
The Report of the 2016-17 Academic Calendar Committee

April 19, 2017

*Draft Version for the Faculty Senate, the Employee Assembly, the Student Assembly,
the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly, and the University Assembly*

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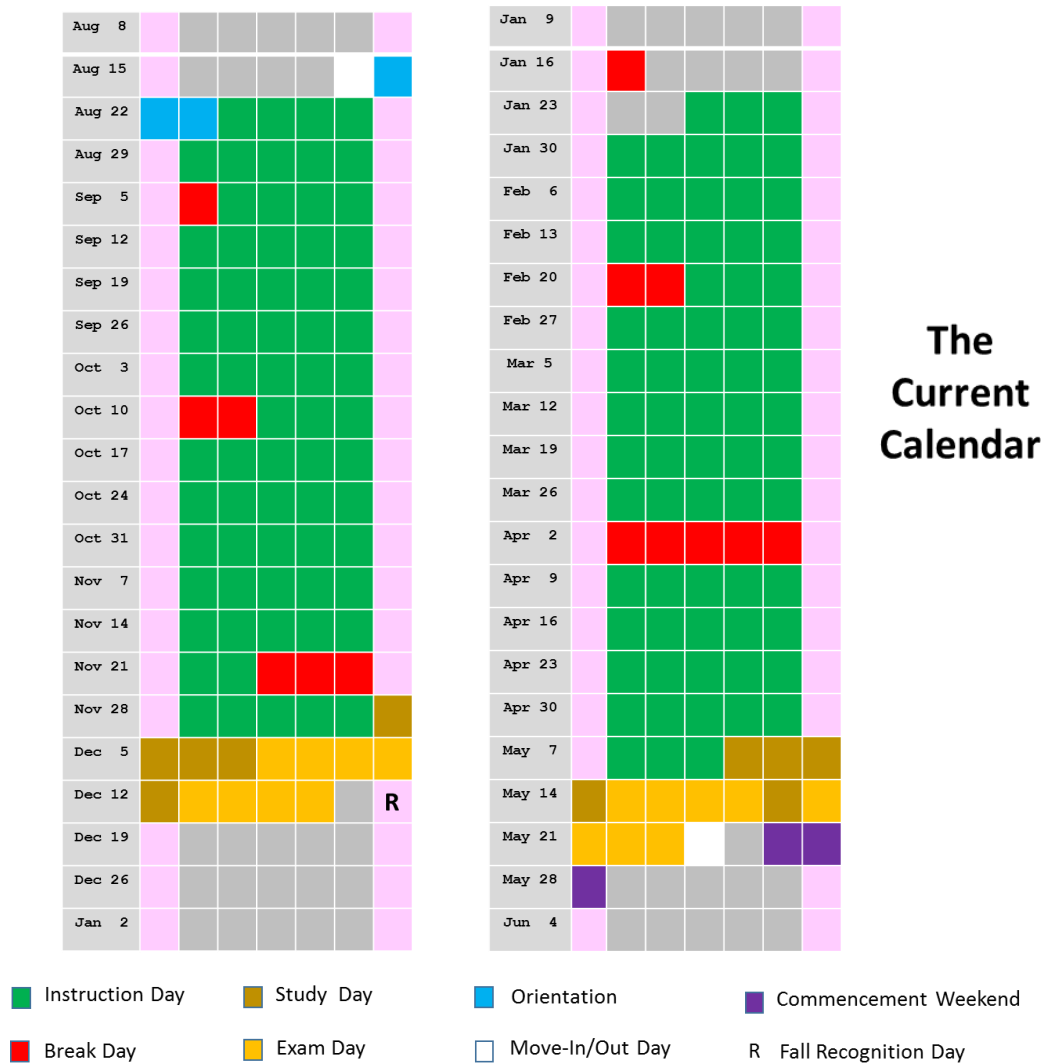
Hazel Hall, Facilities

