

**Calendar Task Force
Final Report – DRAFT for Internal Comment
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Background

On June 13, 2008, President Eileen Wilson-Oyelaran appointed the Kalamazoo College Academic Calendar Task Force, chaired by Provost Mickey McDonald. The charge of the group was to:

- 1) assess the opportunities and challenges posed by our current academic calendar
- 2) consider alternatives
- 3) bring to the campus community for discussion any suggested modifications that might address the issues identified on page 5 of the DIFT report, which included:
 - the difficulties that our current start and stop dates impose on students, particularly athletes and students who wish to engage in internships and research experiences
 - the need to continue to allow as broad a range of students as possible to study abroad, including participation in long-term programs
 - the developmental difficulties inherent in compressing students' exploration and decision-making time regarding majors even further
 - the need for planned (or unplanned) breaks built into every term
 - the impact of the calendar on distinctiveness

The committee met four times through the summer: July 29, August 7, August 26, and September 2. At the first meeting the committee focused on brainstorming challenges and opportunities of our current calendar, and brainstormed without evaluation possible alternatives. These models included various hybrids of the current three quarter model; various hybrids of a semester-based model, including those with a one-month block at either end of a semester, and/or split semesters; a block model; hybrid models that included combinations of blocks, quarters, and/or

semesters. In subsequent meetings we began to discuss various pros and cons of the alternatives, bringing into our deliberations prior conversations of the calendar that took place during the DITF process, paying close attention to the issues raised in the DITF report, and attempting to maintain many of the opportunities gained with our current calendar model while trying to address the challenges. A small subgroup of the committee also consulted with some members of last year's Planning and Budget Committee that had examined the costs associated with moving to various calendar models, particularly models with a one-month block in them as well as the semester models.

Opportunities and Challenges of the Current Model

At our first meeting, we brainstormed opportunities and challenges presented by the current calendar model. We added to this list over the summer as new issues arose. This list is necessarily incomplete, as it represents the thinking of a relatively small group of faculty and administrators. The list is also anecdotal in places. However, we believe the complete list (which can be found in Appendix A) is consistent with many of the concerns that have been raised over the past few years with regards to the current calendar and the factors listed in the DITF report that should guide any calendar change discussion.

The opportunities include issues around the curriculum, teaching load, and intensity of the academic program; study abroad opportunities for all students, including science majors and athletes; long term study abroad opportunities; and the fact that the first few weeks of fall athletics contests do not conflict with class days.

The challenges might be categorized and summarized as follows:

- The use and structure of the calendar year – including the late start, a short on-campus period prior to a long December break, the very long winter/spring period, and the late end which may impinge on student and faculty summer opportunities
- Stress – including the fast pace of the quarter system, the very long winter/spring period, and the potential inability to digest and reflect
- Athletics – including the potential rift caused by having fall athletes on campus alone for 3-4 weeks prior to fall quarter; the additional expenses (~\$50,000-\$70,000) to feed fall athletes prior to fall quarter; and the potential effect of our late start/stop on recruiting athletes
- Admission and Retention – including the impact our late start may have on first years' feeling of "being behind"; missed September admission activity opportunities; the short time first year students are on campus before a very long winter break
- Study Abroad – including students returning from long term fall study abroad with "nothing to do" in winter; the spring crunch; the misalignment of the calendar at a time when much of the rest of the world is moving to semesters

After reviewing and discussing the lists of opportunities and challenges, the committee felt strongly that the current challenges far outweigh the opportunities, and at a minimum we must address the issue of the late start and stop dates of our current calendar.

