

Curriculum Committee Resolution 23/24-18

Date: May 1, 2024

To: St. Olaf Faculty

From: Curriculum Committee

RE: Changes to Academic Calendar Planning Guidelines and Revised Academic Calendars for 2026-27 and 2027-28

At the May 9, 2024 Faculty Meeting, the Curriculum Committee will move that the faculty approve the following Academic Calendar Planning Guidelines and Calendars for 2026-27 and 2027-28 academic years. The new guidelines would go into effect beginning in the 2026-27 academic year.

[2026-2027 Calendar with New Guidelines](#)

[2027-2028 Calendar with New Guidelines](#)

4 Days of Finals

- Proposed text: Final exams are scheduled over four days, not including Sunday.

Fall Break

- Original text: Breaks in fall semester (fall break + Thanksgiving break) to total at least five weekdays; occurs in mid-October; preferably not at the same time as MEA break; includes at least two consecutive weekdays; Thanksgiving break includes at least Thursday (Thanksgiving) and Friday
- Revised text: Fall Break and Thanksgiving Break will total at least five weekdays. Thanksgiving break includes at least Thursday (Thanksgiving) and Friday. Fall break should not overlap with MEA (Minnesota Education Association) break. Fall break must occur within a single week unless it begins on Friday.

Spring Break

- Original text: Breaks in spring semester to total at least six weekdays; include Monday through Friday; if the Easter holiday is not part of spring break, then it will be observed on campus without additional break days.
- Proposed text: Spring break will usually occur during the third week of March and will include at least five weekdays. If the Easter holiday is not part of spring break, then it will be observed on campus without additional break days.

Earlier Start and Finish to the Fall Semester

- Proposed text: Fall semester begins during the week prior to the Labor Day holiday.

Rationale

4 Days of Finals

The Registrar has determined that there are enough slots over four days to accommodate all final exams in four days without adding any additional evening slots. All exams would be scheduled between 8 am and 4 pm except for evening classes, which would continue to hold their final exam in the evenings.

Fall Break

With this adjustment, science labs will have at most one fewer week available for lab contact time. In addition, per Chris George, Admissions data shows that students who visit campus and are admitted to St. Olaf are approximately 2.5 times more likely to deposit than a student who hasn't visited campus. Fall Visit Days in October are the largest two visit programs we host during the year. This past year we welcomed more than 450 students to campus over those two days. Our largest competitors, including UW-Madison and U of M host events during MEA, as do Gustavus, St. Thomas, and Carleton.

Spring Break

Usually keeping Spring Break on the third week of March allows athletics to make long term plans and to avoid conflicts with other institutions.

Earlier Start and Finish to the Fall Semester

- Starting before Labor Day allows new student Fall athletes to attend New Student Orientation. Athletes would not need to arrive any earlier than they currently do.
- Avoiding the holiday weekend would also mean we launch the year when the campus is fully open.
- More staff and faculty would be able to take the holiday off.
- Avoiding Labor Day travel for students and families may save money and hassle.
- Ending the Fall semester earlier to allow for a longer Winter Break and reduce travel expenses, especially for international students.
- The longer break would also benefit faculty teaching January term, especially abroad.

Financial Implications

- The Committee consulted impacted areas with financial implications that would result from these proposed changes.
- There were no significant concerns from Athletics, Events/Camps & Conferences, PLT, or Student Life regarding the beginning of Fall semester.
- Payroll was not concerned about shifting a week off to another time of year to balance out the FTE for staff (such as AAAs) who do not work over the summer.
- Budget and Auxiliary Operations, Smith Center, and Libraries did express the potential for staffing cost increases (both professional and student staff) by having one more week in the Academic Year. Those who typically do not work or work part-time during the

summer would need to return earlier. However, it could be possible to work out alternative schedules such that these staff work reduced hours during college breaks, which would offset the additional week.

- Budget and Auxiliary Operations also discussed implications for student meal plans with an additional week in Fall semester. However, since costs are lower during break periods, they concluded that these savings would offset most of that additional week.

Unchanged

There are no changes to summer or January term.

The Committee also considered starting Fall term three weeks earlier and ending at Thanksgiving (similar to the schedule implemented for 2020-21 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic), shifting January term to an optional May term, or shortening January term to 3 weeks. Given the significant challenges these changes posed for several departments and offices consulted, the Committee decided not to pursue these proposals.

Goals

In September 2023, the Academic Calendar Review and Revision Committee was [charged](#) with reviewing and recommending changes to St. Olaf's academic calendar. The Committee's charge did *not* include recommending changes to the daily class schedule or the number of credits required for graduation. As part of this process, members of the Committee met with [30 different groups](#) across campus to solicit ideas and feedback on potential changes. Because most changes to the academic calendar require a faculty vote, and because the structure of the academic calendar significantly impacts the work of faculty and many staff, the Committee felt this targeted outreach was necessary to understand the feasibility of potential calendar revisions before seeking broader community input.

Our Committee sought to address the following goals:

- Adding/lengthening breaks between and during terms to provide the campus community with more rest periods, support student mental health, and give faculty and staff more time for grading and preparation between terms.
- Reducing holiday travel days for students and families by shifting the start/end of terms accordingly.

After the first round of outreach, the Committee drafted a proposed calendar that addressed several of the suggestions collected from the 30 groups. This model was then circulated for further feedback, and the Committee made a few additional changes. We presented the proposed calendar for all students, staff, and faculty to share their input in early February 2024.

An additional round of discussions and surveys were completed at the April faculty meeting.

Changes from the original proposals

The Committee considered adding a Quiet Day without classes during advising week, but based on feedback from the faculty did not include it in the resolution.