	12/19/2021	12/18/2022	12/17/2023	12/15/2024
grades due	Monday	12/16/2019	12/21/2020	12/20/2021	12/19/2022	12/18/2023	12/16/2024
CHRISTMAS BREAK (Approx 3 weeks or 25 days)							
university closed		12/23/2019	12/23/2020	12/22/2021	12/23/2022	12/22/2023	12/23/2024
university opens		1/2/2020	1/4/2020	1/4/2022	1/3/2023	1/2/2024	1/2/2025
SPRING TERM (Approx 17 weeks or 115 days)							
classes begin	Wednesday	1/8/2020	1/13/2021	1/12/2022	1/11/2023	1/10/2024	1/8/2025
MLK Day	Monday	1/20/2020	1/18/2021	1/17/2022	1/16/2023	1/15/2024	1/20/2025
Spring 1 term ends	Tuesday	2/28/2020	3/5/2021	3/4/2022	3/3/2023	3/1/2024	2/28/2025
spring break week begins	Monday	3/2/2020	3/8/2020	3/7/2022	3/6/2023	3/4/2024	3/3/2025
Spring 2 term begins	Monday	3/9/2020	3/15/2021	3/14/2022	3/13/2023	3/11/2024	3/10/2025
classes resume	Monday	3/9/2020	3/15/2021	3/14/2022	3/13/2013	3/11/2024	3/10/2025
Good Friday off	Friday	4/10/2020	4/2/2021	4/15/2022	4/7/2023	3/29/2024	4/18/2025
classes end	Friday	4/24/2020	4/30/2021	4/29/2022	4/28/2023	4/26/2024	4/25/2025
finals begin for four days	Monday	4/27/2020	5/3/2021	5/2/2022	5/1/2023	4/29/2024	4/28/2025
semester ends	Friday	5/1/2020	5/7/2021	5/6/2022	5/5/2023	5/3/2024	5/2/2025
Commencement	Sunday	5/3/2020	5/9/2021	5/8/2022	5/7/2023	5/5/2024	5/4/2025
grades due	Monday	5/4/2020	5/10/2021	5/9/2022	5/8/2023	5/6/2024	5/5/2025
MAY BREAK (Approx 0 week or 4 days)							
SUMMER TERM (Approx 13 weeks or 87 days)							
classes begin	Thursday	5/7/2020	5/13/2021	5/12/2022	5/11/2023	5/9/2024	5/8/2025
Memorial day break	Monday	5/25/2020	5/31/2021	5/30/2022	5/29/2023	5/27/2024	5/31/2025
Summer 1 term ends	Tuesday	6/19/2020	6/25/2021	6/24/2021	6/23/2023	6/21/2024	6/20/2025
Summer 2 term begins	Wednesday	6/22/2020	6/28/2021	6/27/2021	6/26/2023	6/24/2024	6/26/2025
July 4 Break for two days	Thursday	7/2/2020	7/5/2021	7/4/2022	7/3/2023	7/4/2024	7/3/2025
classes resume	Monday	7/6/2020	7/7/2021	7/6/2022	7/5/2023	7/8/2024	7/7/2025
classes end	Monday	7/31/2020	8/6/2021	8/5/2021	8/4/2023	8/2/2024	8/1/2025
semester ends	Friday	7/31/2020	8/6/2021	8/5/2021	8/4/2023	8/2/2024	8/1/2025
optional Commencement	Sunday	8/2/2020	8/8/2021	8/7/2021	8/6/2023	8/4/2024	8/3/2025
grades due	Monday	8/3/2020	8/9/2021	8/8/2021	8/7/2023	8/5/2024	8/4/2025
AUGUST BREAK (Approx 3 weeks or 18 days)							
NEXT FALL TERM	Wednesday	8/19/2020	8/25/2021	8/24/2022	8/23/2022	8/21/2024	8/27/2025