



**Proposal for Purdue 4-Week January Term  
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**Working Group members:**

Kris Wong Davis, Chair, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management  
Marion Underwood, Co-Chair, Dean of Health and Human Sciences  
Keith Gehres, University Registrar, University Senate Educational Policy Committee (EPC), ex-officio  
Tim Riley, Assistant Comptroller and University Bursar  
Heidi Carl, Executive Director of Financial Aid  
Joe Faulkner, Director of IT Enrollment Management Solutions  
Linda Baer, Assistant Director – Change, Training and Process Improvement  
Tyson McFall, Senior Academic Advisor in Aeronautics and Astronautics, University Senate EPC ex-officio  
John Gipson, Director of Summer Session  
Chris Martin, Director of Purdue Online  
Nan Kong, Associate Professor of Biomedical Engineering, University Senate EPC Representative

**Key Collaborators:**

Assata Gilmore, Purdue Student Government President  
Hannah Walter, Purdue Student Government Vice President, EPC Representative  
Madelina Nuñez, Purdue Graduate Student Government President  
Erik Otarola-Castilla, Chair, University Senate EPC  
Linda Mason, Dean, Graduate School  
Tim Luzader, Center for Career Opportunities

**Proposal:** Purdue has explored/discussed the idea of some form of ‘Winter Session’ at various points over time. There has been ongoing interest in the idea on the part of students and instructors, but the idea was never formalized for various reasons. Students and instructors have continued to ask about the possibilities of a ‘Winter Session’ and in response, this idea was captured in a set of innovations developed by the academic Deans that Purdue should explore post COVID-19. The Deans proposed creating a January Term as an opportunity for academic innovation, to enhance the curriculum with creative, immersive academic experiences and to promote student success.

In response to continued interest in this idea of a ‘Winter Session’ at Purdue, we propose that Purdue University offer a new, optional January Term, a 4-week block of instruction in January, in which students could enroll for credit for a variety of types of academic experiences. A January Term could allow undergraduate and graduate students to take courses needed to progress toward their degrees, enroll in immersive experiences (e.g., study abroad, experiential education) or take intensive courses (e.g., languages, coding, Python, Power Excel, Artificial

Intelligence, Big Data, Internet of Things, and ethics). Courses could be offered in face-to-face, online, or hybrid modes of instruction. Offering January courses for undergraduate and graduate credit could provide faculty and students with the opportunity to participate in a wider variety of academic experiences and shorten time to degree completion. Tuition for these courses would be charged separately from spring tuition. The business model for the January Term will follow the model employed for summer courses at Purdue.

This new January Term would be completely optional and voluntary for both students and faculty. No undergraduate or graduate student will be forced to participate in January Term. No required courses will be taught in January Term that are not offered in the fall and spring semesters. No graduate student or faculty/staff member will be forced to teach in January Term.

In offering a January Term, we would be joining other universities in using the time between the fall and spring semesters to offer exciting, immersive academic opportunities for students and faculty (including MIT, Harvard, Rutgers, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Maryland, and Iowa, among many others. See Appendix).

### **Why a January Term?**

This four-week, self-contained January Term would offer the university an opportunity to expand student access to high demand courses, allow students and faculty a chance to explore diverse academic experiences, and enhance student success. As with Summer courses, optional, voluntary participation in this new January Term would allow students to catch up, maintain timely progress toward degree completion, take courses in areas of special interest, accelerate their progress in order to graduate early, or graduate on time while fitting in more extra- and co-curricular activities (such as co-op, study abroad, and research experiences). For students who opt not to participate in January Term, the four weeks between long semesters could allow them to pursue focused, short-term internships or to work and earn money.

Optional, voluntary participation in a January Term would allow faculty/staff and graduate students the opportunity to teach immersive courses, create new types of academic experiences, and earn additional income if they so desire. Faculty members who choose not to participate in a January Term might appreciate the additional time between the long semesters to prepare their spring courses or to focus intensively on their scholarly work for the extended break.

