

Carnegie Mellon University

Enrollment Services

2014-15 Academic Calendar Changes: Exam and Reading Days

Introduction

Following a 2+-year community-driven process, a decision has been reached by the Faculty Senate to alter the exam and reading day schedule for CMU undergraduates in order to shorten the length of the fall semester exam and reading day schedule by 2 days and the spring semester exam and reading day schedule by 1 day. This decision was affirmed by the president's Management Team on February 19, 2013.

Change Summary

Starting in the 2014-15 academic year, the regular undergraduate exam and reading day schedule will be modified from the exam and reading day schedule that has been in place from the mid-1990's until 2012-13. In 2012-13 and 2013-14, the final Tuesday of each exam and reading period will be changed from having scheduled exams to a make-up day for final exams, at individual faculty discretion.

The addition of a make-up examination day as the final day of each exam and reading day period provides flexibility for faculty to schedule make-up exams for students; make-up final exams may be scheduled before or after the regularly scheduled exam at the discretion of the faculty member or instructor.

The change to the exam and reading day schedule was approved by Faculty Senate on October 30, 2012 and the vote was affirmed by Faculty Senate on January 15, 2013.

The following table highlights the current exam and reading day pattern (mid-1990s through 2012-13), the modest "pilot" changes for 2012-13 and 2013-14, and the new exam and reading day schedule to begin with the 2014-15 academic year.

Option	F	Sa	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su	M	T	# Read Day	# Exam Periods	Week end Exams
Previous Exam Schedule	Last Day of Sem	Read	Read	Exam	Exam	Read	Exam	Exam	Read	Read	Exam	Exam (2)	5	17	none
REVISED Fall '14	Last Day of Sem	Read	Read	Exam	Exam	Read	Exam	Exam	Read	Exam	Make-up Exam		4	15	1 Sun
Spring '15	Last Day of Sem	Read	Read	Exam	Exam	Read	Exam	Exam	Read	Read	Exam	Make-up Exam	5	15	none

Background Information

The fall semester has historically begun one week prior to Labor Day. Every 3 to 4 years, this causes the end of the exam period and grading due date to be very close to the winter holiday. As a way to test the idea of an earlier fall term start date, the fall semester first day of classes in August 2010 began two weeks prior to Labor Day. This earlier start date was widely critiqued as negatively impacting various faculty and student summer activities including faculty participation in research and professional conference activities, and student internships, jobs and study abroad experiences.

In response to regular feedback from faculty, staff and students regarding the CMU Academic Calendar, Lisa Krieg, Director of Enrollment Services, and John Papinchak, University Registrar, launched a series of small and large group sessions in summer 2010 to investigate concerns and opportunities regarding the current CMU Academic Calendar. Invariably, many issues arose regarding challenges with the current calendar and possible solutions. Not surprisingly, a “good idea” for some groups was a “bad idea” for others; starting the fall semester earlier in August is an example of one idea that some community members promote and others strongly oppose. The types of issues put forward and discussed are summarized in this chart:

Academic	Outside the Classroom
Instructional days	Summer internships
Exams and reading days	Summer faculty conferences, research
Grade submission (esp. December)	Holidays, breaks (esp. short fall break)
Academic actions – fall to spring	Recent student focus: 1 day in fall
Role of mini's for undergrads	Winter travel
Cross registration (esp. Univ. of Pitt)	Spring break and Carnival
Tepper/Heinz calendars	Religious observances
Qatar and Adelaide calendars	TA's and graders (esp. December)

At the same time, certain themes or commonalities were mentioned repeatedly:

- Due to the tight timing between the end of the exam period, the start of the winter holiday, and the needs for many students and faculty to travel, the end of the fall term was much more of a concern for the campus community than the end of the spring term
- Decreasing the number of instructional days was unlikely to receive broad faculty support

- Starting the fall semester earlier in August (something that was piloted in fall 2010 and received broad criticism) caused as many problems as it solved

