



WINTER FLEX PROPOSAL – February 7, 2022

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This proposal for a new, 3- or 4-week Winter Flex term over the winter break presents a revision of the original idea to offer a 4- week January Term, and is intended to incorporate the positive elements of the original January Term proposal, while addressing the stated concerns of faculty, staff, and students. As a result of continued discussions with key constituents, this proposal incorporates many ideas of the original group that developed the January Term proposal. Members of the 2020-2021 January Term Working group and key collaborators are listed below.

2020-2021 January-Term Proposal Working Group members:

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

Key January-Term/Winter Flex Proposal Collaborators:

Assata Gilmore, 2020-2021 Purdue Student Government President
Shannon Kang, 2021-2022 Purdue Student Government President
Tim Luzader, Executive Director, Center for Career Opportunities
Madelina Nuñez, Purdue Graduate Student Government President
Erik Otarola-Castillo, 2020-2021 Chair, University Senate Educational Policy Committee
Thomas Sigmund, 2021-2022, Chair, University Senate Educational Policy Committee
Hannah Walter, 2020-2021 Purdue Student Government Vice President, EPC Representative

A. The Proposal

To enhance student success and offer opportunities for academic innovation, we propose to create a new, three- or four-week term called Winter Flex, for three or four weeks in December and January. Key elements of this proposal include the following:

1. The Winter Flex term will offer opportunities for students to take online courses and to participate in Study Abroad, activities that can be conducted flexibly in the four weeks between the fall and the spring semesters.
2. Winter Flex would be voluntary and optional for faculty, instructors, graduate students, and undergraduate students.
3. Winter Flex would involve no change in faculty and graduate student compensation for those who do not participate; those who do teach or support Winter Flex and who are not on contract during that time would be compensated for their effort.

4. Winter Flex would require some staff to work during the winter closure to support students. ITaP, Financial Aid, Registrar, Advising, Finance and others would need to plan for staffing during this time. However, students would not be on campus, so physical in-person services would not need to be provided. Appropriate compensation would be provided for those supporting Winter Flex and who are not on contract during that time.
5. This Winter Flex term will officially recognize the Christmas and New Year's holidays as non-instructional days.
6. No student will be admitted as a student to this Winter Flex term nor will any student be able to achieve degree conferral during this term.

B. Winter Flex and the Academic Calendar

We are currently considering two possible calendar models that differ only in the length of the fall and spring semesters.

1. In the 16-week semester model (Appendix A), faculty, instructors, and graduate students on AY contracts would continue to be under contract for one week prior to the start of classes. One advantage is that the 16-week semester model would require no modification of courses by instructors; there would be no reduction in instructional time. However, the 16-week semester model would require a three-week Winter Flex term so as not to perturb pay for faculty, instructors, or graduate students not participating.
2. In the 15-week semester model (Appendix B) faculty, instructors, and graduate students on AY contracts would have two weeks under contract before Fall and Spring classes begin, to allow additional time for class preparation, training in innovative pedagogy, other professional development, and orientation activities. Another advantage of the 15-week model is that it might drive more participation in Winter Flex by both instructors and students, because it would provide one more additional week between the end of the fall classes and the start of spring classes. The 15-week semester model would also allow for a four-week Winter Flex term.
3. In discussions in Spring 2021, faculty had mixed opinions on the issue of a 15- versus 16-week semester. Some were strongly supportive of slightly shorter semester. In the fall and spring semesters, delivering the same content in a 15-week rather than 16-week semester (a 6% decrease in instructional time) seems possible because students are learning differently due a transformation in how we use technology. Also, many peer universities have 15-week semesters (MIT, Ohio State, Michigan State, Emory, and Brown, to name just a few). Some faculty strongly preferred retaining 16-week semesters because they were averse to the 6% reduction in instructional time. If faculty strongly prefer 16-week semesters, this can be accommodated in the Winter Flex proposal by having faculty under contract for just one week prior to the fall and spring semesters.

C. Academic Opportunities

The new proposed Winter Flex term would focus on offering Study Abroad (beginning 22-23) and asynchronous online courses (beginning 23-24)

1. In Spring 2021 as part of discussions of a possible January Term, Purdue Student Government (PSG) surveyed the entire student body to assess interest. Of the 4000+ students that responded, 36% of students said they were somewhat likely to participate in a J-Term and 16% said they would be extremely likely to participate. Of those interested in participating, 40% said they would like to pursue major/minor/elective courses, 21% were interested in Study Abroad, 19% were interested in research opportunities, and 18% were interested in professional development courses (coding, design, Excel).

