

## Trimester Questions

A shift to trimesters would engage every aspect of the Purdue West Lafayette campus, from people (students, faculty, staff, families, & prospective employers) to mission (research, teaching, & engagement) to space (classrooms, offices, labs, Libraries, & residence halls) to campus life (athletics, Convocations, intramurals, & student organizations) to time (length of a class, a day, & a term), and much more. The rationale for switching to a trimester academic calendar includes greater flexibility for students, faculty and staff, a greater utilization of university facilities, and a strengthened local economy.<sup>1</sup> However, before considering such a move, the entire campus will engage in a deliberate and judicious consideration of how such a change would affect Purdue.

A set of almost 100 questions and issues about the switch to trimesters is provided that guides the process. Some of the questions were asked at the University Senate meeting that focused on trimesters on October 15, 2012.<sup>2</sup> Other questions arise from documents found on the Senate agenda,<sup>3</sup> a literature review,<sup>4</sup> or are a result of conversations across campus. The questions have been categorized into eight interdependent groups:

- Faculty and Staff Roles
- Composition of the Student Body
- Effects On The Research, Teaching, and Engagement Mission
- Student Life
- Funding Models
- Time: Academic Calendar and Day
- Campus Space
- Community Linkages

## Questions that Were Answered

- 1) What is the stance of the Board of Trustees on this issue and do they have the final word?
  - a. Per Tim Sands, the Trustees support the concept, but he is not sure how they could force us into the situation if it did not make any sense. The faculty has control over the curriculum and the calendar. Practically speaking this is the body (the University Senate) that will make the decision. If the faculty doesn't buy into this, it would fail.
- 2) Can we have good market research about those who would be paying (the students and their parents)? In addition, can we have a discussion formed with more rigor by the Ford Foundation report?
  - a. Per Tim Sands, yes. Our response is that our planning will be a slow, deliberate process so we have time to make discoveries and make determinations.

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<sup>1</sup>See Sands, T. "Senate Semester\_PartA-Oct12.ppt" <https://www.purdue.edu/senate/meetings.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTmlshiW0I8&feature=youtu.be>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.purdue.edu/senate/meetings.cfm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://guides.lib.purdue.edu/trimesters>

- 3) Is there a point in this process at which we pull the plug and say it will not be adopted? What might that look like? What if the faculty input is largely negative and there is not a large buy in? How would that affect the decision?
  - a. Per Tim Sands, faculty will follow their own and their department's lead. If we incentivize the summer, and people utilize the option, we expect summer may grow. If the incentives do not lead to growth in summer, we can't move.
- 4) Will trimesters extend to the regional campuses?
  - a. No, although it was discussed with the regional campuses when the concept was first considered.
- 5) Can anyone in the room identify any other universities currently successfully using the trimester model?
  - a. Per Tim Sands, it is in use at the University of Waterloo.
  - b. Per Frank Dooley, the University of Minnesota has announced an intention to evaluate moving to trimesters.<sup>5</sup>

## Faculty and Staff Roles

Perhaps no factor is more important to the adoption of a trimester model than faculty and staff acceptance. Many faculty members already work on a year-round basis, preparing for their classes over summer, and writing research grant proposals to fund their summer during the academic year. The nature of faculty work does not follow the strict academic calendar. Throughout the calendar year faculty face professional meetings, grant deadlines, journal submissions and reviews, and more. Some faculty members use their fall or spring break to catch up on their grading. Staff roles can vary widely depending upon the individual's position. Those in a research lab settings work hand-in-hand with the faculty, and hence face similar deadlines. Expectations for others may follow an academic calendar. Carefully structured, Purdue might be able to achieve a better work/home life balance for their faculty and staff members by moving to a year-round appointment. In turn, such policies may help us recruit a stronger faculty. Thus, the following issues should be studied with respect to faculty and staff.

