

Responses to Calendar Petition Heard by Faculty Senate on February 10, 2021

On February 10, 2021, the Faculty Senate heard a petition, brought by several members of the faculty, requesting that the Faculty Senate obtain the following information:

- 1: Determine when were we notified that we were out of compliance.
- 2: Obtain information on how other universities are addressing #1.
- 3: Seek information if any of these are also attempting to introduce 7-week course delivery at the same time, and discover how they are approaching these dual issues.
- 4: Ask the calendar committee to develop drafts that create 5, rather than 6, 7-week options (i.e. only a single 7-week session option in summer) to provide more weeks available for addressing #1.
- 5: Determine if there are other options for offering the asynchronous time to make up the missing 150 mins. as needed.
- 6: Determine if the additional 120 mins. not accounted for in many lab sessions that cover some disciplines/courses?
- 7: Request a hold on future calendar development until these questions are addressed. In addition, the college LIT teams have not weighed in yet on course modalities.
- 8: Ask the calendar committee to provide a key in future drafts that identify what red and blue signifies.
- 9: Clarify that asynchronous delivery and reading days are required parts of these and/or future calendar drafts.

I have been asked by the Chair of the Faculty Senate to address them as fully as I am able.

Keith Hubbard
Chair of the Calendar Committee

1: Determine when were we notified that we were out of compliance [regarding contact hours per course semester credit hour].

During the early days of the pandemic, an emergency calendar committee was formed to 1) clarify implementation of half-term courses across the university, and 2) ensure compliance regarding contact hours per course semester credit hour. My understanding is that this group met repeatedly with the Chairs Forum and presented new calendar designs along with the rationale for those designs between June and August 2020. A new 2021 calendar was emailed to all department heads by the Registrar's Office in late August, which some chairs forwarded to all their faculty. (It was also posted to the university website.) My understanding is that the chairs were informed of the compliance issue that was being addressed, but that the rationale was not explicitly in the final email with the calendar so many faculty did not understand the rationale. (If a faculty member had asked their unit head, in theory all unit heads knew about the compliance issue.)

The Faculty Senate asked President Gordon about calendar during their October 14, 2020 meeting. Shortly after that conversation, the committee I oversee was asked to review the new calendar and address the Faculty Senate's concerns. I was invited to speak at the Faculty Senate's November 11, 2020 meeting. We explicitly discussed compliance regarding contact hours during that session.

Please see Appendix A, compiled by Dr. Marc Guidry, for a helpful summary of the specific compliance issues under consideration.

2: Obtain information on how other universities are addressing #1.

Multiple members of both the summer Emergency Calendar Committee and of the Calendar Committee examined a variety of institutions. Three institutions of particular interest are discussed here.

Sam Houston State University

<https://www.shsu.edu/dept/registrar/calendars/academic-calendar.html?Sem=Fall&Year=2020&Part=all>

Contains 15-week terms, 7.5-week terms, Friday night terms, Saturday terms

Fall term started August 17, 2020 (one week prior to SFA)

Thanksgiving holiday is Wed-Fri

Final exams run Fri-Wed (<https://www.shsu.edu/dept/registrar/calendars/final-exam-schedules.html>)

Fall term ended Dec 9, 2020 (two days prior to SFA)

Conclusion: 5 days earlier + 2 days on Thanksgiving - 1 days ending earlier = 6 additional days

University of Texas at Tyler

<https://www.uttyler.edu/schedule/files/academic-calendar-20-21.pdf?rand=1>

Contains 15-week terms, 14-week terms, 7-week terms

Fall 15-week term started August 24, 2020 (same as SFA)

Fall 14-week term started August 31, 2020 (one week after SFA)

Thanksgiving is a week-long holiday

Final exams run Tues-Sat (fall) Mon-Fri (spring) (<https://www.uttyler.edu/schedule/files/final-exam-schedule.pdf>)

Fall term ended Dec 11, 2020 (one day (Saturday) after SFA)

MWF meeting times are 55 minutes

Conclusion: same number of meeting days, each class meeting is 5-minutes longer

Texas A&M

<https://registrar.tamu.edu/Catalogs,-Policies-Procedures/Academic-Calendar>

Contains a variety of term lengths across its 11 university sites

Fall term started Wednesday, August 19, 2020 (three days prior to SFA)

Fall 14-week term started August 31, 2020 (one week after SFA)

Thanksgiving: Wed reading day, Thur-Fri holiday, reading day Monday afterward

Final exams run Tues, Dec 1 – Wed, Dec 9 ([https://registrar.tamu.edu/Courses,-Registration,-Scheduling/Final-Examination-Schedules#6-December1\(Tuesday\)](https://registrar.tamu.edu/Courses,-Registration,-Scheduling/Final-Examination-Schedules#6-December1(Tuesday)))

Classes end at Thanksgiving, term ends Dec 9 (two days before SFA)

MWF meeting times are 50 minutes

Conclusion: reading days are essentially asynchronous minutes and count as instructional time

3 days earlier + 2 days at Thanksgiving + 2 reading days – 5 days ending earlier = 2 additional days

This only appears compliant with Federal Regulation 34 CFR § 600.2 if final exam minutes are counted as instruction. SFA currently does not count final exam minutes but does count other exams as instructional minutes (which appears to align with Texas Administrative Code Rule 4.6).