### **How would a January Term affect the academic calendar?**

Establishing this January Term will require modification of the academic calendar in order to begin and end the January Term after the Winter Closure and holiday break. With some modest modification of the academic calendar and a slight shortening of each of the long semesters (Fall and Spring), Purdue could offer a 4-week term in January. This change would result in long semesters that last 15 instead of 16 weeks, a reduction of 6% of instructional time. We believe

that faculty could design courses to still meet the learning outcomes in 15-week semesters, as do faculty at other AAU universities including Ohio State, Michigan State, Brown, MIT, and Emory (see Appendix).

Timing of this consideration is ideal because many faculty members have participated in Impact and Impact X and have become more accustomed to varying modes of teaching. In addition, popularity of the Summer session has continued to grow for both students and faculty. We have been impressed with faculty members' flexibility in responding to the academic calendar changes required by the pandemic. *We also note that in Spring 2021, faculty are already offering courses near the 15-week format; the calendar began as a 16-week semester, but three days were removed for Reading Days, thus Spring 2021 is a semester with 15-week plus two days.*

Research and performance data on winter sessions and January Terms at peer institutions show that a short term between fall and spring can provide opportunities to increased access to courses, enhanced student success, increased student retention, and academic innovation. Winter sessions and January Terms have been instituted at peer institutions such as Cornell, NYU, Rutgers, University of Arizona, Harvard, MIT, SUNY Stony Brook, Texas A&M, University of Iowa, Virginia Tech, and University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign (UIUC). MIT, for instance, uses January as an Independent Activities Period, in which students and faculty can engage in innovative classroom, and out of class, experiences that augment regular term coursework. Information gathered from these peer institutions and others combined with interest from faculty, students, Deans, and Department Heads along with the January Term Working Group has culminated in a proposal to establish a January Term at Purdue.

## **January Term – Calendar, Details and Logistics**

### Calendar:

Attached is a draft calendar of the academic year changes necessary to accommodate a 4-week January Term. Fall and Spring semesters would be shortened by one week each, establishing a 15-week teaching term while still including the respective fall and spring breaks for a total of 16 weeks.

- The start of the Spring Term will move later to the end of January and in some years February depending on the calendar.
- The turn-around time for rolling grades between January and Spring Terms will mimic the time currently between Summer Terms.
- The proposed draft calendar will still allow for a Summer Session of the usual length (8 weeks), and a 4-week 'Maymester' ('Maymester' in this case will extend a week or two later, into June). In total, there will be a total of 12 weeks available for summer instruction.

Any new initiative requires coordination with a wide range of partners on logistics and processes. Key details include:

- No department or instructor will be required to participate.
- No undergraduate student will be required to participate. No required courses will be offered only in the January Term.
- No graduate student will be required to participate, either by being forced to enroll as a student in January Term or by being forced to serve as an instructor or a teaching assistant for a course.
- A 4-week January Term will fall entirely in the month of January between the fall and spring semesters. Note that two options for the length of January Term, 3-weeks, and 4-weeks, were explored. The 4-week option was deemed superior because it allows more time for the students to learn new material or to enjoy an immersive academic experience.
- Initial course offerings will focus on high-demand, lower-division courses that meet student needs, but offerings will not be limited to these courses.
- Faculty would be encouraged to use this January Term to create a variety of types of innovative new courses, credentials, immersive experiences, study abroad opportunities, coops, and more. Three colleges have already indicated interest in offering courses/study abroad experiences during January Term: Health and Human Sciences (Consumer Science, Educational Psychology, Health and Kinesiology, Hospitality and Tourism Management, Nutrition Science, Psychological Sciences); Liberal Arts (Communication, Political Science, Sociology); and Management (Economics, Management), as well as Information and Library Science and General Studies.
- The faculty and instructors will decide on the format of their courses, as well as the appropriate number of credits. Nevertheless, it is expected that courses delivered via online and digital methods are expected to be a sizeable proportion of the offerings during this term. Due to the short length of the January Term, we expect that most courses taught will be 3-credit courses taught over 4 weeks.
- The funding model for instructional costs will follow the same model that Purdue currently uses for its Summer Session. Tuition for a course will pay for the instructor and any other cost of offering the course. Remaining tuition will remit to the Department, with appropriate administrative costs deducted based on the modality of the course (online or residential).
- The tuition and fee schedule/model for January will also be the same as the University's model for summer, which is a per-credit hour rate.
- After each January Term, student outcomes will be assessed: completion rates, grades compared to similar courses in other semesters and student success in subsequent courses where appropriate. Systematic feedback will be collected from students, staff, and faculty.