- 6) Is there a requirement to be on campus all three terms? This would remove the opportunity to do field work.
- 7) This change will mean that not everyone will be present during the fall and the spring. That would change the dynamics of the faculty in terms of making decisions, faculty meetings, attending seminars, being a group, and participating in everything. In other words, we can dilute the effect of a faculty by 1/3 in any given semester. That would have a big impact on the way in which a faculty operates.
- 8) Will we have year round Senate meetings? Or if you select 2 of 3 terms to be on campus does that mean you are not eligible to be the Senate because of when you choose to be on campus?
- 9) There are many critical committee meetings (e.g., promotion/tenure process) that faculty must attend. How do we ensure that these meetings will held when the faculty will be able to participate if we allow faculty to select the 2 semesters that they will be on campus? Will we be

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www1.umn.edu/president/speeches-and-writing/2012-state-of-the-u/index.html> (see Appendix A)

required to be here all 3 semesters because some of the committee meetings we are required to attend?

- 10) Are we anticipating more effort in an integrated sense over a 12 month period from anybody? That wasn't part of the original discussion.
- 11) Are we assuming that all units will be required to go to three trimesters rather than two semesters?
- 12) Is there any push to have a university level pay rate for summer so there is not the disparity from college to college in pay rates?
- 13) Given that the faculty is the highest cost of any given class, will there be a tendency to use lower cost instruction, hiring of non-faculty rank to teach summer sessions?
- 14) What will happen to graduate TA/RA assistantships? Will grad students be teaching more than they are required to now?
- 15) How would a shift to 12-month appointments affect pay?
- 16) Without summers where is the time for reflective thought for idea generation, proposal writing (and incentives thereof), journal paper writing, increased graduate student meeting time, book writing, course note preparation and updating, and mental regeneration/recovery?
- 17) How will trimesters affect recruitment and retention?
- 18) What is trimester's effect on faculty research or engagement?
- 19) How will faculty roles and expectations be aligned with mission and rewards?
- 20) What is the definition of faculty load in a trimester model? Will it be the same across the campus?
- 21) Should the campus build a model of flexible appointments, varying in the number of terms worked per year (e.g., work spring, summer, and be off during winter term), or the percentage of time throughout the year (e.g., work 80% of the day leaving at 3 pm each day for family care)?
- 22) How would such a change affect promotion and tenure processes?
- 23) What current university and academic policies will need to be amended?
- 24) How will we define vacation and other leave polices?
- 25) How will faculty/staff teaching on a year round base find time to recharge?
- 26) How would a shift to trimesters affect non-tenure track faculty? Is it reasonable to expect someone to teach on a year-round basis?
- 27) How would a shift to trimesters affect staff? Will additional staff be needed to meet the needs of a year round campus?

## **Composition of the Student Body**

The initial trimester model proposal assumed that the number of undergraduate credit hours taught on an annual basis will increase by 25% by the year 2022. The 5% decrease in fall and spring credit hours are offset by summer credit hours rising from 35,180 credit hours in 2009 to 311,500 in 2022 (Table 1). This goal was made more challenging given the new law that limits programs to 120 credit hours (unless

justification is provided for more hours). In short, the move to trimesters presumes that more students will matriculate to and graduate from Purdue.

Table 1. Distribution of Undergraduate Credit Hours, by Term

Year/Term	2009-10	2022-23	Percentage Change
	Credit hours		
Fall <sup>1</sup>	460,190	437,181	-5%
Spring	430,338	408,869	-5%
Summer	<u>35,180</u>	<u>311,500</u>	<u>785%</u>
Total	925,708	1,157,550	25%

<sup>1</sup>Office of Institutional Research. "Credit Hours,"  
<http://www.purdue.edu/oir/credithours.html>