3: Seek information if any of these are also attempting to introduce 7-week course delivery at the same time, and discover how they are approaching these dual issues.

SFA's 7-week structure was modeled after UT Tyler's (thanks to a suggestion via Chairs Forum communication). Their approach appears to be designing entire programs as exclusively 7-week in nature. This design also aligned with Recommendation 2 of Hanover Research's study into alternative undergraduate course schedules. See Appendix B.

4: Ask the calendar committee to develop drafts that create 5, rather than 6, 7-week options (i.e. only a single 7-week session option in summer) to provide more weeks available for addressing #1.

After substantial input, particularly from Chairs Forum, Calendar Committee will be performing a review of Summer 2021 outcomes related to term format. After considering quantitative outcomes along with student, faculty, and chair input on Summer 2021, alternative formats may be considered.

5: Determine if there are other options for offering the asynchronous time to make up the missing 150 mins. as needed.

There are certainly other options. Calendar Committee considered 8 preliminary options, which were shared with the chairs of Faculty Senate and Chairs Forum. After asynchronous instruction is implemented throughout Fall 2021 and Spring 2022, I expect it will be reviewed and likely refined.

6: Determine if the additional 120 mins. not accounted for in many lab sessions that cover some disciplines/courses?

Lab sessions vary tremendously in frequency and duration. In fact, many courses differ from the formats laid out in SFA policy on standard meeting times. Most differing course formats are initiated by unit heads. However, if a faculty member wishes to propose teaching in a format not listed in policy, I recommend that faculty member approach with unit head should seek the approval chair and/ or dean. Remember that the policies outlined in Appendix A, do not prescribe a format but generally point to the need for 750 instructional minutes per credit hour in addition to a final exam.

7: Request a hold on future calendar development until these questions are addressed. In addition, the college LIT teams have not weighed in yet on course modalities.

The 2021-2022 academic year calendar has been approved by the Deans Council, the provost, the associate provost, and the president (contingent on the Board of Regents approving a holiday calendar similar to last year). No calendar development or changes are planned this academic year. The Calendar Committee has around 20 members, including representatives from every college, the Faculty Senate, Chairs Forum, Financial Aid, the Registrar's Office, Residential Life, Orientations, the Business Office, Institutional Research, the Office of Graduate Studies, and Academic Affairs. The committee also directly solicits input from Student Government Organization, Faculty Senate, and Chairs Forum. I recommend weighing in through any of these stakeholders, though I am also willing to receive input directly as well. Certainly not everyone is going to be completely happy with calendar decisions and, in a community as large as ours, some may not feel completely heard. But both the administration and the committee itself has made a genuine effort to hear stakeholders as well as to be open to ideas and concerns regarding the calendar.

8: Ask the calendar committee to provide a key in future drafts that identify what red and blue signifies.

Good idea. The early versions of the current calendar contained a key, but subsequent summaries were missing the key. See Appendix C for a sample of the key that was used.

9: Clarify that asynchronous delivery and reading days are required parts of these and/or future calendar drafts.

Yes, asynchronous instructional minutes are required parts of all standard meeting patterns beginning in Summer 2021.

Appendix A:
Compliance issues regarding contact hours per semester credit hour

SFA policy 5.4, Credit and Contact Hours (<http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/credit-and-contact-hours-5.4.pdf>) applies to courses delivered at any level, in any modality, and of any length of term/part of term. It is based on the following rules:

I. Federal Regulation 34 CFR § 600.2 (<https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/34/600.2>), which defines the credit hour for the purpose of determining federal financial aid disbursements:

Credit hour: Except as provided in [34 CFR 668.8\(k\)](#) and (l), a credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates not less than -

(1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or

(2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

Note that 34 CFR § 668.8 l defines a typical 3-credit hour course as including “at least 37.5 clock hours of instruction” (<https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/34/668.8>), which amounts to **2250 minutes**.

