Challenges to the Academic Mission of The Ohio State University
Posed by a Catastrophic Event
Report by the Teaching, Learning, Grades and Calendar Committee
To the President’s Cabinet
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Update on January xx, 2012 to reflect Quarter to Semester transition

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I. Introduction

The President’s Cabinet has been briefed on the plans of the OSU Medical Center (OSUMC) and the Department of Public Safety to prepare for pandemic influenza. In response President Holbrook has charged each Vice-Presidential unit to produce their own office specific plans to deal with a potential pandemic and to send these plans to Dr. Hagop Mekhjian (OSUMC), Mr. Bob Armstrong and Dr. Matthew Platz (Office of Academic Affairs). Dr. Platz was further charged with assembling and convening faculty, staff and student committees to develop plans to anticipate and mitigate the impact of a pandemic on the academic mission of the University and its faculty and students. Two such committees have been assembled; Committee 1 the “Teaching, Learning, Grades and Calendar Committee” and Committee 2 the “Student Life and Professional Development Committee”. This document is the report of Teaching, Learning and Calendar Committee. A companion report of the Student Life and Professional Development Committee will be distributed separately. In some cases the reports will overlap but they are in all cases consistent.

Although this report was motivated by the possibility of an Avian Influenza Pandemic in during the 2006-2007 academic year we have strived to make our recommendations generally applicable to any event which closes campus and forces the suspension of classes. In our planning we have assumed that classes would be suspended for four weeks as the “Spanish Flu” forced the closure of campus from October 11-November 12, 1918. However, if an entire autumn, spring semester is lost due to a disaster which spans 2-3 months the committee recommends that the impacted semester be declared the “quarter off duty” for faculty on nine month appointments and that a full range of courses be offered during the next summer term. The committee notes that some universities closed for extended periods by Hurricane Katrina adopted this model.

The committee recommendations were originally specific to the quarter system which is in place for most of the campus. With the transition to the semester system in 2012, we hope that this report will ensure that the University’s semester calendar system and existing semester calendar system such as the one used by the Moritz College of Law are now aligned.

If this report is accepted by the President’s Cabinet we recommend that it be studied by appropriate Senate Committees (Committee on Enrollments and Student Progress and The Committee on Academic Affairs) and submitted (after review and possible modification) for approval to the University Senate and Board of Trustees.

The committee applied the following principles to a four week suspension of classes:

- Opportunities for teaching and student learning must be maximized
- Academic terms must be completed
- Faculty and students must have maximum flexibility
• Campus should return to its normal calendar as soon as practicable
• We must rely on the good sense and academic values of the OSU faculty in assigning grades

II. Executive Summary

1. An impacted semester/term will be of 11 weeks duration. Final Examinations will be held and papers will be due on the last scheduled day of classes. Assuming that the last day of classes is a Friday then faculty will be expected to turn in letter grades by noon of the following Wednesday.
2. Students will be allowed to drop a class or classes, without penalty, and with a full tuition refund at any point in an impacted semester/term prior to the final examination.
3. Student will be allowed to choose a “pass/ non-pass” option for any class completed during the impacted semester/term for up to 10 days after their letter grades are posted. The standard rules of “pass/non-pass” grades for academic credit and satisfying pre-requisites will be maintained. The Committee recommends that the Registrar’s office explore the option for handling the later-than-normal requests for a PA/NP grade.
4. The committee recommends that during an impacted semester/term that students be released from housing contracts at anytime of their choosing or by order of the State Board of Health and that housing fees be pro-rated to the day with special consideration for individual circumstances.
5. Commencement of an impacted semester/term may need to be cancelled and students graduating at the end of an impacted semester/term will be invited to march in the next commencement.
6. Unless a major holiday intervenes (e.g. Christmas, New Years day, etc.,) the next semester/term will begin the Monday after the Wednesday when course grades for the impacted semester/term are due.
7. The semester/term which follows the impacted semester/term will be of 14 weeks duration with a normal examination week and commencement.
8. Sequenced courses will start where the impacted semester/term finished.
9. Faculty are encouraged to use technology to deliver instruction to students during an impacted semester/term and to voluntarily hold review sessions and extra sessions once classes resume. However, faculty can not assume that students can take advantage of these additional learning opportunities and should not base examinations and grades on distance learning and bonus sessions. The purpose of distance learning and bonus sessions should be solely to deliver the teaching that students will miss as a result of truncated semesters/terms.
10. At the start of autumn quarter 2006 faculty should be alerted to the existence of new distance learning technologies, especially the Carmen system. Additional training sessions should be held to train interested faculty in the use of new technologies that can be used to deliver instruction. The Office of Information
Technology should receive additional resources to enable it to train additional faculty and to accommodate increased usage of this technology.