- 28) Is the presumption that with a trimester we're going to increase enrollment?
- 29) If we admit more students, does this imply we must be willing to accept lower quality students? Wouldn't this strategy lower the reputation of the university?
- 30) Shouldn't we focus on a 3 year graduation rate (as opposed to a 4-year graduation rate)?
- 31) What is the real effect anticipated on 4-year graduation rates and why is that so important?
- 32) How will trimesters affect transfer students between the West Lafayette and other campuses in the Purdue system?
- 33) How will trimesters affect graduate students and graduate course offerings? What consideration has gone into graduate student education?
- 34) Have we considered the effect of trimesters on co-op programs?
- 35) In the short run, what models hold the greatest potential for growing summer enrollment? Ideas to consider include: progression courses, bridge programs, early honors experience, expanded international students, and other innovative courses and programs.
- 36) Is there merit to increase enrollment by admitting more students to high demand programs? The question then becomes could high demand programs fuel enrollment growth at times other than the traditional academic calendar? This option has many dimensions to consider.
  - a. What are the high demand programs?
  - b. Do these programs currently face capacity limits? If so, what is the nature of the precise constraint these programs face (faculty, labs, class availability, etc.)?
  - c. How will an increase in high demand programs affect the rest of campus? E.g., other parts of the university will need to offer more service courses for these majors.
- 37) Would a high school student be willing to start in January or May instead of the traditional fall term? Is it different for international students?
- 38) Can we create a fall semester of general education/core curriculum or prerequisite classes for first year students and have them start courses found in their major in spring and summer?

- 39) What changes would be required of admission policies?
- 40) Could we require students attend at least one summer session?
- 41) Will a larger student body see proportional growth across the campus? Will the growth be greater in undergraduate or graduate programs? Is it possible for all programs to grow by 25%?
- 42) The US economy would be better served if we had more STEM discipline graduates, and Purdue obviously has a competitive advantage in this arena. Should the growth be targeted to increase STEM disciplines? How does that affect campus culture?
- 43) A larger student body in turn will require a larger faculty. For many programs, accreditation guidelines are driven in part by student to faculty ratios. How will growth in student numbers drive faculty lines?
- 44) A larger student body will also require additional staff. E.g., the goal for the advisee-to-advisor ratio is 225-to-1.<sup>6</sup>

### **Effects on the Research, Teaching, and Engagement Mission**

Much of the discussion surrounding the trimester calendar focuses on generating undergraduate credit hours and graduation rates. Many faculty members currently fund their summer salaries from grants. Despite having almost 40,000 students on the West Lafayette campus, Purdue is a Carnegie Research University/Very High Research Activity institution. Purdue has recently doubled research funding and is striving to increase its research efforts further. Purdue also has an established global reputation for excellence with engagement.

- 45) How will we spread the salary across the year-round appointment? Right now when you apply for external funding, we have the process of summer salary or summer ninths. I wonder how it will work to spread the salary with NSF programming throughout the year. When we were audited by the NSF they were quite adamant that we weren't doing other things when we're on NSF money. It will affect time and salary of faculty.
- 46) Given the emphasis on research, how will faculty find additional time to teach?
- 47) Will there be an increase in the number of faculty? Would such an increase be proportional across the campus or targeted?
- 48) Is the increase in the number of faculty accompanied by a growth in staff?
- 49) How will year-round teaching interact with engagement?

### **Student Life**

Compared to the academic year, the pace of life is much different in the summer. Amenities and student services are limited during summer term. For example, there are no sport competitions to attend and cheer on. Student government and virtually every student organization do not meet during the summer. As such, the student experience is very different.

- 50) Is there any information about the number of students who work during the summer?

