

Proposal for a Modified Commencement Schedule

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1. Summary

This document presents a proposal to reduce the time between final exams and Commencement from 14 days to 8 days, enabling the ceremonies to occur by the end of May in five of seven years (and otherwise on the first or second day of June).

2. Background and rationale for the proposal

From 1980-1994, Commencement was typically scheduled 9-12 calendar days (7-8 business days) after the last day of Finals. The ceremony was most frequently scheduled on a Monday, though some years it shifted to Friday or Tuesday.

In 1994, there was a significant calendar change that increased the length of IAP from 3.5 weeks to 4 weeks. Concurrently, a decision was made that Commencement would always be scheduled on a Friday as codified in Section 2.11 of the Rules and Regulations of the Faculty. These changes increased the number of days between finals and Commencement to 14 calendar days (8-9 business days), which has been our practice ever since.

In recent years there have been calls for a change in the schedule for the Hooding and Commencement ceremonies. In part, having two weeks between the end of finals and the ceremonies seems too long in light of the fact that the majority of graduating students have either one final exam or no final exams. In addition, having the ceremonies during the first week of June presents challenges because some graduates must pay an additional month of rent for housing and/or delay the start of employment. Further, an earlier commencement ceremony would provide a longer period for residence hall repairs and/or summer programs.

3. Overview the proposal

There are several variables that come into play when considering how to decrease the time between finals and Commencement. Many different calendar options were prepared and analyzed. These included different combinations of: decreasing the number of days in IAP (reverting to the pre-1994 model); starting IAP earlier; eliminating student holidays; reducing end-of-term reading days; reducing the number of Final Exam days, or deviating from current practice where things occur on the same day of the week (including Commencement).

We believe the following combination of changes best achieves the goals of decreasing the time between finals and Commencement while maintaining the integrity of the degree awarding process and benefitting the community. It would result in Commencement occurring in late-May five of seven years (otherwise it would occur on June 1 or June 2):

- Eliminate one class day in IAP.
- Shift Spring Registration Day to be coincident with the last day of classes in IAP.
- Move from a five-day final exam schedule to a four-day exam schedule, but do so in a way that the four-day exam period straddles a weekend.
- Decrease the number of days between the end of finals and Hooding from 14 calendar days (8-9 business days) to 7 days (5 business days).
- Eliminate the requirement that Commencement be scheduled on a Friday.

4. Details of the proposal

Eliminate one class day in IAP

In IAP 2018, there were only 20 subjects that began in the first week of IAP and were scheduled through the final Friday. 14 of these subjects met 5 days/week while the other 6 met 3 days/week.

51 hours of classes were scheduled on the last day of IAP in subjects that met for the entire term. 14 hours were lab or studio sections. 18.5 hours were for graduate subjects (4 of them studio hours), and undergrad subjects were offered for 32.5 hours (10 hours were lab sections).

There were 571 registrations in these classes. Six subjects were graduate level with 107 total registrations, one class was both grad and undergrad with 2 registrations, and the other 13 were undergraduate subjects with 462 registrations. 18.02A, along with the Concourse and ESG equivalents, accounted for 149 of the registrations in undergraduate subjects with the second largest being 8.223 (Classical Mechanics) which had 116. The Math department had the largest overall enrollment with 162 students followed by Physics with 149 all in undergraduate subjects. HST had the next highest enrollment with 60 in grad subjects followed by Course 6 with 44 in undergrad subjects. We have not yet contacted the departments most directly affected by such a change to determine impact and options for addressing it.

Since IAP scheduling is slightly less standard than in the regular terms, it should be noted that we did not confirm with each of these 20 classes whether they meet on the final Friday. Also, there may be TBA subjects that meet the full term that would not be counted in the 20 subject total.

Shift spring Registration Day to the last day of classes in IAP

The shift from paper to digital registration 8 years ago resulted in a widened window for students to meet with their advisors. Registration Day itself continues to serve an important function whereby many advisors dedicate time for advising appointments. With a minimal number of classes on the last day of IAP, we suggest making it coincident with Registration Day. This eliminates a “non-class” day that can be recouped for the Spring term.

Adjust spring finals

Eliminating one class day in IAP and moving Spring Registration Day to be coincident with the last day of IAP will shift Spring final exams to begin on a Friday. With the exam period straddling the weekend, we believe it is attractive to reduce the final exam period from five days to four days. In particular, it will allow our standard two reading days before the first day of finals followed by two reading days (the weekend) and then a remaining three days of finals.

Simulation data from the last five Spring terms suggest that the elimination of one day of Spring Final Exams will result in an additional 150+ students who would have had back-to-back exams. The number of direct conflicts increased slightly (1-20 students, depending on the year). It is anticipated that including an additional reading day and bookending the first day of finals with two reading days on each side, will help provide time for students to prepare for additional back-to-back exams.

Decrease the number of days between the end of finals and Hooding to 7 days

Decreasing the number of days between finals and Hooding will have an effect on Academic Departments, Faculty committees, and administrative units across the Institute. Timeframes will be tight and deadlines will need to be strictly adhered to. For example, last spring more than 50 undergraduate degree candidates were missing grades from spring semester after the grade deadline had passed. A condensed schedule will require commitment on the part of the faculty to meet the grade deadline so that graduating students are not unduly removed from the degree list.

Eliminate the requirement that Commencement be scheduled on a Friday

Faculty regulations require a Friday commencement ceremony. Removing that requirement allows flexibility for calendar years where shifting the ceremony allows for a May date.

