

Proposal for Changes to the Academic Calendar

Prepared by the Academic Calendar Task Force
March 7, 2015



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Background and Goals

Background

In response to discussions among student leadership, deans, school chairs, faculty, and administrators in the Office of the Provost, as well as recommendations from various committees and organizations (including the Summer Semester Working Group, Mental Health Task Force, and SGA), a task force was appointed by Colin Potts, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, to develop an implementation proposal for changes to the academic calendar. Based on their leadership with the Summer Semester Working Group, Steven Girardot, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Paul Kohn, Vice Provost of Enrollment Services were asked to serve as co-chairs of this task force.

In Spring 2015, two small changes to the academic calendar were implemented. The first, formally approved by the faculty, is extending by two weeks the deadline to withdraw from a single course. This change allows students additional time to make decisions about whether to drop a course or not. The second, approved as a pilot, is moving the last final examination session in spring semester so that no finals would be scheduled during commencement activities.

The following proposal outlines additional recommended changes to the calendar as well as related policies based on these changes.

Task Force Goals and Members

In January 2015, co-chairs Paul Kohn and Steven Girardot, assembled a cross-functional task force that included a core group of faculty, administrators, and students. The overall objective of the task force was to review previous research and recommendations and identify, analyze, and recommend high-priority changes to the academic calendar to be submitted for approval by the faculty. These changes primarily focus on: (1) the current structure of dead week and final exams week; (2) the frequency of holiday/class breaks; and (3) the length of the semester. Three additional criteria for any proposed changes were:

1. Once approved, the academic calendar changes can be implemented reasonably quickly,
2. The proposed changes are to be in compliance with current USG policy, and
3. The recommendations will not create significant changes to the existing spring-summer-fall structure, yet will work towards reducing course contact time and shortening the length of the academic terms to be more comparable to USG and peer institutions.

The following task force members participated in discovery of options and impacts and have compiled the recommendations contained in this report:

- Paul Kohn, Enrollment Services (co-chair for task force)
- Steven Girardot, Undergraduate Education (co-chair for the task force)
- Joe Hughes, Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE)
- Cam Tyson, College of Sciences
- Debbi Greene, Capital Planning and Space Management (CPSM)
- Reta Pikowsky, Registrar's Office
- Craig Tovey, Industrial Engineering, Student Academic & Financial Affairs Committee Chair
- Leslie Sharp, Graduate Education and Faculty Affairs

- Rich Steele, Campus Services
- Laura Margaret Burbach, Undergraduate Student
- Matthew Miller, Graduate Student
- Sandy Simpson, Georgia Tech Strategic Consulting

Recommendations

Recommendations for Scheduling Changes

The task force has endorsed five recommendations for changes to the academic calendar. They are stated below, and further details are contained in Appendices A and B.

Recommendation 1: For each standard semester (fall, spring, and the full summer), the current “Dead Week” will be replaced by two “Final Instructional Class Days” on Monday and Tuesday followed by a Reading Period with exams wrapped around the weekend. Final Exams will begin on Thursday, in the late afternoon period, and will conclude the following Thursday.

Recommendation 2: No final exams (except for conflict periods) will be scheduled on Friday before commencement.

Recommendation 3: Two additional class holidays will be incorporated into the calendar. These include the Wednesday before Thanksgiving in fall semester and the day before or after the July 4 holiday in summer semester (depending on what day of the week the holiday falls; the exact day will be determined by the Registrar). Upon implementation of Recommendation 5, additional class holidays may be added.

Recommendation 4: Spring Semester classes will not begin earlier than the second Monday of January.

Recommendation 5: The daily class schedule will be re-designed as follows:

- a.*** In fall and spring semesters, classes meeting three times/week (e.g., MWF) will be 55-minutes and those meeting two times/week (e.g., TR or MW) will be 80-minutes. Breaks between classes will be 15-minutes.
- b.*** In the full (11-week) summer semester, classes meeting three times/week will be 75-minutes and those meeting two times/week will be 110-minutes. Breaks between classes will be 15-minutes.

The change in the daily class schedule will be implemented within the framework established by Recommendations 1-4.

For any of these recommendations, it is understood that for a given calendar year, there may be specific quirks or challenges that must be accommodated. For example, leap years may introduce some variability; January 1 may fall on a Monday or Friday; or Thanksgiving may fall late. Therefore, when needed, the Registrar’s Office may make exceptions to these recommendations to achieve an acceptable calendar.