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<sup>6</sup> [www.purdue.edu/newsroom/purduetoday/releases/2012/Q4/foe-implementation-undergraduate-advising.html](http://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/purduetoday/releases/2012/Q4/foe-implementation-undergraduate-advising.html)

- 51) It seems intuitive that students come here for more than a piece of paper. Students come here for more than a set of skills and piece of paper. Have we considered how a trimester calendar can affect the Purdue experience? Could an increase in flexibility affect this?
- 52) At what point, do we see expansion in student services for summer?
- 53) Which staff members will provide service to students during summer?
- 54) Will more space be available in residence halls to students (or conversely, where will attendees of summer programs like FFA reside?)
- 55) Will the Libraries be able to have 24/7 and weekend hours during summer term?
- 56) How will trimesters affect student athletes and athletic programs? How does the NCAA view trimesters?
- 57) What types of summer entertainment and recreation can be offered?
- 58) Will students be able to find internships or co-ops during fall and spring term instead of summer?

## **Funding Models**

A new summer instruction funding model will be implemented for summer 2013, with a greater emphasis in providing incentives for departments to offer courses. Questions need to be considered for both an expanded summer and trimesters.

- 59) How will a student or their families afford a 50% increase in tuition (by attending three terms in one year)?
- 60) Have there been any calculations about the short term inefficiencies of ramping up summer, perhaps lags in enrollments?
- 61) What about the costs of faculty effort and time to transform the entire curriculum to a different model of instruction?
- 62) What changes are necessary for financial aid, especially for summer term?
- 63) What will be the funding model if a shift is made to trimesters?

## **Time: Academic Calendar and Day**

The current Academic Year (defined by University Senate Document 90-30)<sup>7</sup> consists of two 16-week semesters and three 4-week summer terms. Typically, a credit requires 50 minutes of lecture (or equivalent) per week for the entire semester. Thus, the expectation is that a credit requires 750 minutes of instruction time.<sup>8</sup> The amount of total instruction time per credit hour will not change with a switch to trimesters.

- 64) How fast can we make a decision about the calendar? I'm concerned about the effect of the uncertainty about the trimester plan and the perspective that is unknown on the faculty that we want to hire as part of this plan will be detrimental, especially if we are trying to recruit a faculty member away from a current institution and bringing them into a situation they may not potentially like.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.purdue.edu/univregs/academicprocedures/calendar.html>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.purdue.edu/registrar/pdf/Credit\\_Hour\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.purdue.edu/registrar/pdf/Credit_Hour_Guidelines.pdf)

- 65) Could we choose to have 14 week terms (13 week terms with one week for exams) during fall and spring, and two 7-week or one 14 week term during the summer? If we balance the semesters at the same length but still call it summer session, then you set up the infrastructure, and student will have the opportunity to evaluate the courses just as the same. This solution would not destroy the whole system of fall and spring.
- a. A different perspective is that is important to make whatever we propose backward compatible. Leave everything the same until we change. If it fails at any point, we can go back without another plan for retreat.
- 66) Rather than flipping the calendar when summer credit hours are 35% of fall credit hours, is this enough to get us the best of both worlds? This would let us keep a semester structure that most of us are comfortable with but show an improvement.
- 67) What about down time? Does every course have to be taught in every semester?
- 68) Can the system remain flexible so that students can keep the traditional model if they want?
- 69) With respect to 6 week terms, can lab and reading intensive courses be taught in a shortened period? How will this affect student learning?
- 70) I am wondering if anyone has taken into account the use of Purdue facilities in the summer for outreach and education programs. There are many funded research projects that are required to have education and outreach components. Many of those accomplish this by having summer events, either for teachers, students or for people from other universities. How will these be impacted if facilities, including dorms, are in use during the summer months? Has anyone taken into account both the real dollar costs of losing these opportunities and the possibility of becoming less competitive on proposals if we cannot provide this kind of opportunities?
- 71) What will be the length of a term in a trimester?
- 72) What will be the timing of the terms?
- 73) Will breaks be evenly distributed among terms?
- 74) Can short Maymester like terms be developed?
- 75) How long per day and often per week will classes meet?
- 76) How many class periods will be offered per day?
- 77) Will the class day extend into evening?
- 78) Should the “dead week” policy be amended?
- 79) When will STAR occur if the campus is on a year-round schedule?
- 80) Will the admissions calendar and deadlines need to change?
- 81) What is the calendar for a transition?