CMU Community Input

Starting in fall 2010 and through the final confirmation of the Faculty Senate vote in January 2013, faculty, staff, and student groups and individuals were consulted regarding the broad issue and the more specific ideas revolving around the revised exam and reading day schedule. Some groups were consulted more than once. The following should not be considered a comprehensive list of consultations:

- Brainstorming session to launch the calendar effort (faculty, staff and students) – September 2010
- Graduate Student Assembly and Student Senate leaders, GSA and Student Senate general meetings - various dates in fall 2011, spring 2012 and fall 2012
- Town Hall meeting (faculty, staff and students) – January 2012
- Faculty Senate Executive Committee and Faculty Senate – February, September and October 2012 and January 2013
- Division of Campus Affairs leadership team – various dates
- Dean of Student Affairs and Division of Student Affairs department heads – various dates
- CORA (Council of Religious Advisors) – May 2012
- University Education Council (chair, Amy Burkert, Associate Vice Provost for Education) – May 2012
- Associate Deans Council and Associate Deans on Graduate Policy - various dates
- Individual discussions, conversations and meetings - throughout

Calendar “Rules”

The University Registrar oversees the preparation and posting of the Academic Calendars for annual review by the Management Team (under the direction of the Carnegie Mellon President.) Changes to the standard rules are approved by Faculty Senate:

Calendar Decision Rules	
First Day of Fall Classes	Monday before Labor Day
Mid-Semester Break	1 day exactly in the middle of the semester
Final Exams	Preceded by weekend (Sa-Su) for reading, M-T for exams, W for reading, Th-F for exams, Sa-Su for reading, M-T for exams
First Day of Spring Classes	18 weeks prior to Commencement
Spring Break	At the mid-point (week 9) of the semester
Spring Carnival	Never on Easter or Passover. Give Thursday before as undergraduate “No Classes” day
Last Day of Classes	2 weeks prior to Commencement

Final Exams	Preceded by weekend (Sa-Su) for reading; M-T for exams, W for reading, Th-F for exams, Sa-Su for reading, M-T for exams
Commencement	ALWAYS the third Sunday in May

All scheduled final examinations are held at the end of the semester during the university's official final examination period. Students who miss an exam with a reasonable excuse and wish to petition for a make-up final exam should check with the instructor. Concerns related to final exams and final exams policy should be directed to the department head of the instructor offering the course or to the associate dean of the student's home college. View Carnegie Mellon University's Exam Policy at <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Exams.htm>.

Benchmarking Information

In fall 2010, the Registrars from the AAU (American Association of Universities) schools were surveyed on their schools' exam and reading day schedules. The AAU, of which Carnegie Mellon is a member, includes 61 of the most prestigious public and private universities with significant research agendas; many of Carnegie Mellon's peer institutions are members of AAU.

In this survey, AAU institutions listed exam and reading day periods ranging in length from 5 to 11 days; with most schools in the 5-7 day range; in this same period, the CMU exam and reading day period lasts 11 days.

Of the private institutions participating in the survey, several offer weekend exams (Saturday only, Sunday only, or both); at this same time, Carnegie Mellon did not offer exams on either Saturday or Sunday during the final exam period.

- a. [Duke University Final Exam Schedule](#)
- b. [Emory University Final Exam Schedule](#)
- c. [Princeton University](#)
- d. [Rice University](#)
- e. [Washington University in St. Louis](#)
- f. [University of Pittsburgh](#)

Religious Exemptions for Students

The Conduct of Classes information contained in the Undergraduate Catalog applies to exams: "Students who, because of religious beliefs, cannot attend a class may arrange as individuals to be absent, provided the work missed is made up in a manner satisfactory to the instructor(s) of the class(es) missed." More information about Conduct of Classes can be found in the [Undergraduate Catalog](#).

Exam Conflict Guidelines

The University Education Council's guideline regarding students with exam conflicts states:

"If a student has been scheduled to have more than the number of exams in a designated time period permitted by university policy, it is the student's responsibility to take immediate action to reach a timely resolution."

The process by which a student should take action is outlined in the [University Policies](#) section of the Undergraduate Catalog.