Appendices A and B outline the timeline and draft schedules for implementing the recommendations contained in this report. Recommendations 1-4 would begin Spring 2016 (with the exception of the class break on the Wednesday preceding Thanksgiving, which would begin Fall 2015). Because of the complexity involved with Recommendation 5a, a more detailed implementation plan needs to be developed with a target of

implementation of this recommendation of Fall 2017. The task force will continue to work on the implementation plan for this recommendation and include additional stakeholders as appropriate. It will be critical that all Colleges are represented fully in this discussion, as well as additional campus service units.

When reviewing these recommendations, the following considerations should be noted:

- USG policy requires that the academic year consist of two (2) regular semesters, each not to be less than fifteen (15) calendar weeks in length, excluding registration and 750 contact minutes per credit hour for lecture courses (which translates to a target of 2250 minutes for a 3-0-3 course). (See: www.usg.edu/policymanual/section3/policy/C339/#p3.4.1_semester_system)
- The standard academic calendar of Georgia Tech consists of fall and spring semesters and an accelerated summer session (<http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/2a.php>). Each semester currently includes approximately fifteen weeks of instruction plus one week of final examinations; the full summer session includes approximately eleven weeks of instruction plus one week of final examinations. In addition to the standard academic calendar, certain programs may be offered on other schedules (<http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/2b.php>)
- Beginning Spring 2016, the calculated contact minutes include 170 minutes for the final exam period. (This is consistent with the schedules of UGA and GSU)
- There are 14 possible annual calendars, based on the day of the week January 1 occurs and whether or not it is a leap year.
- The current academic calendar is a semester calendar with 15 weeks of instruction, in which 50 minutes of class attendance are considered one contact hour and one unit of credit. The working unit of credit definition is as follows (see: http://www.registrar.gatech.edu/faculty/fs_sch.php):
 - One unit of credit represents how much time a typical student is expected to devote to learning per week of study.
 - Each course is evaluated by a system of credits related to time spent in class, lab, research, or field study. One semester credit is expected to require at least three hours of scholarly activity per week.
 - For lecture-based course work, one 50-minute hour of class attendance is scheduled for each credit awarded, but any combination of class attendance, lab, research, or field study experience may be arranged.
 - Studio and laboratory classes earn 1 semester credit for each three hours of attendance.

Recommendations for Changes to Policy

To implement these calendar changes, the current Dead Week policy must be replaced with new policies regarding Final Instructional Class Days and Reading Periods. The following italicized text is proposed to replace the Dead Week/Week Preceding Final Examinations policy (see: <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/12c.php>)

XII. Examinations

C. Final Instructional Class Days and Reading Periods. *The following applies to the standard terms, including the Full Summer Session. It does not apply to the Early and Late Short Summer Sessions. Given the variability in the exact timing of the full summer session, the Registrar's Office will adjust the final instructional class days and reading periods for this semester only in order to meet required instructional time. This policy replaces the former Dead Week (Week Preceding Final Examinations) policy.*

1. Final Instructional Class Days

- a. Final Instructional Class Days are scheduled during each regular term including the Full Summer Session and are the last two days a course officially meets.*
- b. No tests or quizzes are to be administered on these days. Lab quizzes and/or practicums may be given in courses comprised of both a lecture and a scheduled lab, where the lecture carries at least 2 credits.*
- c. For all courses, graded homework or assignments, lab reports, course projects, demonstrations, studio reviews, and presentations may be due during these two days, provided that they are listed on the syllabus at the start of the semester.*
- d. All quizzes and tests should be graded and reported to students on or before the last final instructional day.*

2. Reading Periods

- a. These periods will be designated to provide time for students to prepare for final examinations.*
- b. No classes (including labs, recitations, projects, design/capstone courses and studios) meet.*
- c. No assignments, projects, presentations, or other graded activities are allowed.*
- d. Instructors may schedule optional study review sessions for students during reading periods (but no credit or extra-credit may be attached to these optional sessions). New content may not be covered, and any materials (e.g., handouts, slides, practice problems, etc.) that are provided at these optional review sessions must be made available to all students. This provision does not require that such optional sessions be audio or video recorded.*

3. Requests for exceptions to the Final Instructional Class Day and Reading Period policies may be made in writing by the Dean of the College (or his/her designee) to the Student Academic & Financial Affairs Committee. Requests must be made no later than the semester prior to the desired semester of implementation and will be regularly reviewed.

