

Rutgers University Senate  
Committee on Instruction, Curricula, and Advising

**Report on S-0602: Intersession**

**S-0602: Intersession:** *Examine how other institutions offering intersession programs have dealt with the time constraint issue, and offer recommendations on how Rutgers may adapt its programs so as to best meet student needs while maintaining acceptable pedagogical standards.*

**Rutgers Intersession Programs**

**Summer Session**

As is the case with most universities that have a semester-based schedule, Rutgers has had a long-standing Summer Session program on each of its regional campuses. While schedules have varied somewhat over the years, currently New Brunswick offers three sessions between late May and mid-August; most classes meet Mondays thru Thursdays for either five and a half or six weeks. Newark offers two five and a half week sessions with most classes meeting Mondays thru Thursdays, as well as a twelve-week session with classes meeting once or twice a week. Camden offers three four-week and two six-week sessions during this period.

Issues:

One area of concern regarding Summer Session is the offering of lab courses during four-week sessions. A class with a lab already means that a student has less study time available than a student taking a non-lab course during the summer. However, even missing a single lab during this time period would seriously impact a student's ability to keep up with the course; with little opportunity in the time frame<sup>1</sup> for making up missed assignments, being ill for 2 or 3 days could, and does, result in students having to withdraw or fail the course.

In looking at other institutions, most seem to offer lab courses primarily in their more extended sessions. For example,

SUNY-Stony Brook: 6 week sessions  
University of Arizona: 5 week sessions  
University of Maryland: 6 week sessions  
University of Virginia: 4 ½ week sessions

All Rutgers campuses already have summer sessions that extend beyond four weeks; it would seem in the best interest of students to whenever possible offer lab courses only during those extended sessions.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, students taking a General Biology class that meets Mondays thru Thursdays from 11:30 to 2:10, would be registered for either an 8-11 am or a 2:30 to 5:30 pm lab on those days.

## Winter Session

Unlike the case with Summer Session, offering a separate instructional session between Fall and Spring semesters is a fairly recent phenomenon. Rutgers-Camden offered a Winterim session for the first time in the Winter of 1998/1999; Rutgers-New Brunswick followed suit the next year. While they had been offering a few courses during the Winter break for a number of years, Rutgers-Newark did not have a full-fledged Winter Session program until 2003/2004.

Whereas the break between the Spring and Fall semesters is of sufficient length to accommodate courses of five, six, and even twelve weeks, the much shorter break between the Fall and Spring semesters results in sessions that are more likely to be counted in days than in weeks. In the winter of 2007/08, New Brunswick offered a 15-day session while Newark and Camden both offered 11-day winter sessions.

	Winter Session	No Class	Schedule	Total Days
Camden	Dec. 21-Jan.17	Dec.22-Jan.1	Mon.-Thurs.	11
New Brunswick	Dec. 26-Jan.18	Dec.31; Jan.1; Jan.17	Mon.-Fri.	15
Newark	Jan. 2-Jan.17		Mon.-Thurs + Jan.4	11

## Issues/Previous Recommendations

The challenge of offering pedagogically sound courses within this highly constricted framework has been an area of discussion and concern since the initiation of these programs at Rutgers. The Rutgers University Senate Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee has issued two previous reports which focused on intersession—specifically Winter Session—programs. The initial report <<http://senate.rutgers.edu/winterim.html>>, which was prepared under the aegis of ICA's predecessor, the Educational Policy and Planning Committee and approved by the Senate in October 2000, offered recommendations on issues arising from offering what were in most cases 3-credit courses within a very compressed time frame. The primary recommendations were:

- Winter Session courses should be primarily one- to two-credit courses. Three-credit courses should be the exception, not the rule.
- No student should be allowed to register for a total of more than three credits during a single Winter Session.
- All courses, including three-credit courses that are currently on the books, must go through the normal curriculum-review process (i.e., review by departmental and college curriculum-review committees) prior to being offered during the Winter Session.
- Curriculum committees should conduct their reviews within the framework of a consistent set of considerations developed for Winter Session courses.

In 2004 the Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee reviewed the implementation of the October 2000 recommendations of the Senate regarding Winter Session and offered some additional recommendations, including:

- That the faculties at other units offering, or considering offering, courses during winter sessions look at implementing standards and procedures similar to those adopted by the New Brunswick Faculty of Arts and Sciences  
<[http://sas.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_download&gid=14&Itemid=159](http://sas.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=14&Itemid=159)>
- That the deans of units participating in winter sessions strongly encourage and support their faculties in the development of innovative courses of less than three credits as well as field of study-abroad courses.
- That faculty not be permitted to teach more than one three-credit course during a winter session.