2. Offering a Winter Flex term could reduce time to degree completion. Students could benefit from Winter Flex as an opportunity to make progress toward their degrees by taking required, “bottleneck” courses or by having the chance to catch up if they struggle in a particular course.
3. Winter Flex would offer faculty the opportunity to teach new tools and technologies that could support courses later in the curriculum (coding, data analytic tools).
4. Offering a Winter Flex term could contribute to student success, because it would provide additional opportunities to explore new academic areas and to retake a course if needed.
5. Winter Flex would open up new possibilities for Study Abroad, for example, in Latin America, India, and other Asian countries.
6. Winter Flex could provide opportunities for Study Abroad for students in highly structured majors, for example Engineering and Nursing. A Winter Flex term could also provide a possible Study Abroad opportunity for students who need to use the entire summer to work or to pursue internships.

D. Academic Risks/Limitations

1. Not all courses fit well in the shorter, more intense Winter Flex format – not all required or bottleneck courses may be able to be offered in a shorter, more intensive on-line format.
2. For Winter Flex to remain voluntary and optional, tools and technologies courses needed for later study would need to be optional or taught at other times, in addition to this term.
3. Faculty and students could be tempted to teach and to enroll in courses almost year-round, which could be draining and work against academic success. But, Winter Flex would provide the option for those who choose to do so.

E. Financial Opportunities and Risks

1. The financial model will follow the current summer funding model is in discussion. Incentives will be in place for instructors and units to support a robust set of course and Study Abroad offerings.
2. Financial aid is available for students through a revenue return model similar to summer and administered by Financial Aid. International students would not be required to be enrolled in Winter Flex.
3. There will be one-time student system modification costs to implement Winter Flex.
4. Winter Flex will likely require either overload or additional staff to manage the added workload the term will bring.
5. It is expected in steady state that Winter Flex will cover all costs, and generate a return to the campus. However, financial modelling is being pursued to evaluate the revenue/cost scenarios over time.
6. Some staff in units like Bursars, Financial Aid, Registrar, and Advising will need to work over the winter closure to serve students. Staffing to support this will be critical.
7. Winter Flex will be an instruction only period; faculty and graduate students cannot be paid for research during the Winter Flex period.

F. Challenges with the Original J-Term Proposal

1. While the PSG student survey showed 16% were extremely likely to participate in J-Term, and 35% said they were somewhat likely to participate, the other 49% were neutral to negative on the idea – and those who were negative were very negative. For those not engaged in J-Term, a 6-week winter break would be dead time for many, and likely to be very unpopular with a large number of students.

2. Purdue Summer Session is now coming into its own from about every angle – course and program offerings are creative, robust, and growing. Leaving a long, contiguous period in summer maximizes summer programming opportunities and in all likelihood student opportunities for summer work and internship experiences.
3. It is impossible to implement J-Term as originally proposed without changing the compensation cadence of every faculty, staff, and graduate student on an AY appointment. While their total pay would not be impacted, they would get ½ paycheck in January and a full paycheck in May, where they currently get a full paycheck in January and ½ paycheck in May.
4. There are serious issues with the original J-Term model and how faculty and staff are funded on research grants, because the J-Term resulted in breaking the current contiguous 14-week summer into 2 weeks in January and 12 weeks in summer.
5. Overall, the trade-off of two (separate) weeks in January for two (contiguous) weeks in the summer is terribly unpopular with many students, staff, and faculty. The support for the original J-Term model is not nearly as emphatic.
6. An option is available (Winter Flex) that does not suffer from the above issues, but allows a 3-week or 4-week (online or study abroad) term to be conducted over the current winter break.

G. How this Winter Flex Model Responds to Faculty and Student Concerns with the Prior January Term Proposal

1. The Winter Flex model retains a briefer period between the long semesters, so that students who choose not to participate in the term will have a normal break between semesters.
2. The Winter Flex model includes ending the spring semester in early May as has been our past practice, thus resolving many student and faculty concerns about the prior January Term proposal.
3. The Winter Flex model does not change the practice of starting the spring semester in mid-January, which is more closely aligned with the calendars of early childhood programs and public-school systems in which our students do practicum placements.
4. Spring Break will remain aligned (initially) with the West Lafayette School District spring break.
5. The Winter Flex model keeps Commencement in mid-May, avoiding conflicts with Memorial Day and Indianapolis 500 race weekend.
6. Students will still be able to pursue internships or start summer field work in mid-May, and still have some down time before starting again in August.
7. The Winter Flex model does not perturb the timing of Maymester or disrupt Study Abroad opportunities traditionally offered in Maymester.
8. The Winter Flex model would not require changes in housing and dining contracts.
9. The Winter Flex model has no impact on research contracts.
10. The Winter Flex model can accommodate either a 15- or 16-week semester. Should we go with the 15-week semester model, some faculty may resist the idea that they can achieve learning goals in 15 weeks, and need support in converting 16-week syllabi to a 15-week format. (Support for faculty transitioning courses will be provided by the Innovative Learning Team and the Center for Instructional Excellence.) Of course, one way to allay these concerns is to implement the model with 16-week semesters.