4. Student concerns may be discussed with the faculty member and/or reported to the chief academic officer of the department of instruction, or with the Assistant Provost for Academic Advocacy and Conflict Resolution. (See Student Academic Grievance Policy in the General Catalog.)

While not part of these proposed policy changes, the task force also supports that additional Reading Period policies on extra-curricular activities and other student activities be developed so as to maintain these time periods for their intention of study and review only. (For example, student organizations could not schedule retreats, trainings, or meetings on these dates). These policy changes will be discussed with Student Affairs and other appropriate offices.

Benefits of Proposed Changes

These changes benefit both students and faculty. Specific examples of benefits include:

1. Additional class break days on the day before Thanksgiving and the day before/after the July 4 holiday allows more time for holiday travel and reduces stress for both students and faculty.
2. The “Final Instructional Days” policy is clearer and less restrictive than the current “Dead Week” policy. Dead Week is currently treated by many faculty as merely the final week of instruction in a semester. There are policies (frequently violated, and the subject of numerous student grievances) concerning the setting of assignments due during dead week, but there is no common set of expectations that this should be a time exclusively for course review.
3. Students will have more time to prepare for finals, including a weekend and additional periods interspersed between final exam periods. Unlike most schools, Tech has no reading days embedded into our semesters. These periods allow students to consolidate their understanding of a course, prepare for finals, and prepare semester-ending projects and presentations
4. Ending final exams on Thursday provides additional time for faculty to grade exams prior to the grade submission deadline.
5. Exam conflicts from having three exams in one day would be less common – only four days have this possibility, instead of five.
6. No graduating student would have a regularly scheduled final exam that conflicts with commencement ceremonies.

Appendices

Appendix A: Proposed Calendar Layout and Timeline

The calendars on the following page illustrate draft schedules for implementing the recommendations contained in this report. These calendars are implemented within the overall time periods comparable to the current structure with 17-week spring and fall terms and a 12-week summer term. Only the full summer term is shown.

The numbers at the bottom of each column indicate the number of class days for each day of the week, plus the total class meetings (and contact minute range) for a 3-0-3 course taught on MWF, MW, and TR schedules. 170 minutes for the standard final exam is included in the course contact time (similar to practice at the UGA and Georgia State).

The proposed timeline for implementation of recommendations in this document is as follows:

Beginning Summer 2015

- No changes made to previously announced schedule

Beginning Fall 2015

- An added class break on Wednesday, November 25, prior to the current scheduled Thanksgiving break
- No final exam period scheduled on last Friday session before commencement (assuming no issues with Spring 2015 pilot of this change)

Beginning Spring 2016

- Current Dead Week replaced by Final Instructional Class Days and Reading Period for full-length academic terms (fall, spring, 11-week summer); new schedule and related policies begin
- No final exams scheduled on the Friday prior to commencement

Beginning Summer 2016

- Standard class times revised for full 11-week summer term: 15-minute breaks between classes; 75 minutes for classes meeting 3 times/week; 110 minutes for class meeting 2 times/week

Beginning Fall 2017

- Standard class times revised for fall and spring: 15-minute breaks between classes; 55 minutes for classes meeting 3 times/week; 80 minutes for classes meeting 2 times/week.

The schedules shown illustrate the effect of increasing class length and reducing the number of class meetings. Options for how to best utilize the freed-up days need to be explored more fully before the calendars for Fall 2017 and beyond are finalized.

Holidays **Class Breaks** **First/Final Classes** **Reading** **Finals** **UG Commenc**

	2015							2016							2017							2018						
	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
JAN					1	2	3						1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	28	29	30	31	1	2	3
FEB	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	26	27	28	1	2	3	4	25	26	27	28	1	2	3
MAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	28	29	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
APR	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	30	1	2	3	4	5	6	29	30	1	2	3	4	5
MAY	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
JUN	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
JUL	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
AUG	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	26	27	28	29	30	31	1
	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
SEP	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	30	1	2	3	4	5	6
OCT	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	28	29	30	31	1	2	3
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
NOV	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	25	26	27	28	29	30	1
	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DEC	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
	27	28	29	30	31			25	26	27	28	29	30	31	31							30	31					