While the viability of effectively teaching three-credit courses in an extremely abbreviated time frame was and continues to be an area of concern, it was already evident in 2004 that three-credit courses had become, and would continue to be, the norm for Winter Session courses not just at Rutgers but also at most other institutions offering similar programs. Most of the other Senate recommendations were indeed implemented for the New Brunswick Winter Session program; in Newark and Camden there remains no requirement for Winter Session courses to go through the normal curriculum-review process and be approved as a specifically Winter Session course.

### **Current Review**

Bowing to reality, the present report moves away from concerns of “Should it be done?” and from looking for restrictions on the process, to focusing on the time frame in which it’s being done.

Therefore the Committee

- Looked at Rutgers’ intersession program schedules as well as schedules at other institutions--especially those at our sister AAU public universities.
- We also considered those schedules in light of any regulatory restrictions to which Rutgers might be subject.
- And finally we also discussed what more could be done to ensure that our intersession programs could indeed “best meet student needs while maintaining acceptable pedagogical standards.”

### **Regulatory Requirements**

As adopted by the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education and specified in the *New Jersey Administrative Code*, “Distance Learning and Other Modes of Educational Delivery, § 9A:1-2.1 General program standards:”

- (c) A semester credit hour shall not be counted on an hour-for-hour basis for library, independent-study, laboratory, or physical education activities. No more than one semester

credit hour shall be granted for an experience compressed into one week's time or less unless prior approval is obtained from the Presidents' Council. A semester credit hour is not required to be counted on an hour for hour basis for distance learning or blended (or hybrid) learning.<sup>2</sup>

Since even the most compressed of Rutgers' intersession programs spans two and a half weeks, there would seem to be no problem meeting the "No more than one semester credit hour shall be granted for an experience compressed into one week's time or less..." as long as course credits do not *exceed* three credits. There may however, be issues with offering four (or more) credit courses, or offering a three credit course in a one-week session—both of which have occurred in the past.

Furthermore, as specified in University Policy 10.2.4 UNITS OF CREDIT :

B. The number of credits granted a student for any course in Rutgers University shall be determined by the college, school, or Faculty authorizing the course. The credit value of a course shall be assigned on the basis of the estimated amount of time a median student can be expected to devote to the course, at the rate of three hours a week per credit, including time in class, in laboratory, in conference with the teacher, or in reading, writing and preparing for class.

As we stated in our 2004 report, "As a Winter Session class day is basically equivalent to one week during the regular semester, a student taking a three-credit course would be expected to devote 9 hours a day on that course. A student taking a four-credit course would be expected to spend 12 hours a day on that course. As a sustained effort that would seem both counterproductive and unlikely!"

### **Winter Sessions Elsewhere**

There are institutions which have made Winter Session an integral part of their academic calendar. For example, the University of Delaware has a 5-week Winter session that in 2008 ran from January 3 to February 8; while Middlebury has a January term that lasts for the entire month. While there may be significant educational benefits to these

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<sup>2</sup> According to N.J.A.C 9A:1.2 ("Definitions"):

"Educational delivery mode" means a formal educational process involving one of the following options:

1. "Distance learning," in which instruction occurs when the learner and the instructor are not physically located in the same place at the same time;
2. "Blended (or hybrid) learning," in which a part of the instruction occurs when the learner and the instructor are physically located in the same place at the same time, but a part of the instruction occurs by distance learning; and
3. "Traditional face-to-face learning," in which all of the instruction takes place in the classroom or in out-of-class instruction under the direct supervision of the instructor.

...

"Semester credit hour" means 50 minutes of face-to-face class activity each week for 15 weeks (or the equivalent attained by scheduling more minutes of face-to-face class activity per week for fewer weeks in the semester) in one semester complemented by at least 100 minutes each week of laboratory or outside assignments (or the equivalent thereof for semesters of different length).

extended programs, these would require a complete reworking of the Rutgers calendar. It is unlikely that it could be done without a schedule in which the Fall semester would begin well before Labor Day and the extension of the Spring semester—which would be a significant change in conditions of employment and would require labor negotiations.

Rutgers is one of six AAU Public Universities offering a Winter session. In terms of total number of instruction days, Rutgers-New Brunswick with 15 class days is at the high end of the scale, while Rutgers-Camden and Rutgers-Newark, with 11 class days have among the most abbreviated schedules. While the University of Maryland does offer some courses which have 11 class sessions, and SUNY-Stony Brook's session consists of 12 class days, in both cases those class sessions extend over a longer period of time than Rutgers-Newark and Rutgers-Camden. (See Appendix A). Even if actual class sessions remained limited to 12 days, expanding the overall duration of the winter session to allow for more non-consecutive class days would give students more time to actually study and absorb the material.