A month by month change in the calendar is proposed in the Appendix.

III. Maintaining Academic Integrity

The Academic Calendar
To maximize the educational value of a course as much as possible, the Committee believes that 11 weeks of instruction is the minimum time necessary to provide a successful understanding of the subject material in any given course under the semester system.

The Committee recommends that OSU begin or resume any semester/term after an unscheduled break as soon as practical. If a university holiday (New Years Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Columbus Day) intervenes the semester/term should resume or begin the day after the holiday. The committee recommends that a semester/term should not resume or begin between Christmas Day and New Years Day. Courses should resume where they were interrupted.

The committee recommends that final examinations be incorporated into the last scheduled class meeting of the impacted semester/term, eliminating an independent final examinations week. Assuming that the last day of classes will be on a Friday, faculty will be required to post grades by noon on the following Wednesday. Unless a holiday intervenes (e.g., Christmas, New Year’s Day, etc.), the first day of classes of the subsequent semester/term will start the first Monday after grades are posted. Implementing this calendar will mean that the semester/term following a campus closure will be of 14 weeks duration with a normal final examinations week and a commencement. In the case of sequenced classes the class in the semester/term following the impacted semester/term should begin where the previous course actually finished, rather than where it would normally end. It may be necessary to continue this policy for two or three semesters/terms after a truncated semester/term.

It does not seem wise to the Committee to dictate separate policies for different kinds of courses, rather instructors and departments can best make judgments regarding managing, supplementing, and evaluating their courses. In addition, where possible, faculty should offer on-line materials in place of classroom presentations. Practices might vary considerably for courses of the same type, or even sections within the same course. We cannot presume that all faculty can use distance learning technology and that all students will have access to it. Thus, this material cannot be used to determine course grades. It should be used to provide students with the opportunity of learning all of the material normally presented in the course, but that cannot be offered in an 11-week semester/term.

If necessary, the committee recommends eliminating the May session from the Summer term if there is no reasonable way to accommodate a truncated May session. A proposed approximate calendar accommodation schedule based on unscheduled breaks for each month of the year is present in the Appendix.
Pass/Non-Pass Grades
Students will receive letter grades; however, students will have ten days from the time their letter grade is posted to request that their grade be changed to either a pass (PA) or non-pass (NP) grade. We will maintain the existing rule that a grade of D or better is a pass grade. Students receiving a grade of pass will receive credit for the course but if the course is a prerequisite for another course they will not have satisfied that prerequisite and will have to retake the course. The Committee discovered that there are some technical challenges in the student system (MARX) in changing from a graded course to a pass/non-pass after students have enrolled in the course. The technical challenges can be addressed but may require time to make a switch from one status to another. The Committee recommends that the Registrar’s office explore the option for handling the later-than-normal requests for a PA/NP grade.

Dropping of Classes, Make Up Examinations and Incompletes
The Committee recommends that in an impacted semester/term that students have the option to drop a course and receive a full refund anytime prior to administration of the final examination or the last scheduled meeting of the class of the impacted semester/term. We recommend discussion of policies at the department level to establish general practices for incompletes and make-up examinations during an impacted semester/term. We believe that the liberalized drop-date policy and PA/NP option will reduce the need for these discussions.

Housing Contracts
The committee recommends that during an impacted semester/term that students be released from housing contracts at anytime of their choosing or by order of the State Board of Health and that housing fees be pro-rated to the day with special consideration for individual circumstances.

Graduating Seniors
One way to mitigate the impact of illness, personal necessity, or a disrupted calendar for graduating seniors would be to extend the deadline for completing course work, once a semester/term is over while still qualifying for a degree effective to the prior semester/term. Under current policy, college offices must certify a student as having completed all requirements for a degree no later than the second Friday of the subsequent semester/term. (Students certified this late do not, of course, qualify to receive a diploma at the commencement ceremony.) This deadline could, under the exceptional circumstances considered here, be extended further into the semester/term following commencement.