Spring	14	15	15	15	15	14	15	14	14	14	14	15	14	14	14	13	14	13	13	13
MWF/MW/TR	44/29/30 (2345-2420)					42/28/29 (2270-2345)					42/28/29 (2270-2345)					39/26/27 (2250-2330)				
Summer	10	11	11	11	10	9	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10
MWF/MW/TR	31/21/22 (2340-2480)					29/19/20 (2260-2370)					29/19/20 (2260-2370)					29/19/20 (2260-2370)				
Fall	14	15	15	15	15	14	15	14	14	14	13	14	13	13	13	13	14	13	13	13
MWF/MW/TR	44/29/30 (2345-2420)					42/28/29 (2270-2345)					39/26/27 (2250-2330)					39/26/27 (2250-2330)				

Appendix B: Proposed Changes to Dead Week/Finals Week

Table 1(a). Current Dead Week & Final Exams Week Structure														
Week N - 1							Week N							
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Finals Time Periods
Dead Week <i>Classes meet; restricted by Dead Week Policy</i>								Period 1	Period 5	Period 8	Period 11	Period 14	Official Conflict Period	I. 8:00-10:50
								Period 2	Period 6	Period 9	Period 12	Period 15	Grad	II. 11:30-2:20
								Period 3	Period 7	Period 10	Period 13	No exams Scheduled*		III. 2:50-5:40
								Period 4*	Common Exam	Common Exam	Common Exam	Alternate Exam Period		IV. 6:00-8:50

**Piloted for Spring 2015, the third period on Friday afternoon was moved to a Monday evening final to avoid conflicts with Commencement activities*

Table 1(b). Proposed Final Instructional Class Days, Reading Periods, Finals Exams Structure														
Week N - 1							Week N							
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Finals Time Periods
Final Instructional Class Days Less-restrictive Dead Week Policy for these days only								Period 5	Reading Period	Period 9	Period 12	Conflict Period	Grad	I. 8:00-10:50
								Period 6		Period 10	Period 13	Conflict Period		II. 11:30-2:20
								Period 7	Period 8	Period 11	Period 14	No exams Scheduled		III. 2:50- 5:40
								Common Exam**	Common Exam**	Common Exam**	Common Exam**			IV. 6:00- 8:50

**** NOTE:** Classes scheduled to meet after 6pm will have their final exams during the evening (Period IV) on the same day of the week as the class met during the term (Thursday or Friday of Week N-1 or Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday of Week N).

Appendix C: Student Government Association White Paper on Calendar Changes

***Curriculum and Institute Policies Committee
Student Government Association
Georgia Institute of Technology***

To the Administration of the Georgia Institute of Technology:

The Undergraduate Student Government Association is pleased to present this white paper with recommended changes to the Georgia Tech academic calendar.

Students at Georgia Tech spend a greater number of days in school than those at any other university in the nation. We currently experience high levels of stress caused by rigorous coursework, and the current structure of our academic calendar fuels this workload. With a recently targeted focus on improving the overall mental health of our students, we, the Undergraduate Student Government Association, propose an overhaul to our academic calendar.

The following white paper recommends a Maymester calendar option, selected by student leaders from four proposed options. Detailed within the paper, we also recommend changes to both registration events and finals week, all with the benefit of reducing stress and bettering the overall academic experience at Georgia Tech.

We surveyed and analyzed student input on the various aspects of this paper. As a result, the following changes are recommended:

- 1) Shortening of semesters
- 2) Changes to finals week
- 3) Postponement of withdrawal date

The Undergraduate Student Government Association looks forward to integrating your feedback into our recommendations to further our ultimate goal of serving the student population of the Georgia Institute of Technology.

In Progress and Service,

Arjun Meka
Vice-President of Academic Affairs

Laura Margaret Burbach
Curriculum and Institute Policies, Chair

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE GEORGIA TECH ACADEMIC CALENDAR

Undergraduate Student Government Association
Committee for Curriculum and Institute Policies

Revised December 2, 2013

Nicholas Picon, President
Lucy Tucker, Executive Vice President
Arjun Meka, Vice President of Academic Affairs
Laura Margaret Burbach, Curriculum and Institute Policies Committee Chair
Charlie Bryant, Emily Burke, Justin Tamayo, Jimmy Tang, Samir Vedantham, Joy Zhang

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE GEORGIA TECH ACADEMIC YEAR

Background

The Georgia Institute of Technology academic calendar features more instructional days than any other university in North America (University of Toronto). Furthermore, Georgia Tech's programs have been ranked as having the least-manageable workload, and student stress levels have ranked the Institute in the top 40 (College Rankings; Newsweek).