### **Maintaining Pedagogical Standards**

No matter when they may be offered, courses reflect departmental standards and expectations. Departments need to take seriously their responsibilities in terms of oversight for both content and scheduling.

#### ***Content and Expectations***

Anecdotally, there is a sense that what is being taught in many of the compressed sessions is actually a subset of what would be taught in a 'regular' semester. Departments need to take seriously the responsibility to ensure that there are some basic content expectations for a course offered in that department. Whatever the scheduling format, courses should meet a minimum set of standards. When 'regular' courses are offered during summer or winter sessions, the content and expectations should be the same as during a fall or spring semester.

Departments also need to develop procedures to better monitor actual class schedules. While instances of classes regularly being let out early are certainly not limited to intersessions, this does tend to occur more significantly as class periods get longer. This can result in significantly fewer contact hours than the course listing indicates. And perhaps significantly fewer contact hours than the content demands.

Courses should also be structured so as to give students sufficient time to do the work.

### **Outcomes Assessment**

Some literature does exist on learning outcomes in relation to intensive teaching formats.<sup>3</sup> It is, however, far from conclusive and there exist concerns about biases and

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<sup>3</sup> Davies, W. Martin. "Intensive Teaching Formats: A Review," *Issues in Educational Research* 16, 2006. <<http://www.iier.org.au/iier16/davies.html>>; Gaubatz, Noreen. "Course Scheduling Formats and Their

inconsistencies in assessing outcomes. Assessment of effectiveness tends to primarily be based on grades and student feedback. While grades are a normal benchmark for judging performance, they are in part based on expectations and can easily be impugned. There is also a question about the relative effectiveness of compressed courses for long-term retention—since any data collected would normally be taken immediately after the course ends there is a question as to how accurately it reflects long-term retention. However as Rutgers continues to work toward developing a “pervasive culture of assessment”<sup>4</sup> it is important that intersession courses too be considered both in terms of their value as departmental offerings and specifically as intersession courses. The same kinds of outcomes assessment should be done for both regular semester and winter session classes. While assessment does not necessarily always have to be done on a course by course basis, where student outcome measures for specific courses can be defined by departments it would be valuable to compare those outcomes for 15-week courses versus 15 or 11-day courses.

Obviously, time frame is not the only variable between sections of the same course. Nor is there the expectation that every department would assess and compare outcomes of every course being taught within different time frames every year. However it would be valuable for departments to undertake periodic focused studies of the outcomes of some of these courses. The information gathered could provide valuable insights not just for the specific courses studied, but also for other courses being offered or considered. Such studies might also serve to dispel some myths!

## **Best Practices**

Teaching within an intensive time-frame requires some adjustment in terms of pedagogical approach—realistically you can’t always duplicate exactly what you would do over a 15-week period semester. Schools should identify courses which can serve as “best practices” models for faculty looking to offer intersession courses.

## **Recommendations**

1. Rutgers-Newark and Rutgers-Camden should look at ways to either expand their winter sessions beyond the current 11-day session, or ways to spread those class days over a longer period.

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Impact on Student Learning,” *National Teaching & Learning Forum* 12(1), 2003.

<<http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/suppmat/1201course.htm>>;

University of Melbourne. Faculty of Economics & Commerce. *Intensive Teaching Formats: Report of the Working Group*. 2005.

<[http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/papers/academic\\_resources/Final\\_Report\\_of\\_WP.pdf](http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/papers/academic_resources/Final_Report_of_WP.pdf)>; Daniel, Eileen L. “A Review of Time-Shortened Courses Across Disciplines,” *College Student Journal* 34 (2), 2000, 298-308.

<sup>4</sup> As laid out in *Educational Change at Rutgers: An Institutional Self-Study* (2008): Section VI: Assessment of Student Learning: Standard 14 <<http://middlestates.rutgers.edu/pdf/sectionVI.pdf>>, prepared for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education 2008 decennial reaccreditation review.

2. Lab courses should generally only be offered during summer sessions spanning more than four weeks.
3. In light of the provisions of *New Jersey Administrative Code 9A:1-2.1 (c)*, and *University Policy 10.2.4*, courses offering more than three credits generally should not be offered during Winter Session.
4. Departments need provide oversight to ensure that when “regular” courses (that is, courses that have not separately been approved as Winter Session courses) are offered during summer or winter sessions, the content and expectations are the same as during a fall or spring semester.
5. The same kinds of outcomes assessment should be done for both regular semester and intersession classes.
6. Departments should periodically collect and compare student outcome measures for specific courses being offered both during regular semesters and during intersessions.
7. Schools should identify courses which can serve as pedagogical “best practices” models for faculty looking to offer intersession courses.

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