Cancelling and Combining Commencements
It is possible that the timing of a suspended calendar might displace commencement itself, and, in that event, there could be advantages to holding a single commencement ceremony for students completing degrees in either of two semesters/terms. If final examinations are administered during the last scheduled class and if grades are due on the following Wednesday— it may not reasonable to expect college offices to certify graduation in time for a commencement ceremony on the following Sunday. It may, in such an event, be
necessary to cancel that commencement and combine it with a later semester/term’s commencement, depending, in part, on whether we are trying to recapture one or two weeks worth of instructional time. Eliminating an examination week would recover one week; eliminating a week of break would recover another. (The breaks following autumn and spring semester are longer, even when factoring in holidays, than the one week after Summer term, so these decisions would need to be made nimbly, in response to the timing and duration of an interruption.).

Licensing and Accreditation
The University cannot control the expectations of outside accrediting agencies, nor can the guidelines of all agencies be anticipated by this committee, but we recommend that deans contact accrediting agencies in their disciplines to have a plan in place for students who are delayed in completing a specific number of required clinical hours.

Extending Class Periods?
The Committee considered whether to “extend” the class period to accommodate longer class sessions, including longer class periods and/or weekend classes. An extended day would provide maximum instructional exposure without extending the calendar; however, this suggestion was not considered to be a viable option for all students. Thus, faculty who provide bonus classes should not base course grades on material covered in these sections. Rather, these sessions should be used to provide students with the opportunity of learning material that is normally presented in a typical semester but cannot be offered in a 14-week semester.

Separate Policies for Separate Types of Courses?
It does not seem wise to the Committee to dictate separate policies for different kinds of courses, rather instructors and departments can best make judgments regarding managing, supplementing, and evaluating their courses.

Distance Learning, Technology and Carmen
The Committee believes that OSU faculty be encouraged and trained to use technology to deliver instruction to students while campus is closed and classes are suspended. Additional resources should be provided to the Office of Information Technology to train and support increased use of the Carmen System. As not all faculty will be able to use distance learning technologies and not all students will have access (or be healthy enough to avail themselves of it!) faculty should not base course grades on material delivered solely with the aid of distance learning technology. The goal of distance learning during a catastrophe should be to deliver teaching and encourage learning, particularly of the material that may be omitted from class during a truncated semester/term.

The Committee notes that the Carmen system has many features that can be used in the event of a catastrophe, such as delivering quizzes/tests and having students post homework assignments for faculty review/response, etc. Approximately 7,500 courses are offered each semester/term and 1,600 of these are offered through Carmen. Currently, 10 percent of the faculty and 37,000 students are using Carmen. The average ramp-up time to get a
course into Carmen (with any quality) is approximately one month, particularly with a faculty member who has not previously used the technology.

**Expanding Access to Distance Learning**

According to a recent poll, 97 percent of faculty and students have Internet access from their homes; however, 40 percent live in rural areas that lack access to broadband services. Lack of access to broadband services greatly limits the quality of course delivery that involves video and even audio. This situation could perhaps be offset by the University’s providing an option to allow students to call a 1-800 number that would allow access to broadband services; however, this service would involve a cost to either the student or University (or both). Another accommodation option would be to lease or provide modems and other services to students who don’t have them and/or can’t afford them. The University would need to work with vendors to get agreements in place for modems and/or services.

The University's help desk staff estimate that each Carmen course results in 1.5 help desk calls. Thus, an increase in courses delivered through Carmen would perhaps require additional support staff. It is assumed that most students are accessing Carmen from an on-campus site. Off-site access might require additional support staff.

The OSU faculty should be encouraged and trained to utilize other options for course delivery such as using WOSU to broadcast classes or through Ohio Learns or Penn State, both of which have well developed pod cast infrastructure. Current University infrastructure (equipment) is sized to gradually increase the courses offered through Carmen and could support approximately 2,500 courses. The current equipment is not able to handle the rapid additions of students, volume of courses, etc. thus, depending on what direction is decided upon, we might need to purchase and install new equipment. In addition, in the modem bank at the University used for dial-up access, incoming connectivity is limited and needs expansion to serve greater numbers of students.

