

## **Principles and Guidelines for Determining Academic Term Dates**

(Formerly called Academic Term Dates Principles)

### **Principles:**

- An appropriate balance must be struck between instruction time, reflection time, break periods and exam scheduling for optimal learning, performance, and well-being.
- Students should have appropriate access and opportunity to receive advising and assistance before the start of an academic term, particularly with the re-opening of the university after the December closure.
- Recognizing and celebrating the diversity of faiths and cultural observances within the university, Dalhousie is committed to selecting dates, to the extent possible, which allow for the fulfillment of both academic and personal commitments.
- Standard practices should be established and applied across Faculties as much as possible; especially where students are likely to take courses from multiple Faculties.
- Levels of stress and anxiety for students vary at different times of the calendar year, and therefore the terms should not necessarily be symmetrical.
- Due to accreditation requirements and other practical issues, some programs will require flexibility and therefore the guidelines will not apply to everyone.
- Other academic policies (Grading Policy, Exam Regulations), and university activities (Convocation, advising, subsequent academic term starts) are related to academic dates, therefore these principles should be adhered to as much as possible, yet a nimble approach is required.

### **Guidelines:**

The following guidelines apply to scheduling the start and end date of classes, week-long breaks, and the formal examination period. These guidelines should be used in conjunction with other applicable policies and procedures (namely the Grading Practices Policy and Convocation Ceremony Planning) to determine the academic term dates for an academic year.

### **Fall & Winter Terms**

1. The term will be 12 weeks of instruction in each of the Fall and Winter terms. Within these limits, where possible, the schedule should balance the days of the week, Monday to Friday, available for in-person and/or online synchronous instruction.

Rationale: This approach ensures all courses have the appropriate amount of instruction, and for those courses with a synchronous component, the same number of teaching days with no loss due to holidays. This will bring greater consistency to the academic schedule.

2. In the fall term, classes begin the Tuesday after Labour Day.

Rationale: To meet the full set of principles, the fall term must begin as early as possible in September. It is best practice for classes to begin after Labour Day to encourage attendance, provide time or orientation programming, and facilitate residence move-in days. Given that the university remains open throughout the summer, students can access advising and support, and therefore an additional day between the holiday and the first day of class is not necessary.

3. In the winter term, classes begin the second Monday of January, except when New Year's Day lands on a Tuesday, in which case classes begin the first Monday of January. If using these principles results in exams extending beyond a viable end date for grade submission and academic standing assessment, the start of the winter term can be other than a Monday, but the university must be open for a minimum of two business days before the first day of class.

Rationale: It is best practice for the winter term to begin on a day after there has been an adequate period for academic advising (particularly since academic standing for the fall term occurs in early January); this encourages attendance, provides opportunities for orientation program, and facilitates the re-opening of residence. If a day other than the second Monday of January is required, these factors will be taken into consideration when determining the first day of class.

4. Normally there will be at least one calendar day between the end of classes and the beginning of the examination period. Where necessary, as determined by the Chair of Senate and the Registrar on behalf of Senate, and in consultation with the Officers of Senate, any day(s) between the end of classes and the beginning of exams may be used in lieu of lost days during the term.

Rationale: This will ensure there is a break in advance of the formal exam period.

5. A formal exam period, normally between 10 and 15 days, will be scheduled at the end of the academic term. Exams will be scheduled full days Monday through Friday and Saturday and Sunday from 12 noon onwards, except on certain religious and cultural holidays, when no exams will be scheduled. If the resulting exam period extends beyond a viable date for the submission of grades and academic standing assessment, exams can be scheduled on religious holidays, as determined by the Chair of Senate and the Registrar on behalf of Senate, and in consultation with the Officers of Senate.

Rationale: To meet the exam regulations and produce a viable schedule, all days of the week are required. Saturday and Sunday mornings are excluded to provide intentional time for rest and study. Given the many factors related to setting academic dates, the university is unable to avoid scheduling classes and activities on all religious and cultural holidays, but this is more attainable within the exam period. The accommodation policy will still be applicable if exams need to be scheduled on religious and cultural holidays.

6. In the fall term, a one-week break will be scheduled near Remembrance Day. In the winter term, a one-week break will be scheduled near Heritage Day. The Faculties of Dentistry and Medicine will determine the availability, length, and scheduling of study breaks.

Rationale: Study breaks meet a variety of student and instructor needs (completing work and research, preparing for upcoming tests and exams, rest, and renewal) and are important for academic success and well-being. When taking all principles and guidelines into consideration, the optimal week differs between the fall and winter terms. The Faculties of Dentistry and Medicine determine the optimal

timing of breaks due to longer program structures and to ensure alignment with clinic and rotational schedules.

### **Summer Term**

1. The full summer term will be 12 weeks of instruction. Within these limits, where possible, the schedule should balance the days of the week, Monday to Friday, available for in-person and/or online synchronous instruction.

Rationale: This approach ensures all courses have the appropriate amount of instruction, and for those courses with a synchronous component, the same number of teaching days with no loss due to holidays. This will bring greater consistency to the academic schedule.

2. In the full summer term, classes begin on the first Monday in May.

Rationale: To meet the full set of principles, the full summer term must begin as early as possible in May.

3. Normally there will be at least one calendar day between the end of classes in the full summer term and the beginning of the examination period. Where necessary, as determined by the Chair of Senate and the Registrar on behalf of Senate, and in consultation with the Officers of Senate, any day(s) between the end of classes and the beginning of exams may be used in lieu of lost days during the term.

Rationale: This will ensure there is a study break in advance of the formal exam period.

4. A formal exam period, normally between 5 and 10 days, will be scheduled at the end of the full summer term. Exams will be scheduled full days Monday through Friday and Saturday and Sunday after 12 noon, except on certain religious and cultural holidays, when no exams will be scheduled. If the resulting exam period extends beyond a viable date for the submission of grades and academic standing assessment, exams can be scheduled on religious holidays, as determined by the Chair of Senate and the Registrar on behalf of Senate, and in consultation with the Officers of Senate.

Rationale: To meet the exam regulations and produce a viable schedule, all days of the week are required. Saturday and Sunday mornings are excluded to provide intentional time for rest and study. Given the many factors related to setting academic dates, the university is unable to avoid scheduling classes and activities on all religious holidays, but this is more attainable within the exam period. The accommodation policy will still be applicable if exams need to be scheduled on religious holidays.

5. In the full summer term, a one-week break will be scheduled in mid-June.

Rationale: A break meets a variety of student and instructor needs (completing work and research, preparing for upcoming tests and exams or rest and renewal) and is meant to support overall success and well-being.

6. Within the summer term, there will be two half terms (A and B) of approximately seven weeks long each, including instruction, examinations, and statutory holidays. Within each half term, three-week courses may be scheduled.

Rationale: To increase the ability for students to complete program requirements, the summer term includes two half terms with concentrated course offerings as determined by individual Faculties. The condensed format and variable start and end dates for these parts of term does not allow for separate exam periods.

7. The start date takes into consideration the end of examinations in the winter term and the provision of a break before the start of the summer half terms. There will be a break between the end of the first half term and the beginning of the second half term.

Rationale: This will ensure there is time between academic terms and parts of term for students to seek advising and provide an opportunity for rest and renewal.

8. The second half term normally begins the day after Canada Day unless Canada Day is celebrated later in the week than Wednesday.

Rationale: It is best practice for classes to begin on a day that encourages attendance.