We believe much of the stress and heavy workload that Georgia Tech students experience comes from taking a full load of rigorous courses with few breaks from classes. Additionally, as Georgia Tech is the most recent university within University System of Georgia to transfer from the quarter system to a semester structure, we believe that the content of many courses still aims to teach two quarters' worth of material in one semester (Office of the Registrar).

Furthermore, because the deadline to withdraw from classes is fairly early during the semester, students may not have a single grade to use when making their decision about whether or not to remain enrolled.

Additionally, the current structure of finals week means that students have only one weekend between their last week of classes and the beginning of finals week, and students may be taking their last final as late as the Saturday morning before they walk at graduation that afternoon.

These several factors mentioned above negatively affect the mental health of our campus and warrant significant restructuring of the Georgia Tech academic calendar.

Objectives

According to the 2011 National College Health Assessment, approximately 90% of Tech students self reported being “very stressed”, greatly exceeding the national average of 53% (American College Health Association). Our goal is to create a healthier and more appealing environment while maintaining the integrity and value of a Georgia Tech degree. We expect that a more flexible academic calendar will lead to a more diverse, interdisciplinary curriculum that will contribute to the innovative atmosphere of Georgia Tech.

It is our hope that this new calendar will prompt professors to reevaluate the information that is taught in each course and how those courses are paced. We also hope this new calendar will allow students adequate time to both make an informed decision about withdrawing from a class and prepare for finals. Holistically, these changes should reduce the unnecessary stress and workload of the students.

Proposed Changes

Shortened School Year

Four calendar alternatives for a shorter school year were created: (1) integrating longer intermittent breaks throughout the semesters, (2) including a minimester in January, (3) including a minimester in May, and (4) extending the summer term. Based on recommendations from leaders within the Undergraduate Student Government Association, we have further developed the Maymester plan, which also incorporates more intermittent breaks, for consideration.

The Maymester plan would shorten each semester in order to create a Maymester, making the school year 20 days shorter (6 days shorter for students participating in the Maymester). This optional three-week minimester is designed to offer unique classes that may not be available during other semesters. Maymester students would generally take one class that meets daily, with the option of adding one seminar or shorter course. As Maymester becomes more popular, Georgia Tech may want to develop shorter study abroad programs or even review courses designed for students who may want to gain further prerequisite understanding before moving into a subsequent class.

Since other institutions within the University System of Georgia (USG) operate with a Maymester structure, this calendar would allow Georgia Tech students to seek educational opportunities at other schools, such as study abroad programs or courses in disciplines not offered at Tech. Additionally, some professors at other USG schools may be invited to teach special topics courses at Georgia Tech in one of these disciplines that is not traditionally offered.

Ultimately, this change seeks to bring new opportunities to Georgia Tech students while reducing student stress and improving overall mental health on campus.

Weekend Wrapped Finals Week

Recommendations from students and administrators have reflected a desire to change the way finals week is structured to incorporate more time for students to study. By wrapping finals week around a weekend, we hope to improve upon two issues that currently affect finals week: (1) the current dead week structure provides five "off days" for students to prepare for finals, but many students still have various assignments which are due during this time; (2) students may be taking finals as late as the last Saturday morning, which limits the time professors can complete grades and can greatly affect the experience of graduating seniors who may be taking a final the morning before they walk at graduation.

With the proposed changes, dead week would be shortened to three reading days. This time is designed to be opportune for studying, with possible review sessions held during normal class hours and absolutely no assignments due. Final exams would begin at the end of dead week and carry into the first few days of the next week, providing an additional weekend for students to study. The remaining days of finals week will allow students time to move out, and optional Georgia Tech programming similar to "Ramblin' On" will be provided for graduating seniors.

We hope that these changes will provide students with a less stressful finals week experience by having more built-in time to study. For graduating seniors, we hope this change will also allow them to leave Georgia Tech with a strongly positive experience.

