

Committee on Academic Policy  
Meeting #9 of 2020-2021 Academic Year  
December 7, 2020, 2:00 pm by Zoom  
Meeting to Discuss “Just in Case” Calendar, Draft 110

Meeting Started at 2:03 pm.

Attendees: Jeanine Dudle (chair), Sarah Miles, Art Heinricher, Jill Rulfs, Suzanne Weekes, Ryan Candy, Lauryn Hubbard, Oleg Pavlov, Jennifer deWinter, Adrienne Hall-Phillips

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the draft “Just in Case” calendar (Draft 110) for C/D/E terms 2021. The calendar has C term starting on February 1 with classes running 5 days per week for 7 weeks (no breaks or days off). The calendar has a 5 day break (2 weekend days and 3 weekdays) between C and D terms. The calendar has D term starting on March 25, which is a Thursday, and ends on a Thursday. Thus, the 7-week term occurs over 8 calendar weeks. There is one day off for Patriot’s Day (Monday, April 19).

The commentary from CAP is as follows:

**Mental Health Concerns:**

There are significant concerns regarding continuing mental health issues with regard to C term and the C/D break. C term is scheduled to occur 5 days per week for 7 weeks with no days off. This intensive schedule is very difficult for both faculty and students. This is followed by only 3 weekdays off between C and D term. A term and the A/B break followed similar patterns. This caused many mental health issues which continue to this day, and would be anticipated to occur/continue in the spring. Thus, the C term calendar is unrealistic.

A five day C/D break is better than the four day A/B break; however a full week C/D break would provide much needed rest for students, and time for faculty to complete grading and prepare for the subsequent term. Students could be encouraged not to travel and to make positive health decisions for reasons other than a new term starting.

**Start Day for C Term and C term days off:**

It is unclear why the start date is so late (Feb 1). The trajectory of the pandemic is unlikely to change between mid-January and early February, thus pushing back the start date does not seem to offer benefits. Instead, the term could be started earlier than the calendar published on the WPI website to allow some non-class days to be incorporated, and C term to occur over 8 calendar weeks. For example, if C term started on January 19, it could still end on March 10, and two non-class days could be added (one for Academic Advising day and one for a mental health day in week 3 or 4). This would allow D term to start and end earlier as well.

Additionally, a 7 week break between B and C terms may be problematic for two reasons: (a) sponsored projects, and (b) mental health. For sponsored projects, having almost 2 months “off” from project work will cause projects to lose ground and may be problematic for sponsors who see no progress being made. From a mental health perspective, a 7-week break (in which there

would potentially be no WPI-related meetings or interactions) during the winter when daylight hours are short may be isolating for some faculty/students. A return to a regular schedule for work/school can be helpful for alleviating isolation. Thus, starting C term earlier has potential benefits for mental health.

### **Project Presentation Day and Patriot's Day**

The lack of a non-class day for PPD in Spring 2021 is of concern. PPD is supposed to be a culminating experience for seniors, and regardless of the format of PPD this year, it should still be a culminating experience. Students cannot be expected to present their MQPs and go to their regular classes/discussion sections/labs on the same day.

It is also noted that Patriot's Day is a negotiable holiday. Rather than have Patriot's Day off and PPD off of classes in the same week, a holiday could be introduced earlier in D term to provide a mental health day in week 3 or 4.

### **Summer Classes**

Reducing E1 from 7 weeks to 5 weeks would require faculty to "pivot" their teaching again. This demand on faculty may cause some faculty to drop their classes rather than pivot to a 5 week schedule. Students are unlikely to take three classes in a 5-week term, which may impact enrollment.

### **Potential proposal to move C term to March/April/May and D term to Summer**

CAP was made aware of a potential proposal to move C term to March/April/May and D term to summer. CAP cannot express strongly enough that this proposal should not be considered. Many faculty worked unpaid in summer 2020 to prepare for the fall; and many faculty have responsibilities related to teaching, research, and childcare. Asking faculty to teach D term classes in the summertime while conducting research, caring for children and family members, and taking vacation, is not acceptable.

### **Summary**

CAP strongly recommends that the following changes be made to the spring calendar:

- Start C term earlier, and have C term occur over 8 calendar weeks (keep D term occurring over 8 calendar weeks as well)
- Introduce 2 non-class days in C term (one day off in week 3 or 4, one day off for Academic Advising Day)
- Maintain a minimum 3 weekday break between C and D terms, and consider a 5 weekday break
- Eliminate the Patriot's Day holiday and replace it with a non-class day in week 3 or 4 of D term
- Introduce a non-class day for PPD

Meeting Ended at 2:55 pm.

Submitted by Jeanine D. Dudle, CAP Chair