- This term will be for continuing students only and will not be available as a new admit term.
- Similar to the current [academic regulations](#) for summer sessions, academic standing will not be assessed in J-Term. Any grade earned will factor into the student's cumulative GPA and will be reflected on their academic record/transcript in the same way performance is reflected for fall, spring, and summer terms.

### **Important Questions/Issues**

Establishing a January Term at Purdue would follow the Maymester and Summer models. However, we recognize that with any academic schedule change there is a need to address potential questions/concerns.

- *Academic Rigor and Quality* – Academic quality and challenge will be priorities for Purdue's January Term. All new courses for January Term would undergo the usual approval processes at the department, college, and university levels. Purdue currently teaches courses over a short term during Maymester including 80, 4-week, 3-credit online courses. Nevertheless, a fast-paced short term does require students to employ exceptional time-management skills, as they do in other intensive courses. In UIUC's winter session, most students (80% of 470 survey respondents) rated the overall quality of winter session courses as good or excellent and also rated their overall experience as good or excellent (78%). Around half of the students (51%) found the course to be very or extremely engaging. Additionally, the majority of students (84%) felt the quality of interaction with their instructors was the same as or better than most face-to-face courses they have taken during the traditional academic year (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign).
- *Enrollment in Other Semesters* – We acknowledge the possibility that some students will use January Term to achieve a more balanced load, which could reduce enrollment during other sessions, or to retake a Fall course to get a higher grade instead of retaking the course during the Spring. However, at UIUC the introduction of a winter session resulted in an increase in total credit hours for the year (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign).
- *Faculty and Department Interest* – Several departments/schools/colleges have already expressed interest in teaching a course as part of a new January Term: Communications, Consumer Science, Economics (specifically, ECON 25100 and ECON 25022) Educational Psychology, General Studies (1-credit undergraduate research courses), Management, Nutrition Science, Political Science, Psychological Sciences, and Sociology. In 2017, conversations with Purdue faculty regarding a proposed Winter

Session resulted in approximately 40 faculty members interested in potential offerings. Faculty interest will continue to be investigated, including instructors and faculty interested in exploring other academic enhancing experiences.

- *Academic Term Teaching Contracts – No faculty, staff, or graduate student's AY pay would be impacted as a result of the change to the fall and spring semesters and the creation of a J-Term. No faculty, staff, or graduate student's health insurance would be affected by the proposed January Term. Anyone teaching in January Term would be compensated above and beyond their AY salary for their effort, including faculty, staff, and graduate students.* Human Resources, the Graduate School and Financial Services are already involved and investigating processes for accommodating a January Term for Teaching Assistants, Lecturers, Adjunct Faculty, and other instructors should implementation of a January Term move forward

Faculty contracts would continue to begin before fall term and extend until the end of the spring term. With a January term in place, faculty contracts will begin two weeks before the start of the fall and spring classes, to allow additional time for orientation activities and for faculty to prepare to teach in the long semesters. (AY faculty/instructor contracts currently begin one week prior to the start of classes.) Faculty who choose to participate in January Term will be paid for their instructional time during the full four weeks. Faculty who choose not to participate in January Term would have their salary divided across pay periods as normal and would be paid without interruption through the month of January.