Delayed Withdrawal Date

Students and administrators alike have suggested delaying the deadline at which students would withdraw from classes and receive a "W" on their transcript. At the "W" drop deadline's current placement, just before the halfway mark in the semester, students often feel that they have too few graded assignments to make an informed decision about whether or not to remain enrolled. Hasty withdrawals snowball into several negative effects: students withdrawing from courses

means they would reenroll the next semester, taking up spots from students who need to take the course for the first time.

By delaying the withdraw deadline, many of these consequences could be eliminated, allowing students to be more successful in completing their coursework and creating a better registration process overall.

Conclusion

We believe shortening the school year, extending the withdrawal date, and amending finals week structure will ultimately lead to a healthier and more successful student population. The Maymester presents valuable enrichment opportunities while reducing current semester length; extending the withdrawal date allows students time to make more informed decisions; and, amending the structure of finals week will give students additional time to prepare for finals.

At this stage in our analysis, we did not heavily emphasize the financial implications of any of these changes. However, we expect that tuition and fees would remain consistent with the number of credit hours attempted, while other campus services like housing and dining would be adjusted to reflect the number of days they are in use. We plan to work more elaborately on financial implications when specific details of this change have been further assessed.

We look forward to hearing your feedback on these options and working with you to design a calendar that is most conducive to an excellent campus environment.

References

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Appendix D: Benchmarking of Instructional Minutes for USG Institutions

Fall 2013

UGA

Aug 12-Dec 3

Full	M	T	W	R	F	Total	Weeks	MWF Min	TR Min	MWF Total	TR Total
Instruction	15	15	15	15	15	75	16	50	75	2250	2250
Breaks	2	1	1	1	2	7					
Reading	0	0	1	0	0	1					
Exams	1	1	1	1	1	5					

GSU

Aug 26-Dec 9

Full	M	T	W	R	F	Total	Weeks	MWF Min	TR Min	MWF Total	TR Total
Instruction	14	14	14	14	14	70	15	50	75	2100	2100
Breaks	2	1	1	1	1	6					
Reading	0	0	0	0	0	0					
Exams	1	2	1	1	1	6					

GATECH

Aug 19-Dec 6

Full	M	T	W	R	F	Total	Weeks	MWF Min	TR Min	MWF Total	TR Total
Instruction	14	15	16	15	15	75	15	50	80	2250	2400
Breaks	2	1	0	1	1	5					
Reading	0	0	0	0	0	0					
Exams	1	1	1	1	1	5					

**All contact minutes listed correspond to 3 credit hour classes

Spring 2014

UGA

Jan 6-April 28

Full	M	T	W	R	F	Total	Weeks	MWF Min	TR Min	MWF Total	TR Total
Instruction	15	15	15	15	15	75	16	50	75	2250	2250
Breaks	2	1	1	1	1	6					
Reading	0	1	0	0	0	1					
Exams	1	1	1	1	1	5					

GSU

Jan 13-Apr 28

Full	M	T	W	R	F	Total	Weeks	MWF Min	TR Min	MWF Total	TR Total
Instruction	14	14	14	14	14	70	15	50	75	2100	2100
Breaks	2	1	1	1	1	6					
Reading	0	0	0	0	0	0					
Exams	1	2	1	1	1	6					

GATECH

Jan 6-Apr 25

Full	M	T	W	R	F	Total	Weeks	MWF Min	TR Min	MWF Total	TR Total
Instruction	14	15	15	15	15	74	15	50	80	2200	2400
Breaks	2	1	1	1	1	6					
Reading	0	0	0	0	0	0					
Exams	1	1	1	1	1	5					

**All contact minutes listed
correspond to 3 credit hour classes

Appendix E: Benchmarking: Calendar Overview for USG Institutions

In summary, during the benchmarking exercise, we reviewed the calendars and contact hours for both our peer institutions and local USG institutions. We found Georgia Tech’s semester longer in comparison to both our peers and the USG institutions. Our contact hours were greater than those of the other USG institutions.

Our benchmarking exercised consisted of the review of the calendars for 14 peer institutions, 4 local USG institutions, and 1 local private institution (Emory) that we collaborate with on a number of programs. A few of our key findings include: Of the 19 institutions we reviewed:

- 12 have reading days prior to finals;
- 13 take the Wednesday before Thanksgiving as part of the Thanksgiving holiday break;
- Georgia Tech’s semester was longer in comparison to most of our peers and the USG institutions; and
- Our contact hours were greater than those of the other USG institutions.