Recommendation

After careful consideration of a number of calendar options (see Appendix B for the list of options discussed), the committee recommends that we **retain the calendar with three terms, each of approximately 10 weeks, but move the start/stop dates forward by approximately three weeks.** In this way, we will:

- always begin classes after Labor Day (although Orientation will often precede Labor Day)
- finish fall term immediately before Thanksgiving and have the entire week of Thanksgiving as a break between fall and winter terms
- begin winter term and complete three to four weeks of that term prior to the winter holidays (depending on the length of time between Thanksgiving and Christmas)
- complete the remainder of the winter term after the holidays
- take an extended spring break of two weeks and
- hold commencement by June 1

We also recommend calling this calendar a **Trimester** or **Term** calendar and no longer using the terminology of quarters. After mapping out this calendar model over a period of about 10 years, we reiterate that classes will always start after Labor Day and commencement will occur by June 1, leaving the three months of June through August available for student and faculty summer activities such as internships, research, curriculum development, independent travel, and summer classes. We note that in some years (where Labor Day is very early in September) Orientation may begin in very late August. There are also a few issues that occur in particular years that we point out below.

Because the 2009-2010 calendar has already been established, and there are implications of a calendar change on admission, our on-going ERP implementation process, and many other programs across campus, we would recommend that we begin planning now to **implement this new calendar model beginning in Fall 2010.**

This recommendation addresses the concerns related to start/stop dates of the current calendar, but maintains many of the opportunities we currently enjoy, including: a variety of options for study abroad including short, long, and extended term; athletes' participation in study abroad; and the ability for science majors to study abroad in significant numbers without creating significant new concerns about the sequencing of courses. With regards to the latter, we very much want to continue our practice of sending most science students, including pre-medical

students, abroad. The course sequencing issues are a real constraint for these students in particular, and maintaining our three term system with the current sequencing of science and language courses will allow us to continue to send significant numbers of science (and pre-med) students abroad.

While maintaining a three 10-week term system may not resolve some of the challenges related to stress and intensity of the academic and personal experience, we believe we are addressing this to some degree by: reducing the time after the winter holidays from 20 weeks of classes to 17 weeks; providing an extended break between the winter and spring terms; extending the break at Thanksgiving (between fall and winter terms); and adding short mid-term breaks.

Specifically with regards to our study abroad programs, we believe a change to this calendar model will have the following impact and opportunities:

- We could still do all of our programs without significant impact or change, with the possible exception of two long-term (fall/winter) programs in England and our short-term (winter) program in Oaxaca. It is likely that we could work out the details even with these programs.
- A earlier spring term start would actually be more helpful with our short-term (spring) programs because of most host institution calendars.
- The earlier winter term start may eliminate (or shorten) the long lag between the end of long-term (fall/winter) programs for students and their return to campus in spring term. We might also explore alternative options for these students during these (up to seven) weeks after the holidays but before the start of spring term, e.g., formal internship or externship opportunities.

With regards to admission and recruiting, having the month of September in which prospective students can visit the campus, attend classes, and stay overnight, is a very positive opportunity made possible by this calendar change. With regards to athletics, there will be better alignment in terms of the beginning of fall sports and the beginning of the fall term. Although some fall athletes may still have to come to campus a week or two early, athletics will save \$50,000-\$70,000 that can be put toward other program costs.

There are at least three institutions relatively close to us that use this model:

- Augustana College – their academic year begins prior to Labor Day and they finish fall term several weeks prior to Thanksgiving, completing 4.5 weeks of classes (with a two day Thanksgiving break) before a relatively long winter break. They also have a one week break between fall and winter and a two week break between winter and spring.
- Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology – their calendar is nearly identical to what we are proposing except they have a one week break between winter and spring terms and then take an additional week spring break one month into spring term.

- Ohio Northern University – their calendar is also nearly identical to what we are proposing except they have a one week break between winter and spring terms. They are the only one of the three that uses the terminology of “quarter.” The other two use “terms.” [Note that ONU will be switching to the semester system in 2011.]

We include six years (2010-2016) of our proposed calendar on an attached spreadsheet. There are a few particulars due to the ever-changing nature of our calendar that we note below and on the spreadsheet. These may require further community dialog and input. But this chart gives a general sense of start and stop dates, timing of mid-term breaks, and length of breaks between terms.