- *Registration – One important consideration is whether the timing of registration may pose challenges for academic advisors who do not have the capacity to accommodate additional advising appointments. Based on feedback from academic advisors and discussion with the Registrar's Office, students will register for January Term classes at the same time as Spring semester courses. This strategy eliminates the need for additional advising appointments. Academic advisors are represented on the J-Term working committee. Currently, a group of head advisors from each college are working with the University Advising Office to create recommendations on how best to support our advising community should a J-Term be adopted. That said, conversations continue with respect to how best to manage any additional academic advising load.*
- *Additional Demands on Staff – Although all fiscal year staff are on campus right after the New Year when the January Term will be in session, adding a January Term will likely require some additional staff effort in December and January. Where additional staff capacity will be needed will depend on the types of January Term courses the faculty decide to offer and the students decide to take. The University will plan carefully to add additional staff where needed, or to compensate staff for additional time where needed to support January Term.*

- *Student Interest* – Will Purdue students want to take a course during January Term? Student interest in Maymester and Summer Session offerings has been increasing each year. With students continuing to seek opportunities to augment Fall and Spring courses to complete second majors, minors, certificates, and high demand courses in their primary major, we believe there will be student demand for a January Term. As we move beyond the pandemic, students who missed semesters of a traditional residential education might welcome the chance to be on campus in January, to enjoy time with peers, to attend athletic events, and to participate in campus organizations and activities. Working with PSG a survey of current students has been conducted in order to gather additional feedback on the student interest in a January Term. Preliminary survey results indicated that of over 4,000 respondents, 36% said they would be somewhat likely to participate in January Term and 16% said they would be extremely likely to participate – a total of 52%. The Working Group will continue to assess and explore student feedback on this proposal.
- *Student Performance* – Some may express concerns that it will be difficult for students to learn, perform well and successfully complete a course in a short time frame (4 weeks). In published research on a study that addressed this question, on average students actually performed better in a shorter winter term course than in the same course with the same instructor during other (longer) sessions during the year (Harkness, S., Laves, E., & McClure, B. (2014)). Perhaps because the short winter term format limited students to a single course, they were able to focus and learn the material well. Students succeed and struggle in courses for a variety of reasons. It seems possible that some students could do better in a challenging class when allowed to focus on just that one course. Not all courses will be appropriate for the intensive, four-week term, but some courses could be well suited to a more intensive, immersive format.

### **Responses to some questions we have received about January Term**

- What are the academic implications of altering the Fall and Spring terms each by one week? *Examination of similar academic calendars at other AAU institutions indicates that it is possible to deliver a semester's worth of course content in 15 weeks.*
- If a January Term begins in 2022, then fall 2021 will be 16 weeks and spring 2022 will be 15 weeks. This will mean that the 2021-2022 academic year will be slightly imbalanced. Are there contract/pay implications caused by this? *As stated above, AY pay will not be altered, as a result of the differences in length of semesters.*

- Are there any accreditation issues or concerns that must be addressed if altering the length of each semester? *Based on benchmarking research across AAU peer institutions, we are not aware of any accreditation implications for the modification of the calendar.*
- Will the modification of fall and spring terms have an impact on reading week (formerly ‘dead’ week) and finals timing? *No current proposal exists to modify reading week; however, this may be a discussion item resulting from the changes to the academic calendar.*
- How will 8-week course modules be modified under a 15-week semester? *The most likely change would be to modify the modules to a 7.5-week course.*
- What about housing and dining options for students? *University Residences is developing a plan to address the needs of students who need to be on campus during January Term but who may not take classes as well as students who only wish to live on campus during January.*
- What are the faculty and staffing implications of a January Term regarding expected workload? *The expected workload for faculty and graduate students as specified in offer letters will only include teaching in the fall and spring semesters. Teaching in January Term will be optional for all AY faculty members and all graduate students.*
- What is the impact to the timing of spring break in coordination with local school calendars? *Under a January Term, every effort will be made to plan Purdue’s spring break to coincide with at least one spring breaks of the local school calendars. Local school calendars currently follow at least two different Spring Break calendars. Under the January Term proposal, the timing of Purdue’s spring break would still fit at least one of the local school calendars. We would immediately communicate with the three large local school districts about the change in our calendar and would choose a week that will fit with at least one local school district’s calendar.*
- How will FY versus AY contracts be handled for faculty and what will be impact for summer salary be? *FY contracts are not impacted by a January Term. We have confirmed with the Provost and the Treasurer that AY faculty would still be paid for the same number of weeks. The proposed calendar with a January Term would still leave 12 weeks in the summer during which faculty could be paid summer salary, plus 2 weeks in January that AY faculty could pay themselves as well, for a total of 14 weeks.*
- Would adding a January Term affect Study Abroad offerings once international travel can resume? *A January Term has great potential as many of our peers offer such Study Abroad programs during a winter term. A later May/early June end date to our Spring*