Fall Semester		Local Institutions					
Classes Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Thanksgiving Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Semester Length = Start date to end of finals minus breaks		16 Weeks	16 Weeks	15 Weeks	15 Weeks	15 Weeks	16 Weeks
Day	Date						
Monday	18-Aug	Class Begin	Class Begin			Class Begin	Class Begin
Tuesday	19-Aug						
Wednesday	20-Aug						
Thursday	21-Aug						
Friday	22-Aug						
Saturday	23-Aug						

Fall Semester		Local Institutions					
Classes Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Thanksgiving Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Sunday	24-Aug						
Monday	25-Aug			Class Begin			
Tuesday	26-Aug						
Wednesday	27-Aug				Class Begin		
Thursday	28-Aug						
Friday	29-Aug						
Saturday	30-Aug						
Sunday	31-Aug						
Monday	1-Sep	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
Tuesday	2-Sep						
Wednesday	3-Sep						
Friday	19-Sep						
Monday	6-Oct						
Tuesday	7-Oct						
Wednesday	8-Oct						"W" Deadline
Thursday	9-Oct						
Friday	10-Oct	"W" Deadline					
Saturday	11-Oct						
Sunday	12-Oct						
Monday	13-Oct	Break			Break	"W" Deadline	

Fall Semester		Local Institutions					
Classes Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Thanksgiving Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Tuesday	14-Oct			"W" Deadline			
Wednesday	15-Oct						
Thursday	16-Oct						
Friday	17-Oct				"W" Deadline		
Saturday	18-Oct						
Sunday	19-Oct						
Monday	20-Oct						
Tuesday	21-Oct						
Wednesday	22-Oct						
Thursday	23-Oct		"W" Deadline				
Friday	24-Oct						
Saturday	25-Oct						
Sunday	26-Oct						
Monday	27-Oct						
Tuesday	28-Oct						
Wednesday	29-Oct						
Thursday	30-Oct						
Friday	31-Oct		Break				
Saturday	1-Nov						
Sunday	2-Nov						
Monday	3-Nov						
Tuesday	4-Nov						

Fall Semester		Local Institutions					
Classes Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Thanksgiving Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Tuesday	11-Nov						
Wednesday	12-Nov						
Thursday	13-Nov						
Friday	14-Nov						
Saturday	15-Nov						
Sunday	16-Nov						
Monday	17-Nov						
Tuesday	18-Nov						
Wednesday	19-Nov						
Thursday	20-Nov						
Friday	21-Nov						
Saturday	22-Nov						
Sunday	23-Nov						
Monday	24-Nov		Break	Break		Break	Break
Tuesday	25-Nov						
Wednesday	26-Nov				Break		
Thursday	27-Nov	Break					
Friday	28-Nov						
Saturday	29-Nov						
Sunday	30-Nov						
Monday	1-Dec						

Fall Semester		Local Institutions					
Classes Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Thanksgiving Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Tuesday	2-Dec						
Wednesday	3-Dec						
Thursday	4-Dec						
Friday	5-Dec	Class End				Class End	
Saturday	6-Dec						
Sunday	7-Dec						
Monday	8-Dec	Finals		Class End		Finals	Class End
Tuesday	9-Dec		Class End	Finals	Class End		Finals
Wednesday	10-Dec		Reading Day		Finals		
Thursday	11-Dec		Finals				
Friday	12-Dec						
Saturday	13-Dec						
Sunday	14-Dec						
Monday	15-Dec						
Tuesday	16-Dec						
Wednesday	17-Dec						
Thursday	18-Dec						
Friday	19-Dec						

Spring Semester		Local Institutions					
Class Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Semester Length = Start date to end of finals minus breaks		16 Weeks	16 Weeks	15 Weeks	16 Weeks	16 Weeks	16 Weeks
Day	Date						
Thursday	1-Jan						
Friday	2-Jan						
Saturday	3-Jan						
Sunday	4-Jan						
Monday	5-Jan	Class Begin	Class Begin				
Tuesday	6-Jan						
Wednesday	7-Jan						Class Begin
Thursday	8-Jan						
Friday	9-Jan						
Saturday	10-Jan						
Sunday	11-Jan						
Monday	12-Jan			Class Begin	Class Begin	Class Begin	
Tuesday	13-Jan						