There are a few new issues that arise from this change. However, we believe that these can be addressed, and the challenges associated with maintaining the current calendar system are far greater. Among the issues we need to address are:

- Teaching and learning in the winter quarter – while some argue that there may actually be some potential pedagogical gains by providing students an opportunity in the middle of a quarter for extended reflection, we know that there may be some faculty who are concerned about developing a 10-week course with a significant break part way through the term. We would urge the Committee on Teaching and the Provost’s Office to provide faculty workshops and other development opportunities during the summer prior to implementation of the calendar for those faculty who would like to take advantage of these opportunities.
- The one-week break between fall and winter terms – this replicates the current break between winter and spring terms, and this week also includes a major holiday, Thanksgiving. We understand the challenge this may pose to faculty for completing grading for fall (although grades would normally be due Tuesday noon) and preparing for winter term. One major difference from the current winter/spring model is that there are only three to four weeks of the following term before another major break. We also do not feel it would be good to extend the Thanksgiving break in general if it means starting classes prior to Labor Day, completing fewer than three weeks of winter term before the winter break, or holding commencement past June 1. Another issue to consider in this break is the work Academic Standards Committee (and then other administrative units) must do for students who do not make satisfactory academic progress. This work has to be done AFTER final grades are turned in. Therefore, we recommend that the exam period either remain the same, or be shortened to Monday-Wednesday [model of a 3-day exam period under development], and that final grades be due by Monday 8AM of Thanksgiving week. This should provide the time for ASC and other units to do what is needed prior to Thanksgiving holidays.
- Program adjustments – many programs such as Land-Sea, some of our Study Abroad Programs, and others, may have to make adjustments in terms of dates and possibly in terms of duration. But given a one-and-a-half year

lead-time prior to implementation in Fall 2010, we believe these adjustments should be possible.

- The very short summer during the transition year – we all must be aware that during the year we transition from relatively late start/stop dates to the earlier ones, we will have a truncated summer, with commencement in mid-June, and orientation at the beginning of September. Again, with the knowledge of when this transition will take place, people can plan for this shorter summer break. This shortened summer may have particular impact on facilities management, information services, and others who have to do much of their renovation and upgrade work during the summer and we must attend to planning in these areas.
- Calendar particulars – with the ever-changing nature of the calendar, we must be aware in our planning of a few particulars that may present occasional challenges. These include:
 - When Memorial Day is very early (e.g., 2014 or 2015), in order to maintain this as a holiday for staff and faculty, we would need to shorten the exam period. We believe this is possible if we consider making special accommodations for seniors, and shorten the exam period to Tuesday-Thursday [model of a 3-day exam period under development].
 - Every seven years or so we need to split Week 4 of winter term. This will likely necessitate courses with labs, on both Tuesdays and Thursdays for example, to adjust their planning not to have labs during that week of the term. As long as this condition does not arise more than once a term, we felt that this could be accommodated in order to meet our goal of starting classes after Labor Day and completing the academic year by June 1.
 - Every seven years or so we need to have four weeks of winter prior to the break rather than three. We did not feel this would have a significant effect on course planning or pedagogy.
 - Every few years we will have to return to winter term classes on January 3 or 4. While this is a particular challenge for residence life staff who must open the residence halls a few days in advance, we have done this several times under our current calendar, and we could meet the challenge as long as this wasn't the norm every year.
 - In a majority of years, Orientation will take place prior to Labor Day with classes starting the Tuesday after Labor Day. We must pay attention to how to preserve Labor Day as a holiday for most of our staff and faculty, understanding that students will be on campus and in the residence halls at that time.
 - We acknowledge the issues that are raised by this calendar with respect to Labor Day (the majority of years this will occur between Orientation and the first day of classes) and Memorial Day (most years this will be the Monday after commencement; in the other years it will be the Monday of exam week). The College must address the equity

issues of who might and might not be able to take these days off and how to appropriately adjust their schedules if they do not. However, we did not see another viable resolution available within our goal of keeping the academic calendar within the months of September-May.