5. Pros and cons

Pros

- The number of days between end of finals and commencement is decreased
- Commencement is complete on or before May 31 in 5 of 7 years
- Spring term grades are due on a weekday, which allows for more efficient collection of late grades. With more than 42,000 grades submitted in recent Spring terms, collecting on a weekday with faculty and administrative staff available is critical.
- Minimal disruption to existing processes, rules & regulations, etc. compared to other possible models
- The two-day Patriot's Day student holiday is preserved
- Bookending the first day of finals with 2 reading days on each side would provide students with additional preparation time for final exams.

Cons

- Spring term begins on a Friday, this may impact some lecture classes that prefer to meet in lecture ahead of recitations. More input needs to be gathered to understand how departments might mitigate any negative effects.
- Two fewer days between the last final exam and when grades are due.
- One fewer work days for departments to collect grades and review satisfactory progress in the spring term. More information from the departments needs to be gathered to understand the impact of this.
- Since there are fewer days before commencement, there may be increased stress on students to complete outstanding work from previous terms by the required deadlines.
- Risk of an increased number of students unable to complete requirements
- Increased number of back-to-back final exams in the spring

- One fewer Tuesday/Thursday class day, if the Tuesday after Patriots day is retained as a student holiday. However, shifting that holiday to the Friday before Patriots Day weekend would balance Tuesday/Thursday and Monday/Friday teaching days if desired.

6. Timeline and process for further consideration

In order to impact the 2019-2020 Academic Calendar and allow for parents and families to plan, the faculty vote must occur no later than March 2019. Thus, this fall term should be used to strategically target discussions with impacted groups. The first step with this proposal was to bring it to Eric Grimson, Gayle Gallagher, for their input as Chair and Executive Officer of the Commencement Committee. Following this, to prepare the ground for the governance process and the necessary changes to Rules and Regulations, we would need to present the proposal to the following committees:

- CAP
- CGP
- FPC

We would also recommend, as a courtesy, at least providing some information to CUP as well. Please note that CAP and CGP are essential in carrying the proposal forward as, under the governance structure, they are the committees that can propose changes to the academic calendar.

In terms of socializing the proposal across the campus we recommend engaging the following groups:

- Undergraduate and Graduate Officers
- Academic Council
- Undergraduate and Graduate Administrators
- The UA and the GSC (note that the President of the UA and the GSC serve on the Commencement Committee)

APPENDIX

Rules and Regs 2.11 that may need to be changed:

- a four-week period set aside for academic and independent activities (ending on Friday).
- Spring term classes shall begin on the following Tuesday (the first Tuesday in February), followed by:
 - fourteen calendar weeks for classes (ending on Thursday), interposed with a one-week Spring vacation after the seventh week of classes; a three-day reading period; and a five-day period reserved for final examinations.
 - Commencement shall be held on the second Friday following the spring term examination period. (Note – if the ‘alternate’ scheme for cycle 1 is adopted this can stay as is).
 - Half-term subjects held in the first half of the spring term (H3) shall begin on the first Tuesday in February followed by seven calendar weeks for classes ending on Friday.
 - Half-term subjects held in the second half of the spring term (H4) shall begin on Monday of the eighth week of the semester following the one-week Spring vacation. This will be followed by: seven calendar weeks for classes (ending on Thursday); a three-day reading period; and a five-day period reserved for final examinations.

And perhaps:

Classes shall be suspended during the following additional vacation periods:

- Day following Patriots Day. (Only if attempting to balance the number of Tuesday/Thursday classes by shifting the vacation day to the Friday prior to Patriot’s Day).

Note: The last time the academic calendar was overhauled in 1994 it was initially implemented as a three-year experiment. At the end of that time the Faculty declared themselves satisfied and the new calendar was officially adopted. One possible consideration would be to adopt this proposal as a two- or three-year experiment to assess its viability.

Example comparison of current vs proposed schedule – FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY

Current 2019 Schedule = Green

What the 2019 Schedule would look like under the proposal = Red

Note that the earliest we could change things is June 2020!

May – June 2019						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			May 1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
		Last Day of Classes	Reading Day	Last Day of Classes Reading Day	Reading Day Final Exams	Reading Day Reading Day
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Reading Day Reading Day	Final Exams Final Exams	Final Exams Final Exams	Final Exams Final Exams	Final Exams	Final Exams Final Grade Deadline 12 noon	
26	27	28	29	30	31	June 1
	Memorial Day	Final Grade Deadline	CAP/CGP mtgs	Hooding	Commencement	
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	CAP/CGP mtgs			Hooding	Commencement	

Option 1A – Suggestions from Dean’s Group

It was suggested at the Deans Group that the last day of IAP remain on Friday and that the first day of Spring classes begin on Monday. In exchange, one of the two student holidays on Patriot’s Day weekend would revert to a day of classes.

Example Comparison of Current vs **Option 1A** Proposed Schedule – FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY

Current 2019 Schedule = Green

Option 1A Proposed 2019 Schedule = Purple

January - February 2019						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
27	28	29	30	31	Feb 1 Last day of IAP classes Last Day of IAP Classes Spring Registration Day	2
3	4 Spring Registration Day First Day of Spring Classes	5 First Day of Spring Classes	6	7	8	9

April 2019						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
14	15 Patriots Day – No Classes	16 Student Holiday – No Classes Classes Held	17	18	19	20

Option 1A – Adjustments to potential issues to be considered

- Eliminate the issue of losing a day of teaching in IAP
- Eliminate issues associated with starting the Spring term on a Friday
- Eliminate the issue that there is one fewer Tuesday/Thursday class. The number of classes would be balanced across each day of the week
- Add the issue that one student holiday is eliminated
- Add the issue that, with Spring Registration Day occurring on a Friday, there might be a decrease in the number of students that register before classes begin. Thus class lists may not be as accurate

Option 1A – Adjustments to advantages

- Eliminate the advantage that two Patriot's Day student holidays are preserved
- New advantage that classes would begin on a Monday, which allows a full week for the first cycle of lectures/recitations