Since technology is not a panacea, the Committee recommends that distance learning strategies focus on three course areas: those classes required for graduating seniors, those classes in which the volume is large (e.g., 100+ students), and those classes in which many sections are offered (e.g., mathematics, biological sciences, etc.).

In addition, the committee encourages greater use of pod casting; however, the Office of Information technology will need increased funding to expand its capabilities. Carmen has many more features that might be helpful.

**Augmented summer terms?**

Offering a full slate of full-term summer course offerings will only be necessary if an entire semester is lost or if large numbers of students decide to drop courses during an impacted semester. In the former situation we recommend that the “missed” semester be declared the quarter off duty for most if not all nine month faculty and that faculty be expected to teach in the summer in exchange for being paid full salary during a semester in which they have not taught at all in the classroom. In the latter case, deans and chairs are urged to be...
flexible and entrepreneurial in the offering of additional summer courses as the current budget model provides significant financial incentives for doing so.

We note the need to coordinate additional teaching with summer orientation efforts for incoming students and with many “summer institutes” for middle school and high school students that require dormitory and facility space. If classroom technology is not an issue, then there may be some non-traditional spaces that could be utilized, such as suites in Ohio Stadium and in the Schottenstein Arena and also classroom space on West Campus.

Accepting Transfer Credit
A pandemic by definition will be an international event. It is unlikely that OSU will close but that other universities will be unaffected. One can imagine that a localized catastrophe might close OSU while universities outside of central Ohio will remain open. In this eventuality the Committee recommends that OSU follow the Tulane Model. OSU students will be allowed to take equivalent courses at other universities for OSU credit while the receiving universities collect OSU tuition and send such funds to OSU.
Appendix I: Approximate Calendar Accommodation

Unscheduled break month: January

Spring Semester: February/March/April (min. of 11 weeks; last week to include final exams)
Spring Break (one week)*

Summer Term: Normal schedule

Unscheduled break month: February

Spring Semester: January/March/April (min of 11 weeks; last week to include final exams)
Spring Break (one week)*

Summer Term: Normal schedule

Unscheduled break month: March

Spring Semester: January/February/April (min of 11 weeks; last week to include final exams)

Summer Term: Normal schedule

* Spring Break may be canceled depending on circumstances.

Unscheduled break month: April

Spring Quarter: Ends with a minimum of 11 weeks of instruction. Grades will be given based on all available weeks of learning.

May Session: Return to normal schedule
Summer Term: Return to normal schedule

Note: The clear majority of this semester will likely already be completed.

Unscheduled break month: May

May Session: Session may be extended into Summer Term or canceled depending on the duration of the disruption. A minimum of 15 days are required for a completed May Session in the event of a disruption. Break (one week)
Summer Term: Return of normal schedule

Unscheduled break month: June
Summer Term: May/July/Aug (min of 9 weeks, last week to include final exams)
Autumn Semester: Resume normal schedule

Note: Assume the clear majority of Summer Term is completed. A Summer Term includes a 4-week May Session and a 7-week Summer Session.

Unscheduled break month: July
Summer Term: May/June/Aug (min of 9 weeks, last week to include final exams)
Autumn Semester: Resume normal schedule

Note: Assume the clear majority of Summer Term is completed.

Unscheduled break month: August
Summer Term: May/June/July; Ends with a minimum of 9 weeks of instruction. Grades will be given based on all available weeks of learning.

Autumn Semester: Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec (min of 11 weeks; last week to include final exams)

Unscheduled break month: September
Autumn Semester: Aug/Oct/Nov/Dec (min of 11 weeks; last week to include final exams)

Spring Semester: Normal Schedule

Unscheduled break month: October
Autumn Semester: Aug/Sept/Nov/Dec (min of 11 weeks; last week to include final exams)

Spring Semester: Normal Schedule
Unscheduled break month: **November**

Autumn Semester: Aug/Sept/Oct/Dec (min of 11 weeks; last week to include final exams)

Spring Semester: Normal Schedule

Unscheduled break month: **December**

Autumn Semester: Aug/Sept/Oct/Nov (min of 11 weeks; last week to include final exams). Grades will be given based on all available weeks of learning.

Spring Semester: Normal Schedule