H. Departments Interested in Offering Courses in the January Term Model

Agricultural Economics
 Anthropology

Chemistry
Communication
Computer Graphics Technology
Consumer Science
Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences
Electrical and Computer Engineering
Economics
Educational Psychology
Engineering Technology
Food Science
General Studies (1-credit undergraduate research courses)
Health and Kinesiology
Hospitality and Tourism Management
Industrial and Physical Pharmacy
Information and Library Science (1-credit undergraduate research courses)
Interdisciplinary Studies
Languages and Cultures
Management
Nutrition Science
Philosophy
Physics
Political Science
Psychological Sciences
Sociology
Technology, Leadership, and Innovation

Conclusion

We believe that a four-week Winter Flex term offered in December and January provides important academic opportunities for students: enjoying Study Abroad opportunities to new destinations and taking asynchronous, online courses to make progress toward degrees or to explore new areas . The Winter Flex model responds to the most serious faculty, staff, and student concerns expressed about the earlier January Term proposal. We look forward to close consultation with faculty and staff, Purdue Student Government, Purdue Graduate Student Government, the University Senate, Deans, and Department Heads as we consider implementing a Winter Flex term at Purdue.

- In collaboration with the University Senate, survey the faculty to assess support for and interest in participating in a Winter Flex term.
- Develop a communications plan to keep the campus engaged in and apprised of the status of the discussions.

APPENDIX A – 2023 ACADEMIC CALENDAR COMPARISON – 16 WEEK TERMS

2023 SPRING SEMESTER			
CURRENT		PROPOSED	
Weeks	Date	Weeks	Date
		WS 1	December 19
		WS 2	December 26
	January 2 (AY Faculty Begin)	WS 3	January 2 (AY Faculty Begin)
Wk 1	January 9	Wk 14	January 9
Wk 2	January 16	Wk 2	January 16
Wk 3	January 23	Wk 3	January 23
Wk 4	January 30	Wk 4	January 30
Wk 5	February 6	Wk 5	February 6
Wk 6	February 13	Wk 6	February 13
Wk 7	February 20	Wk 7	February 20
Wk 8	February 27	Wk 8	February 27
Wk 9	March 6	Wk 9	March 6
	March 13 – Spring Break		March 13 – Spring Break (TBD)
Wk 10	March 20	Wk 10	March 20
Wk 11	March 27	Wk 11	March 27
Wk 12	April 3	Wk 12	April 3
Wk 13	April 10	Wk 13	April 10
Wk 14	April 17	Wk 14	April 17
Wk 15	April 24	Wk 15	April 24
Wk 16	May 1 (FINALS)	Wk 16	May 1
	May 8 - Break		May 8 – Break
	May 9 – Grades Due		May 9 – Grades Due
	May 12-14 – Commencement		May 12-14 – Commencement
	May 14 (AY Faculty End)		May 14 (AY Faculty End)
2023 SUMMER SESSION			
Wk 1 (MM)	May 15	Wk 1 (MM)	May 15
Wk 2 (MM)	May 22	Wk 2 (MM)	May 22
Wk 3 (MM)	May 29	Wk 3 (MM)	May 29
Wk 4 (MM)	June 5	Wk 4 (MM)	June 5
Wk 5	June 12	Wk 5	June 12
Wk 6	June 19	Wk 6	June 19
Wk 7	June 26	Wk 7	June 26

Wk 8	July 3	Wk 8	July 3
Wk 9	July 10	Wk 9	July 10
Wk 10	July 17	Wk 10	July 17
Wk 11	July 24	Wk 11	July 24
Wk 12	July 31	Wk 12	July 31
	August 5 – Commencement		August 5 – Commencement
	August 7 - Break		August 12 – Commencement
2023 FALL SEMESTER			
	August 14 (AY Faculty Begin)		August 14 (AY Faculty Begin)
Wk 1	August 21	Wk 1	August 21
Wk 2	August 28	Wk 2	August 28
Wk 3	September 4	Wk 3	September 4
Wk 4	September 12	Wk 4	September 11
Wk 5	September 18	Wk 5	September 18
Wk 6	September 25	Wk 6	September 25
Wk 7	October 2	Wk 7	October 2
Wk 8	October 9 (October Break)	Wk 8	October 9 (October Break)
Wk 9	October 16	Wk 9	October 16
Wk 10	October 23	Wk 10	October 23
Wk 11	October 30	Wk 11	October 30
Wk 12	November 6	Wk 12	November 6
Wk 13	November 13	Wk 13	November 13
Wk 14	November 20 (Thanksgiving Break)	Wk 14	November 20 (Thanksgiving Break)
Wk 15	November 27	Wk 15	November 27
Wk 16	December 4	Wk 16	December 4
Wk 17	December 11 (FINALS)	Wk 17	December 11 (FINALS)
	December 17 (Commencement)		December 17 (Commencement)
	December 19 (Grades Due)		December 19 (Grades Due)
	December 19 (AY Faculty End)		December 19 (AY Faculty End)
	December 19 – Holiday Break		December 19 – Winter Flex
	December 26 – Holiday Break		December 26 – Winter Flex