## **Campus Space**

A Ten Year Capital Plan was submitted to the Board of Trustees in July 2012.<sup>9</sup> Another committee is currently reviewing renovation of lab spaces.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www2.itap.purdue.edu/bot/viewDocument.cfm?id=5492>

- 82) What about construction on campus? Will it spread year round?
- 83) How will a change to trimesters affect the need for classroom space? E.g., longer class periods needed to meet the definition of a credit hour means that fewer sections can be taught per day. Classroom space is heavily utilized and a reduction of availability will introduce constraints to growth.
- 84) The Residence Halls face two challenges to more students on campus during the summer. First, only around half of the dorms are air conditioned. Second, groups such as FFA have long term contracts with Purdue to use residence halls during summer. What is the time frame for allowing more students to live in residence halls?
- 85) If classroom and lab space is used more intensely over summer, when will routine maintenance be conducted?
- 86) As an alternative, could we greatly expand the use of distance education, creating an “onsemester” with more online courses from: 1) preparatory courses for students entering in the fall (e.g. math), 2) between semester courses either makeup or preparatory/get ahead for next semester, 3) Core Curriculum courses taken by all students, 4) elective courses (e.g., one semester physics service courses), or 5) specialty courses.
- 87) Where would space be found for programs such as STAR if the campus is used more intensely?
- 88) How will the campus accommodate summer camps and other programs key to recruiting?
- 89) Where would additional faculty and staff be housed?

## **Community Life**

Much of the discussion surrounding the trimester calendar focuses on generating credit hours among undergraduate students. Many in the community are interested in the effect on the local economy.

- 90) How does a balanced academic calendar affect the local community and economy?
- 91) How will Purdue’s calendar affect local K-12 schools?
- 92) How will Purdue’s calendar affect the availability of child care?
- 93) When should an economic impact analysis be conducted?

## Appendix 1:

**Extracted from Reference 5:** <http://www1.umn.edu/president/speeches-and-writing/2012-state-of-the-u/index.html>

*Second, I will engage with you to define and bring to life a remarkably revised academic calendar. Specifically, building on the report from the 2011 Summer Semester Committee, I'd like to take a serious and rigorous look at moving to a year-round academic calendar. This would include three 14- or 15-week periods that—with sincere apologies to our English faculty—I am going to call semesters, even though there are three.*

*Now, I have learned that in Minnesota there are two immovable calendar events—the religious holidays in December and the secular 10-day celebration that is the Minnesota State Fair. Working around them, I do believe a full, three-semester calendar could be crafted, and it offers great opportunities for both students and faculty. My vision for a year-round calendar would also incorporate an extended winter session in January.*

*There are significant advantages to doing our best to make this work. First, it would give more students a real chance at graduating in less than four years. On such a calendar, a full-time, year-round student could earn 120 credits in less than three years.*

*Second, a longer winter session would give students more opportunity to study abroad, have meaningful internship or service and learning opportunities, or complete honors or other significant senior projects.*

*Third, and very importantly, a year-round schedule increases use of our laboratory and classroom space. Using our facilities year round reduces bottlenecks and can reduce our long-term need, and cost, for new facilities. Finally, three full semesters would increase tuition revenues annually, allowing us to hire more faculty.*

*Faculty would still teach two semesters a year, but could have flexibility to arrange them so that two consecutive semesters could be devoted to research. Alternatively, "B," or nine-month faculty, might choose to teach three semesters from time to time for additional compensation.*

*Of course, there are big challenges, chief among them here—managing financial aid for students. There are also valuable programs on our campuses in the summer that would have to be accommodated. And, we'd need a transition time to move to the new model.*

*But all in all, in the balance, I think the benefits could outweigh the challenges, and this is an idea well worth driving forward. We'll start this conversation on the Twin Cities campus, with other campuses having the option to join as they wish.*