We engaged in significant conversations about a move to a semester system model of some sort. However, there were important programmatic issues at Kalamazoo College that make such a move less appealing at this time. In particular, the flexibility for short, long, and extended study abroad programs would not be accommodated as easily in a semester model. As many other colleges have, we would likely need to move to only two options – a semester option or a full-year option. Significant concern was also raised about the sequencing of courses, particularly in the sciences and languages, and the impact this might have in the participation of science majors in study abroad. We were also concerned about the impact that two relatively significant calendar changes (the elimination of the summer quarter in the mid-90s and a move to a semester system in the late 2000s) would have on both internal and external perceptions of our commitment to the K-Plan, which many alumni have tied to a specific calendar system. Finally, there was a fairly strong feeling among the faculty on the committee that they, and many other faculty, would not want to move to teaching three courses at a time, which would be necessary in a move to any semester system model.

In prior faculty conversations about any model with blocks (e.g., the initial DITF 4-12-4-12 model; a “K-mester” consisting of a semester, a quarter, and a block; or any semester model with a required block), while there were some very positive aspects seen, there were many downsides presented as well. These downsides about the blocks in particular included: lack of reflection time; concerns about co-curricular activities such as plays, musical groups, student work, and athletics during the blocks; concerns about lack of classroom space; concerns about student/faculty ratio during a required block; the suitability of blocks for all types of courses; and the difficulty of conducting research or conference attendance during a block. In addition, when studied by Planning and Budget as part of the DITF feasibility assessment, concerns were raised about the faculty size, lack of classrooms, and the funding needed to support a block model. While many of these calendar options were quite interesting, the committee ultimately felt that both in terms of finances and of maintaining the strong opportunities available through our current three-term system, these models simply were not feasible.

Additional Suggestion for Consideration: Optional June Block

Although we are not recommending that our new calendar include a required block component, we recognize that a number of faculty members were excited about the immersive opportunities available in block teaching. In particular, many faculty desired a teaching format that would allow them to take students on trips – domestic or even international – to enhance the class experience. Therefore, we recommend the College explore the possibility of adding some optional 3-week courses that could be offered in June (by our estimates, block courses that were offered solely in June would not interfere with the start dates of any of our current study abroad programs). This recommendation comes with three stipulations. First, this block term must be optional for both faculty and students; as such, faculty would receive additional compensation for teaching classes in this block and students would pay extra tuition for taking such classes. Second, because some of these classes may involve substantial travel away from K's campus, we would need to construct a flexible pricing scale to absorb these travel and room/board costs (a "pay as you go" system). Third, because each class will need to generate the income to support travel and faculty salary, the College will need to determine the minimum number of students that must enroll for a class to "make."

Appendix A: Brainstorming Session

Opportunities of Current Calendar

- Athletes can go on study abroad in spring term
- Fall sports can play all or most of their away games before the quarter starts
- Science students can go on long term study abroad
- All students have the option of a short-term (10 week) study abroad
- Current calendar accommodates many international calendars (South America, Australia, British, etc.)
- Allows for Land-Sea (in the current manifestation of the program)
- Calendar allows students to study away for extended periods, but be back in time for spring quarter
- Students can take nine courses a year; allows for 36 courses in four years; only three courses at a time
- The quarter system feeds/is symbiotic with the intense pace of K, which some see as part of our identity
- When courses are “bad”, they are over soon; you’re not stuck with anything for very long
- In one academic year, may be able to cover more content in three quarter courses
- The momentum is maintained within each course – it moves
- Students may be better able to balance around perceived difficult or problem courses
- Language acquisition may be helped by frequent, intense interactions (may be true of other disciplines/areas as well)
- We’re “still on the K Plan” – as some (alums?) connect the K Plan with the quarter system
- December break is long enough for faculty to start/finish projects
- Allows sequencing of courses, enables students to build developmentally – three courses in sequence in a year
- Enables faculty and students to try things outside their interest areas – taking or developing a 10 week course may allow more for this “experimentation”
- Allows two-course teaching load for faculty
- Uses classroom space efficiently
- Staying with this model accommodates students (and others) who don’t like or want change
- Allows us to keep doing what we’ve been doing
- Calendar is “distinctive” in that relatively few are on this system
- Summer extends “longer”, i.e., into mid-September
- September convocation and June commencement usually have lovely weather

- Students have identified liking the shorter class segments and more opportunities with three quarters