*semester may decrease the number of Maymester study abroad offerings since those programs will be partially offered during the month of June. Some students begin summer internships in June and may not choose to participate in a Maymester program that ends after June 1<sup>st</sup>. However, over time we believe that J term offerings will more than offset any decline in Maymester Study Abroad offerings.*

- *Would adding a January Term mean that Purdue students will be less competitive for jobs or internships because they are entering the market later? We do not anticipate that this will be a major concern because if we implemented a January Term, the spring semester would end only two weeks later than with the current calendar. With the proposed calendar including a January Term, Purdue's spring semester would end on May 20, 2022. Just as a few examples, in the spring of 2022, University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana spring semester will end on May 14, and both the University of Maryland and MIT spring semesters will end on May 18. We are actively communicating with employers who hire Purdue students for internships, many of whom have confirmed that they would still offer internships to Purdue students starting slightly later, as they already do for students from other universities that end later in May. Some employers have also indicated an interest in offering a four-week January Term internship for students they wish to hire for the following summer, where they could use January to orient the student to the company and do required training, which would enable the same student to hit the ground running in a summer internship a few months later.*
- *Will Purdue reduce tuition if each of the semesters is one week shorter? The proposal to modify fall and spring terms is not a move to eliminate any content from courses or affect learning objectives. Technology has allowed us to use instructional time in new and more efficient ways. Purdue supports the superior quality of the content delivered through our faculty and teaching staff and would expect no loss of content with the change, with appropriate modifications to courses.*
- *Will a January Term have any visa or other implications for international students? Purdue offering a January Term will not affect the visa status of international students. Some international students may appreciate the opportunity to use January Term to make more rapid progress toward their degrees; others may take advantage of the longer period between fall and spring semester to return home to see their families.*
- *Will a January Term increase the risk of burnout for faculty, instructors, graduate students, and undergraduate students? We have faith in the ability of our instructors and students to make informed decisions about what course selections in which terms best serve their academic goals and personal needs. The proposed January Term is entirely voluntary and optional for faculty, instructors, graduate students, and undergraduate students. Some may decide to participate in January Term instead of a Maymester or*

*summer. Whether or not faculty or students choose to participate in January Term, the January Term proposal preserves all of the traditional semester breaks and provides a longer period of time between the extremely challenging fall and spring semesters. Many of our AAU peers and most Big10 universities already have 15 week fall and spring semesters. We hope that participating in January Term will feel like a different experience than the regular long semesters. We believe that the longer break between the regular rigors of the fall and spring semesters and the variety of formats for taking and offering courses has the possibility to enhance the mental health of undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and instructors.*

## **Conclusion**

A new January Term would be an excellent opportunity to enhance student success and academic innovation at Purdue. Although this project will require modestly modifying fall and spring terms, there will be few negative effects on instruction in the regular academic year. This proposal offers faculty and staff a new term with which to develop and plan coursework, experiences, and other academic engagement. Because the January Term does not impact the Winter Closure, it will be feasible for the university to provide the full suite of support services for students, faculty, and staff throughout the term.

