

To: Faculty Senate

From: Michael Baltzley, Associate Provost for Academic Effectiveness

Date: April 7, 2020

**Re: Building a new academic schedule to support assessment, diversity training, and AES**

Our Strategic Plan calls for “Support[ing] knowledge, experiences and activities that promote a better understanding of diversity-related topics.” The Strategic Plan also calls for “Provid[ing] professional development opportunities for faculty and staff that advance the university mission.” An obstacle to both of these initiatives is creating the time needed for meaningful engagement.

I have encountered a similar challenge with assessment, both as a faculty member and as Associate Provost. Ideally, our assessment work allows us to reflect on current practices and to improve our courses and our curricula for our students. However, one of the continuing challenges of assessment is finding time for faculty to engage in the work together. Departments and divisions have scheduled meeting times during the academic year, but those meetings are filled with many other business items making it difficult to carve out time dedicated to assessment. We have begun scheduling an Assessment Day as part of the Fall Kickoff calendar, but we do not have additional time scheduled during the academic year.

Modifying our academic calendar is a solution that can address our needs for dedicated time for diversity training, professional development, and program assessment. As it currently stands, our current academic calendar is unbalanced. In the 2020-21 academic year, the Fall term will have 47 instructional days, Winter term will have 49, and Spring term will have 48 (including Academic Excellence Showcase day). Because of the differences in when classes are taught during the week (e.g., MWF vs. TR) and the differences in instructional days across terms, there is high variation in how many instructional hours there are per class. For example, in Fall 2020, MTRF 4-credit courses will have 7.9 hours of instruction per credit, while Winter 2021 TR 4-credit courses will have 9.2 hours of instruction per credit—an additional 5-hours of class time over the term.

If we standardize our academic terms so that every term has 47 instructional days, we could:

- 1) give faculty time to focus on assessment
- 2) build time into the calendar to provide professional development opportunities
- 3) dedicate a day every Winter term to cultural competency training
- 4) give students a short break prior to the academic push that occurs at the end of every academic term
- 5) reduce some of the term-to-term variation in the number of instructional hours per course
- 6) promote the value of AES by officially dedicating an academic calendar day to the event

I propose the following schedule for days without classes:

Fall term:

- Assessment Day** (Fall Kickoff): suggested focus on reviewing data from the previous year
- Veterans' Day** (Nov. 11)
- Thanksgiving** (Week 9: Thursday and Friday)

Winter term:

- Martin Luther King, Jr., Day** (3<sup>rd</sup> Monday in January)
- Cultural Competency Day** (Week 9, Thursday)

Potential programming includes:

- professional development workshops suggested by the Diversity and Inclusion PLC in their final report
- workshops, presentations, and trainings suggested by University Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (UDIAC) and University Cultural Competency Advisory Committee (UCCAC)
- events, workshops, presentations, activities for students

- Professional Development and Assessment Day** (Week 9, Friday)

Potential programming includes:

- department/program assessment meetings in the morning, with a suggested focus on curricular changes based on previously collected data
- professional development opportunities throughout the day for staff and in the afternoon for faculty

Spring term:

- Memorial Day** (Last Monday in May)
- Academic Excellence Showcase** (Week 9, Thursday)
- Professional Development and Assessment Day** (Week 9, Friday)

Potential programming includes:

- department/program assessment meetings in the morning, with a suggested focus on planning for the upcoming year
- professional development opportunities throughout the day for staff and in the afternoon for faculty