Challenges of Current Calendar

- Use and structure of calendar year
 - First year students are not here long enough to be acculturated, then they leave and go back home, then they return for the 23 week “marathon”
 - The December break seems “too long”; unused academic time
 - Summer seems “too short”
 - Having exams after Thanksgiving vacation sends a message to students and families that we don’t care about their being inconvenienced (and that we intend to have students from close to K)
 - 10th week (Thanksgiving week) of fall isn’t really a week
 - It’s very hard to find time for faculty development workshops (in December? When?); after school is out is impossible, and it’s hard to bring people back early and it’s hard to find time during the term
 - Because of late end to year, faculty and students are denied opportunities for internships, AP grading, grants, workshops; we’re out of sync with the rest of academe; hurts faculty participation in organizations that it is important for us to have presence; hurts students participation in summer work and experiential opportunities
- Stress issues from the calendar model
 - The break between winter and spring quarter seems so short
 - By midway through spring quarter, real learning seems to have stopped, people are getting “squirrelly and mean”
 - In this model, we have three starts and stops, three sets of end-of-term concerts/shows/programs, three exam weeks, sets of advising days, registration, drop/add periods, opening/closing halls, etc.
 - On quarters, students say “it’s very hard to have a life” (don’t get sick, don’t have a relative get sick, don’t have a relationship go belly up) – you can never recover from missing even a small piece of the quarter
 - Some students have difficulty achieving the third level of language in a rapidly paced quarter system
 - Increased mental health issues from the stress, especially of Winter/Spring “marathon”
 - Makes it difficult to digest material or step back and reflect
 - Faculty have little turn-around time for course work, course prep, especially from winter to spring
 - Pace and intensity of quarter system too much
 - Hard to build developmental writing into 10 weeks
 - Fast pace of language (or other areas/disciplines) may be difficult for some students

- Athletic and Recruitment Issues
 - The fact that athletes come so much earlier contributes to the split between athletes and non-athletes, amply documented by the Student Satisfaction survey; they also have to move housing from temporary to permanent each year
 - Orientation for fall athletes occurs after they have been here for a month, then we say, “welcome to college!”
 - Athletes are in season (in games) when orientation finally begins
 - We are out of sync with our sister athletic schools
 - About \$50-\$70K of athletic budget goes to feeding fall athletes prior to opening of school year
 - If you are a fall athlete, do you really want to come to school on 8/16 and not leave until 6/16? Might affect recruiting? [Note: This also gives fall sport athletes only two months for summer, jobs, etc.]
 - Some schools may use our calendar against us – generally, as well as specifically in athletics
 - Late start gives little/no opportunity for September prospective students to visit and attend classes
 - [Rare...but is happening this fall] A first year student doing a fall inter-institutional course at WMU coming in August and living alone

- Issues arising from misalignment with other institutions
 - Child care issues for faculty/staff w/ children on other models
 - New students (and parents) see friends getting information from colleges, doing summer reading, etc. and feel we’re “a month behind”; also see friends leave for college, then must remain home “alone” another month

- Study abroad related issues
 - Students with “nothing to do” in winter quarter – completed study abroad, but can’t return until spring quarter
 - The spring crunch – many students returning at the same time
 - Europe undergoing semesterization; other partners already built on or moving to semester system

Appendix B: Calendar Options Discussed

Including variants of those listed below

- Keep the current calendar
- Split the winter quarter (1/3 before winter break, 2/3 after; or 1/2 before and 1/2 after)
- Traditional semester system – early start (fall ends before Dec holiday break)
- Traditional semester system – late start (fall exams after Dec holiday break)
- Some version of a 4-12-4-12 system
- Go to 4-4-1 (i.e., semester w/ May term; with the 1 being optional?)
- Go to 4-1-4 (i.e., semester w/ January term; with the 1 being optional?)
- Semester system where each semester has half-semester within
- Full fall and spring quarters; two half winter quarters (one before, one after Dec holiday break)
- Return to full year calendar of four quarters
- A “K-mester” model consisting of semester, block, and quarter (e.g., 16-4-10 or 4-10-16) model
- 1-4-4-1