The working group looks forward to continuing to engage with faculty, staff, students, and administrators in conversation and collaboration around this proposal and the related elements. Attached here is a draft calendar for 2021-2022. Although there is much work to do, given the many benefits of the January Term, we propose to work toward an inaugural January Term in 2022, knowing that we will continue to address logistical issues and others concerns, and expecting that enthusiasm for a January Term will continue to build over time, as it has for our Summer Session. What a voluntary, optional January Term will become depends on what faculty and instructors choose to offer, and how students choose to engage.

Harkness, S., Laves, E., & McClure, B. (2014). Implementing a Successful Winter Session. *Summer Academe: A Journal of Higher Education*

University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign: Winter Session White Paper, 2015-2016

## ACADEMIC CALENDAR COMPARISON

### 2022 SPRING SEMESTER

CURRENT		PROPOSED	
Weeks	Date	Weeks	Date
	January 3 (AY Faculty Begin)	JT 1	January 3
Wk 1	January 10	JT 2	January 10
Wk 2	January 17	JT 3	January 17 (AY Faculty Begin)
Wk 3	January 24	JT 4	January 24
Wk 4	January 31	Wk 1	January 31
Wk 5	February 7	Wk 2	February 7
Wk 6	February 14	Wk 3	February 14
Wk 7	February 21	Wk 4	February 21
Wk 8	February 28	Wk 5	February 28
Wk 9	March 7	Wk 6	March 7
	March 14 – Spring Break		March 14 – Spring Break (TBD)
Wk 10	March 21	Wk 7	March 21
Wk 11	March 28	Wk 8	March 28
Wk 12	April 4	Wk 9	April 4
Wk 13	April 11	Wk 10	April 11
Wk 14	April 18	Wk 11	April 18
Wk 15	April 25	Wk 12	April 25
Wk 16	May 2 (FINALs)	Wk 13	May 2
	May 9	Wk 14	May 9
Wk 1 (MM)	May 16	Wk 15	May 16 (FINALs)
Wk 2 (MM)	May 23	Wk 1 (MM)	May 23
Wk 3 (MM)	May 30	Wk 2 (MM)	May 30
Wk 4 (MM)	June 6	Wk 3 (MM)	June 6
Wk 5	June 13	Wk 4 (MM)	June 13
Wk 6	June 20	Wk 5	June 20
Wk 7	June 27	Wk 6	June 27
Wk 8	July 4	Wk 7	July 4
Wk 9	July 11	Wk 8	July 11
Wk 10	July 18	Wk 9	July 18
Wk 11	July 25	Wk 10	July 25
Wk 12	August 1	Wk 11	August 1
	August 8	Wk 12	August 8

**2022 FALL SEMESTER**

	August 15 (AY Faculty Begin)		August 15 (AY Faculty Begin)
Wk 1	August 22		August 22
Wk 2	August 29	Wk 1	August 29
Wk 3	September 5	Wk 2	September 5
Wk 4	September 13	Wk 3	September 12
Wk 5	September 19	Wk 4	September 19
Wk 6	September 26	Wk 5	September 26
Wk 7	October 3	Wk 6	October 3
Wk 8	October 10 (October Break)	Wk 7	October 10
Wk 9	October 17	Wk 8	October 17 (October Break) (TBD)
Wk 10	October 24	Wk 9	October 24
Wk 11	October 31	Wk 10	October 31
Wk 12	November 7	Wk 11	November 7
Wk 13	November 14	Wk 12	November 14
Wk 14	November 21 (Thanksgiving Break)	Wk 13	November 21 (Thanksgiving Break)
Wk 15	November 28	Wk 14	November 28
Wk 16	December 5	Wk 15	December 5
Wk 17	December 12 (FINALS)	Wk 16	December 12 (FINALS)
	December 20 (Grades Due)		December 20 (Grades Due)
	December 20 (AY Faculty End)		December 20 (AY Faculty End)
	December 19 – Holiday Break		December 19 – Holiday Break
	December 26 – Holiday Break		December 26 – Holiday Break