Spring Semester		Local Institutions					
Class Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Wednesday	14-Jan						
Thursday	15-Jan						
Friday	16-Jan						
Saturday	17-Jan						
Sunday	18-Jan						
Monday	19-Jan	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
Tuesday	20-Jan						
Wednesday	21-Jan						
Thursday	22-Jan						
Friday	23-Jan						
Saturday	24-Jan						
Sunday	25-Jan						
Monday	26-Jan						
Tuesday	27-Jan						
Wednesday	28-Jan						
Thursday	29-Jan						

Spring Semester		Local Institutions					
Class Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Friday	30-Jan						
Saturday	31-Jan						
Sunday	1-Feb						
Monday	2-Feb						
Tuesday	3-Feb						
Wednesday	4-Feb						
Thursday	5-Feb						
Friday	6-Feb						
Saturday	7-Feb						
Sunday	8-Feb						
Monday	9-Feb						
Tuesday	10-Feb						
Wednesday	11-Feb						
Thursday	12-Feb						
Friday	13-Feb						
Saturday	14-Feb						
Sunday	15-Feb						

Spring Semester		Local Institutions					
Class Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Monday	16-Feb						
Tuesday	17-Feb						
Wednesday	18-Feb						
Thursday	19-Feb						
Friday	20-Feb						
Saturday	21-Feb						
Sunday	22-Feb						
Monday	23-Feb						
Tuesday	24-Feb						
Wednesday	25-Feb						
Thursday	26-Feb						
Friday	27-Feb	"W" Deadline					
Saturday	28-Feb						
Sunday	1-Mar						
Monday	2-Mar						
Tuesday	3-Mar			"W" Deadline			"W" Deadline

Spring Semester		Local Institutions					
Class Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Wednesday	4-Mar						
Thursday	5-Mar						
Friday	6-Mar				"W" Deadline		
Saturday	7-Mar						
Sunday	8-Mar						
Monday	9-Mar		Break		Break		
Tuesday	10-Mar						
Wednesday	11-Mar					"W" Deadline	
Thursday	12-Mar						
Friday	13-Mar						
Saturday	14-Mar						
Sunday	15-Mar						
Monday	16-Mar	Break		Break		Break	
Tuesday	17-Mar						
Wednesday	18-Mar						
Thursday	19-Mar		"W" Deadline				

Spring Semester		Local Institutions					
Class Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Friday	20-Mar						
Saturday	21-Mar						
Sunday	22-Mar						
Monday	23-Mar						
Tuesday	24-Mar						
Wednesday	25-Mar						
Thursday	26-Mar						
Friday	27-Mar						
Saturday	28-Mar						
Sunday	29-Mar						
Monday	30-Mar						
Tuesday	31-Mar						
Wednesday	1-Apr						
Thursday	2-Apr						
Friday	3-Apr						
Saturday	4-Apr						Break

Spring Semester		Local Institutions					
Class Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Sunday	5-Apr						
Monday	6-Apr						
Tuesday	7-Apr						
Wednesday	8-Apr						
Thursday	9-Apr						
Friday	10-Apr						
Saturday	11-Apr						
Sunday	12-Apr						
Monday	13-Apr						
Tuesday	14-Apr						
Wednesday	15-Apr						
Thursday	16-Apr						
Friday	17-Apr						
Saturday	18-Apr						
Sunday	19-Apr						
Monday	20-Apr						

Spring Semester		Local Institutions					
Class Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Tuesday	21-Apr						
Wednesday	22-Apr						
Thursday	23-Apr						
Friday	24-Apr	Class End					
Saturday	25-Apr						
Sunday	26-Apr						
Monday	27-Apr	Finals	Class End	Class End	Class End		
Tuesday	28-Apr		Reading Day	Finals	Finals		
Wednesday	29-Apr		Finals				Class End
Thursday	30-Apr						Finals
Friday	1-May					Class End	
Saturday	2-May						
Sunday	3-May						
Monday	4-May					Finals	
Tuesday	5-May						
Wednesday	6-May						

Spring Semester		Local Institutions					
Class Begin		Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Georgia	Georgia State University	Emory University	Georgia Southern University	Kennesaw State University
Withdrawal Deadline							
Break							
Classes End							
Reading Day							
Final Exams							
Thursday	7-May						
Friday	8-May						
Saturday	9-May						