Winter Flex Undergraduate Survey

Survey purpose was to gauge graduate students’ interest in potential Winter Flex term.

- Survey was conducted in November - December 2021.
- 11 questions were asked—seven closed-ended questions and four open-ended questions.
- 223 students participated—156 (70%) finished and 67 (30%) did not finish the survey.
Question #1

Do you think a Winter Flex term would be positive for graduate students who choose to participate in that it would provide another opportunity for Study Abroad, maybe especially for students in highly structured majors or those who need to work in the summer?
Question #2

Do you think a Winter Flex term would be positive for undergraduate students in that it would provide them with the opportunity to take asynchronous, online classes: required courses, elective courses, courses to get ahead or catch up, or courses to explore exciting new areas?

![Bar chart showing responses to the question. The chart shows the percentage of students who responded Very Positive (41%), Positive (30%), Neutral (10%), A Little (9%), and Not at all Positive (10%).]
Question #4

If you answered “Yes” in previous question, please specify.
(Open-Ended Question) - Summary Analysis

In their own words, 63 of those who answered “Yes” provided specifics. Summary of their key concerns/times mentioned:

- Burnout (of both graduate students who work as TAs, as well as students): 31
- Pressure to Participate: (on both graduate students who work as TAs, as well as students): 24
- Graduate Students’ Compensation: 11
- Making other Semesters Shorter: 8
- Financing for Students: 4
- Quality: 4
Question #4

Comment Examples

“Graduate and undergraduate students need a break, they NEED the winter break. Mental and emotional well-being issues for students continue to climb as we continue to push the boundaries of doing more in four, graduating early, study abroad, double major, minors and certificates. Even if Purdue promotes this as optional everyone is going to compare themselves to others and even though they need a break feel compelled to keep up with what everyone else is doing.”

“Graduate students are already over worked, burnt out, and in some cases exploited. The last thing we need is an additional work period and work load. I'm genuinely confused at how this would be beneficial to graduate students. Where is the self-care? Where are the work-life boundaries? We should be paid more, period. Not asked to work an additional "flex" semester for additional pay. It seems misguided and something that benefits Purdue over it's students.”

“It would require professors and students to be in the classroom longer and force them to cover more materials than what would typically taught. This could lead to poor student attendance/grades and less understood concepts.”
Question #5

As of now, how likely are you to teach a course during Winter Flex, considering that you would get paid to teach when otherwise graduate students on an academic contract are not paid during the break?
Why may you choose NOT to offer a class during Winter Flex?

- **Want to take a break**: 77% (124)
- **Not interested in teaching during that time frame**: 42% (67)
- **Concerns about the quality of courses offered in Winter Flex**: 30% (49)
- **Other**: 20% (32)

*n=161*
If you answered “Other” in previous question, please specify.
(Open-Ended Question) – Summary Analysis

29 respondents answered this question. Summary of key answers/times mentioned:

- N/A: 11
- No reason: 5
- Impact on research time: 3
- Compensation: 3
- Burnout (of both graduate students who work as TAs, as well as students): 2
- Quality: 2
Comment Examples

“The time off between fall and spring semesters is not something I would categorize as a mere break; it is the only time period during the academic year to focus heavily on research and progress on the dissertation project, without other concerns of teaching and class maintenance. To have the options possible reflect only desire for time off is borderline insulting.”

“Fatigue. People will get fatigued without properly incentivized breaks. A 4-week break between semesters is good for performance in the latter.”

“My main concern here is that the net effect of a Winter Term would be more unemployed days for TAs, and potential loss of yearly income.”

“The highly compressed nature of the term requires extremely well prepared and refined curriculum for a high quality instruction. Otherwise, I believe it’s a waste of resources for an organized teaching term. On the other hand, faculty can always suggest ways to benefit from the break period for students to enjoy at their own pace.”
Question #9

Are any of the following options concerns that you would have with Winter Flex?

- Effects of a shortened winter break for those who participate: 75% (117/156)
- Increased expectations from PI/Advisor: 52% (81/156)
- Effects of possibly shortened Fall/Spring semesters: 44% (68/156)
- Feeling like you have to teach: 37% (57/156)

n=156

Purdue University Office of Enrollment Management
Question #10

How would you feel if the semesters were shortened to 15 weeks to accommodate a Winter Flex term?

- **Extremely Agreeable**: 34% (53)
- **Somewhat Agreeable**: 22% (35)
- **Neither Agreeable or Disagreeable**: 13% (20)
- **Somewhat Disagreeable**: 17% (26)
- **Extremely Disagreeable**: 14% (22)

*n=156*
Question #11

What other questions or concerns do you have about the potential Winter Flex term? (Open-Ended Question) – Summary Analysis

156 respondents answered this question. Summary of key answers/times mentioned:

• None: 49
• N/A: 27
• None—it’s a Good Idea: 12
• Concerns: Making other Semesters Shorter (8), No Benefit to Graduate Students/In General (8), Compensation(6), Burnout (6), Impact on Research Time (3), Timing (3)
• Questions: Timing (6), Impact on Regular Instruction (4), Compensation (3)
Question #11

Positive/Interested Comment Examples

“As a student, I would love to see this happen. I am a graduate student so I understand that there are limitations of the courses offered but I would still like to participate in something I have an interest in but is not a part of my degree program.”

“I think it is a great concept and is applicable to graduate students that want teaching opportunities.”

“I think it would be a great idea and it is optional for students who would prefer to keep their break as is. Shorter fall and spring semesters would create longer break as well for those who work fulltime.”

“Winter flex is a great idea. Other universities have implemented such programs with great success as well.”
Question #11

Negative/Concerned Comment Examples

“Shortening the fall and spring semesters **diminishes the "standard" classes**, as less information can be conveyed in 15 weeks. The addition of a sub-utilized middle half-term would detract from the general education provided during "actual" semesters. Also, if there is going to be ~6% reduction in instruction, I would like a ~6% **reduction in tuition** for the standard classes, please.”

“This really just seems like an opportunity for Purdue to make more money by creating a period of less desirable teaching time mostly carried out by graduate students.”

“I'd be concerned about changes to **timeline expectations for dissertations**, the risk of **decreased salary for graduate students** over the summer due to increased costs in winter flex term, and how this could increase demand for TAs and RAs over break even if we wanted a break someone would HAVE to do it.”
Question Examples

“How would this impact salaries for people working on a full year schedule?”

“Would the credits hours offered be worth the lost break (e.g. is a 1 credit hour course worth losing a four week break?)”

“Would shorting the semesters result in a more condensed work load?”

“I need more specifics (e.g. exact proposed dates).”

“Would the graduate students who teach the online classes be allowed to be remote?”

“I am an international student. I would love to be able to teach (and be paid) remotely, but with my visa I don't think it would be possible.”