



# Proposed Changes to the Academic Calendar

## Academic Calendar Task Force • April 17, 2015



**Steven P. Girardot, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education**  
**Paul Kohn, Vice Provost for Enrollment Services**

## What is being voted on today?

1. Structural Changes to the Academic Calendar
1. Changes to relevant policies— primarily related to the current “Dead Week” policy

## Why change the academic calendar?

*“We [students at Georgia Tech] 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.”*

Undergraduate SGA White Paper on Proposed changes to the  
Georgia Tech academic calendar  
December, 2013

## Why change the academic calendar?

- Respond to concerns and opportunities expressed by the Georgia Tech community
  - Discussions among student leadership, deans, school chairs, faculty, and administrators
  - Recommendations from committees and organizations (Summer Semester Working Group, Mental Health Task Force, SGA)
- Enhance the learning environment for both students and faculty
  - Reduce stress and undue pressure
  - Enable greater balance between academic rigor and a manageable cadence
  - Better align calendar with peers (i.e. reading periods, semester length)
- Continue the improvements in the academic calendar that began this year
  - Extended deadline for withdrawal from a single course by 2 weeks
  - Moved last final exam session in 2015 spring semester so no final was scheduled during commencement activities (as a pilot)

## What was the process used?

- Dr. Colin Potts, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, asked Dr. Paul Kohn, Vice Provost for Enrollment Services, and Dr. Steven Girardot, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, to co-chair an implementation task force.
- Drs. Kohn and Girardot appointed a task force:
  - Ms. Laura Margaret Burbach, Undergraduate Student
  - Dr. Debbi Greene, Capital Planning and Space Management (CPSM)
  - Dr. Joe Hughes, Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE)
  - Mr. Matthew Miller, Graduate Student
  - Ms. Reta Pikowsky, Registrar's Office
  - Dr. Leslie Sharp, Graduate Education and Faculty Affairs
  - Ms. Sandy Simpson, Georgia Tech Strategic Consulting
  - Mr. Rich Steele, Campus Services
  - Dr. Craig Tovey, Industrial Engineering, SAFAC Committee Chair
  - Dr. Cam Tyson, College of Sciences

## What was the process used?

- Task force researched and reviewed options
  - What did the other committees (SGA, MHTF, etc.) recommend?
  - What are other USG and peer universities doing?
  - What are key policies?
  - What are the implications of the changes (policy changes, etc.)?
- The following criteria were applied to determine the feasibility of potential options:
  - Implemented reasonably soon
  - In compliance with current USG policy
  - Would not create major changes to the existing spring-summer-fall structure.
  - Could serve as a foundation for potential future changes to the academic calendar

## What was the process used?

- Discussed thoroughly with Academic Associate Deans and made revisions based on their feedback
- Disseminated final proposal to Assoc. Deans and Deans, VPs, Faculty, and Students:
  - Presentations at Deans/VP meeting
  - Presentation at Student Affairs Cabinet
  - Students informed via SGA
  - Disseminated as informational item to several faculty committees (IGCC, IUCC)
- Presented at Student Regulations Committee- Approved at April 1, 2015
- Widely Publicized -- Daily Digest, Whistle, Technique
- Held Information Session on April 17, 2015

## What are the proposed changes to the calendar currently being considered?

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.
2. No final exams (except for conflict periods) will be scheduled on Friday before commencement.
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).
4. Spring Semester classes will not begin earlier than the second Monday of January.

**Table 1(a). Current Dead Week & Final Exams Week Structure**

Week N - 1							Week N							Finals Time Periods
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	
<b>Dead Week</b> <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							Finals Time Periods
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	
<b>Final Instructional Class Days</b> 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).

## What are the policy changes?

- Current “WPFE”/Dead Week Policy Eliminated
- Two New Policies Established:
  - Final Instructional Class Days: last two days a course officially meets; less restrictive policies than current dead week.
  - Reading Periods: Time for students to prepare for final examinations
- Program-level exceptions may be requested by College Dean’s Office through Student Academic & Financial Affairs Committee (SAFAC)
- Need to establish Reading Period Policies around non-academic activities (in discussion with Student Affairs)

## What are the policy changes?

- Final Instructional Class Days
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - All quizzes and tests should be graded and reported to students on or before the last final instructional class day.

## What are the policy changes?

- Reading Periods
  - These periods will be designated to provide time for students to prepare for final examinations.
  - No classes (including labs, recitations, projects, design/capstone courses and studios) meet.
  - No assignments, projects, presentations, or other graded activities are allowed.
  - 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.

## What are the proposed changes to the calendar being considered **in the future**?

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

- 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.
- 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.

***Note: This recommendation is not currently being voted on; it is supported “in principle” by Student Regulations Committee but will require additional details and approvals before it is implemented. Implementation of this recommendation will be based on the foundation of Recommendations 1-4.***

## What is the timeline for implementation?

- Beginning Fall 2015:
  - Wednesday before Thanksgiving added as class break
  - no final exam period scheduled on last Friday session before commencement
- 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; 75 minutes for classes meeting 3 times/week; 110 minutes for class meeting 2 times/week
- If approved-- 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.

## What is the Effect on Courses and Instructors?

- Fewer course contact minutes may require adjustments in some types course schedules (but still within USG guidelines)
- Fewer restrictions on “Final Instructional Class Days” than current “Dead Week”
- Additional time to grade final exams before grade submission deadline
- Additional class holidays
- Potential change in daily class schedule with a shift to 55-minute "hours" will result in fewer class sessions per day and may require modifications to some courses– but may also lead to more meaningful use of class time (less time taken up for “housekeeping”) and less tardiness by students (navigating the distance on campus)

## Who do I contact for more information?

Questions or comments may be directed to:

Dr. Paul Kohn

Vice Provost for Enrollment Services

[paul.kohn@gatech.edu](mailto:paul.kohn@gatech.edu)

Dr. Steven Girardot

Assoc. Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

[steven.girardot@gatech.edu](mailto:steven.girardot@gatech.edu)