Questions/Concerns from the Senate

Responses to questions and comments provided in italic

1. Professor David Sanders the Board of Trustees have given an extended break during the semester break period. It seems the pilot proposal implies that staff, in particular, and faculty, perhaps, need to be on campus at that time. “Is that correct?” Professor Kaufmann said that participating faculty would be on campus, but he does not know about the staff members. He said there is a survey for staff to fill out and they can say that they are being coerced to stay around longer than they want to stay. Professor Sanders point is that there is a campus-wide official vacation, but staff from ITaP and other areas will be required to be on campus. Professor Kaufmann said that the onus will be on the people in charge of the program and the pilot will not work without these staff members. The resolution also asks for temporary adoption of necessary rules and regulations to allow the program to run.
   - Faculty and staff will not be required to be on campus over the break. Staff members from the Division of Summer Session and select units across campus (e.g., ITaP) will be on-call to assist students remotely. Other institutions who utilize this support model typically receive 0-10 calls during closure. Faculty are free to teach online courses from campus or remote locations of their choice.

2. Professor Steven Landry wondered if this would be a different format for courses. “Does the temporary waiving of the normal process for getting courses approved circumvent the approvals by the College’s curriculum committees and Graduate School (for graduate courses) that currently occur? Would the courses then be automatically approved for the new format?” Professor Kaufmann said that is not the intention of the pilot proposal.
   - No, we are not requesting a change to the course approval process.

3. Professor Stephen Martin noted that the documents seems to address the mechanics of the pilot program but the philosophy is missing. He asked what courses would be offered during the three-week session. MIT has a winter session that provides an opportunity for students to take courses that they would never be able to take during the regular semesters. He took such a course during his time as a student and it broadened his education even if he has never used the things he learned in the course. If the purpose of the three-week session is to give students credit for a 15- week course in Microeconomics, we should not do it. If the purpose of the session is to allow students to take an intensive three-week course in, for example art history, he supports the proposal. However, there is nothing in the proposal that addresses these issues. Professor Kaufmann suggested it is supply and demand. The courses that will be offered and the ones the students take will determine the success or failure of the program. Typically, the courses offered will be standard courses in a curriculum.
   - As with Maymester and Summer courses, Winter Session will allow students to catch up, maintain timely progress toward degree completion, accelerate progress in order to graduate early, diversify educational experiences by fitting in courses students otherwise couldn’t complete, or graduate on time while fitting in more extra- and co-curricular activities (such as co-op, study abroad, and research experiences). We believe individual faculty should determine what courses can be offered in a 3-week format as they are the content experts.
4. Professor Laurel Weldon noted that the job of faculty on the Educational Policy Committee (EPC) is to maintain curricular control to ensure quality. She expressed concern about the lack of checks in place to maintain quality. She was skeptical of the ability to replicate a course in three-weeks that is normally a full semester in length. She did not hear from the EPC Chair anything that addresses this key concern nor did she hear anything about solidarity with staff personnel who have expressed great appreciation for the semester break shutdown. The whole product is the product of the concern. Professor Kaufmann stated that the points and restrictions in the resolution document address these concerns, explicitly. The EPC members were very concerned with these issues. The EPC has taken into consideration the interest expressed by the students and by some faculty members. The EPC is presenting a proposal that is debatable and will be up to the Senate to approve or reject at the September Senate meeting.

   - Please see responses to points 1 and 3.

5. Professor Alexander Francis asked for a clarification about the survey assessments that were mentioned: “Will they be done before or after the first class session?” Professor Kaufmann said they would be done after the first session.

   - Pre- and post-surveys will be conducted to understand how student and faculty opinions change throughout the module. Additional analyses will be conducted to determine the overall impact of Winter Session.

6. Professor Cooky asked: “Who will be in charge of the assessments, reading the survey and writing up the report?” She commented that she would hate for the students to categorize certain classes offered during the three-week session would not be “hard classes.” She is worried that there would be pressure on faculty in the arts and humanities to teach their classes in the three-week session. Professor Kaufmann referred to the text of the document where it states that whomever is running the winter session will be responsible for the survey and it should be presented to the EPC. The idea for a winter session is the same as for the Maymester and the summer session which are shorter than normal semesters. He still envisions it as a supply and demand issue. Perhaps the courses could be restricted to the online format. It could provide an opportunity for students who are on campus, such as international students, to catch up on credits or finish their degree in a shorter time frame. At UIUC, the population of students taking courses in the winter session is more general that one might expect.

   - The Division of Summer Session will be responsible for overseeing Winter Session. Based on discussions with interested units/faculty, we expect it to be more difficult to select what courses will be offered during year 1 and what courses will wait until year 2 of the potential pilot. Some units want to teach based on demand, some faculty want to offer courses to earn additional income, some faculty want to teach a course they otherwise could not teach during the academic year, and some units want to give graduate students more teaching experience while helping undergraduate students progress toward degree completion.
7. Professor Kaufmann stated that Winter Session at Purdue would be different because others, including Illinois, offer 4-week courses.
   - Illinois, Brown, Rutgers, Iowa, Cornell, Virginia Tech, Connecticut, Colorado-Boulder, Louisville, Oklahoma, and Arizona are examples of institutions offering 3-week winter courses.

8. Professor Ayhan Irfanoglu asked about 100 students in a class with students from Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Construction Management about this proposal. About 40% said they would be interested in taking certain classes in the proposed winter session. In following up, he asked them what they would expect to learn and they answered “Not much” and “Nothing.” From their perspective, the purpose is to take care of three credits, not to broaden their education and knowledge. He has serious concerns that this does not serve the students or faculty and there are other ways to earn the credit, perhaps through online courses. He opposes this proposal.
   - Results of the survey illustrate that the reasons students enroll in courses vary and can sometimes be dictated by one’s plan of study. Taking courses to enrich one’s education emerged as a theme while reviewing open-ended survey questions. Other themes include graduating early, retaking a course to stay on pace, lightening loads for the spring semester to focus on difficult courses, and freeing more time for internships, study abroad, and research during summer.
   - Sample student responses relating to what interests them most in a potential 3-week course during winter break are listed below.
     - I stayed on campus during winter break. It is a good opportunity to learn something new.
     - I’d like to see CS crash courses for topics not taught in the normal curriculum such as other programming languages and tools for personal projects.
     - As an international student, I do not have much things to do during winter break so a 3-week session would allow me to take a course not required for graduation.
     - It would allow me to use that time to take credits during the break so that I am not overwhelmed with credits during a semester.
     - A small time to learn something completely new.
     - There is already a built in break that lapses the time that people focus on school. By instituting the ability to take a class, students could stay focused and be ready for second semester.
     - I’d like to take general ed classes or classes for fun.
     - It would help me get a requirement out of the way, or potentially dive deeper into a subject that I already enjoyed learning about.
     - It would be a great time for students to try courses that aren’t needed for the major or to catch up if they are behind in credits.
     - I would be interested in taking a class over the winter to lessen my course load during the regular fall and spring semesters while still being able to pursue internship, study abroad, or other job opportunities during the summer.