II. SACSCOC policy on Credit Hours (<https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/Credit-Hours.pdf>):

For purposes of the application of this policy and in accord with federal regulations, a credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates

1. Not less than one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time, or

2. At least an equivalent amount of work as required outlined in item 1 above for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

III. Texas Administrative Code, Rule 4.6, The Minimum Length of Courses and Limitation on the Amount of Credit that a Student May Earn in a Given Time Period

[https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&rl=6](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&rl=6)):

- (a) *Traditionally-delivered three-semester-credit-hour courses should contain 15 weeks of instruction (45 contact hours) plus a week for final examinations so that such a course contains 45* to 48 contact hours depending on whether there is a final exam . . .*
- (d) *Courses delivered in shortened semesters are expected to have the same number of contact hours and the same requirement for out-of-class learning as courses taught in a normal semester.*

*Note that 45 contact hours is considered equivalent to 37.5 clock hours (2250 minutes), that is, 45 fifty-minute class sessions.

Appendix B: Hanover Research Finding for SFA Alternative Undergraduate Course Schedules



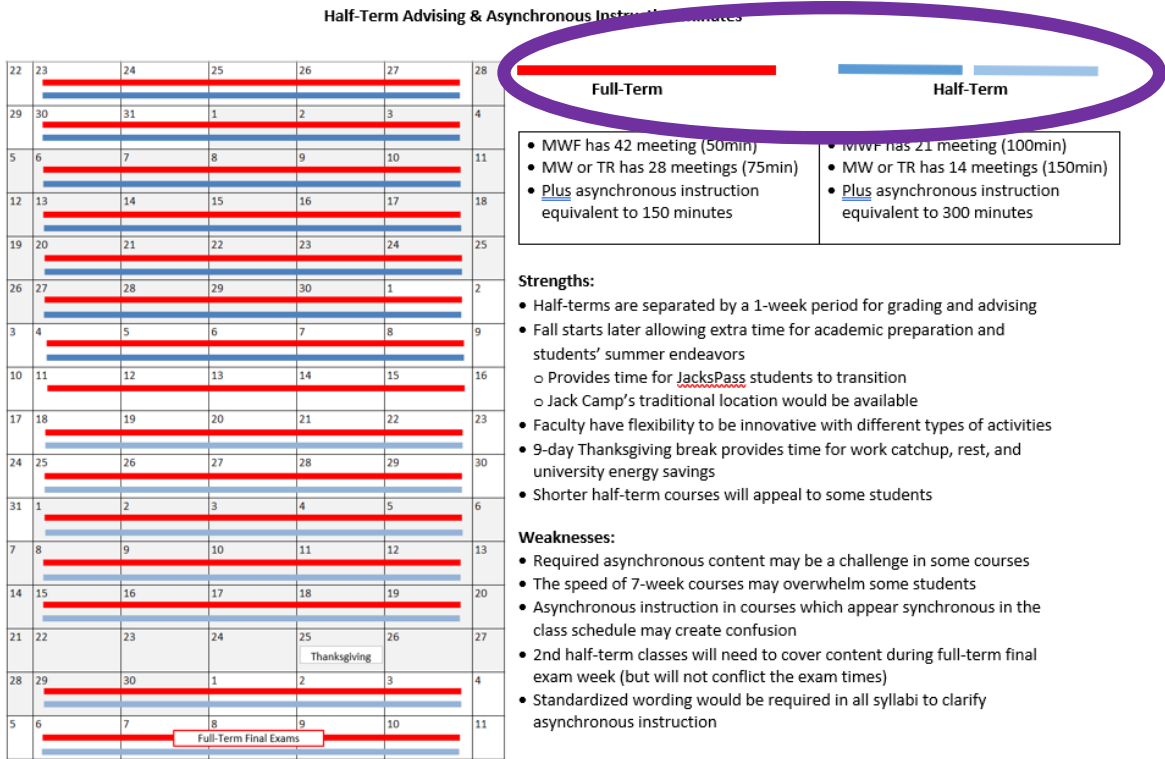
RECOMMENDATIONS

Stephen F. Austin State University should:



- 1** Start with a pilot semester that implements mini-terms within a few volunteer departments or programs. Stakeholders, including faculty and staff, may be skeptical of the mini-term format. A pilot among volunteers would help SFA explore the option without forcing it onto reluctant faculty.
- 2** Design the mini-terms as two seven or eight-week sessions, with an interseasonal period, inside of a traditional 16-week semester. This is the most common mini-term length found among participant institutions. Participants whose institutions include a break of a few days, or even a week, between mini-terms within the same semester report that those periods are highly appreciated among students, faculty, and staff. One participant whose institution does not include interseasonal periods stated that their absence contributes to burn out among students.
- 3** Provide faculty with professional development resources that will help them reconfigure their curricula and pedagogy for shorter terms. Several participants note that such resources were crucial to the implementation of their mini-terms – or that the lack of such resources led to frustration and missed opportunities.

Appendix C: Original Fall 2021 Option (which was eventually adopted) Example of red and blue line key



*instructional method listed in Banner will NOT change