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1. Quick Overview for the Busy Reader

The current calendar took effect AY 2013-14 and here is what it looks like in a typical year:

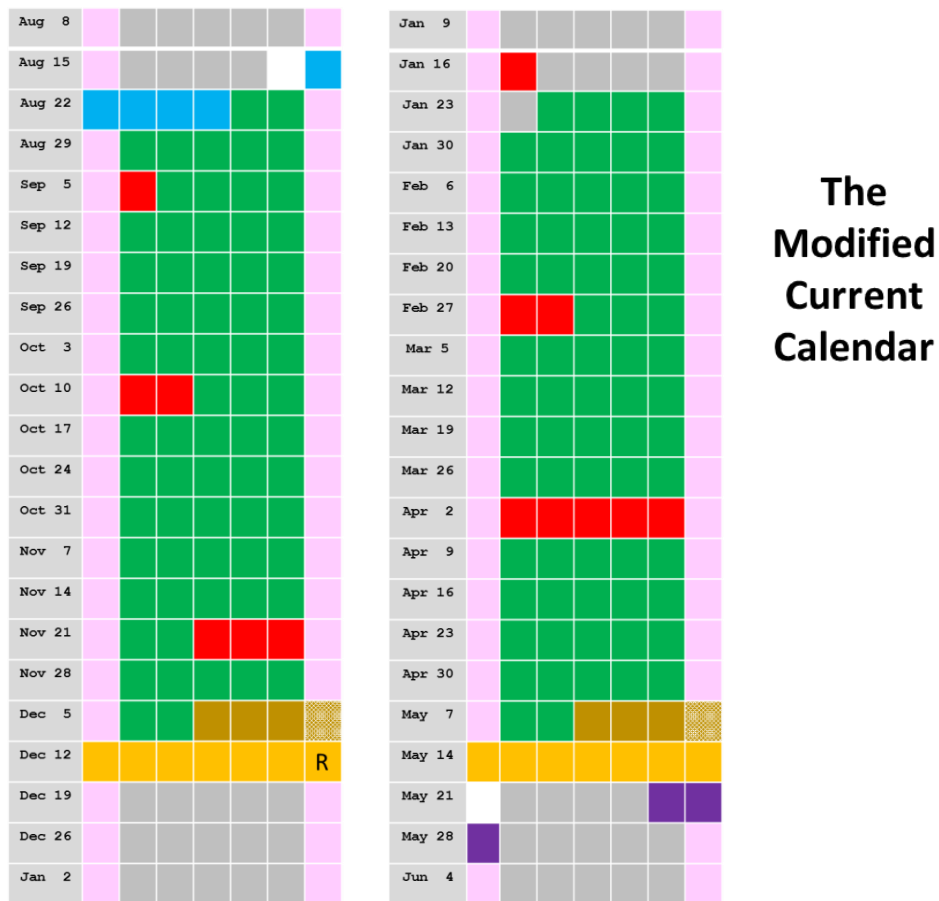


Issues with this calendar include the early August start, the extremely long between-semester break, the positioning of the spring-semester breaks, and the relatively short summer break. The adoption of the [current calendar](#) in 2012 included a stipulation that it be reviewed after three years of experience. Thus, our committee was formed last fall and formally charged by the Provost to examine all aspects of the calendar and to make academically-driven recommendations. Although our review has been comprehensive we have primarily focused on:

- (a) How to position breaks so that they support learning and wellbeing.
- (b) How to increase summertime opportunities for scholarship and employment.
- (c) How to enhance the value of class days before and after Thanksgiving.
- (d) How to structure an effective orientation period and study/exam period

As much as possible, we also took into account concerns that related to religious practice, childcare, and a host of practical issues such as getting course grades in on time, big course prep, getting the dorms ready for graduation families, etc. The Committee was asked to provide two possible calendars, one of which moves Commencement from Memorial Day weekend.

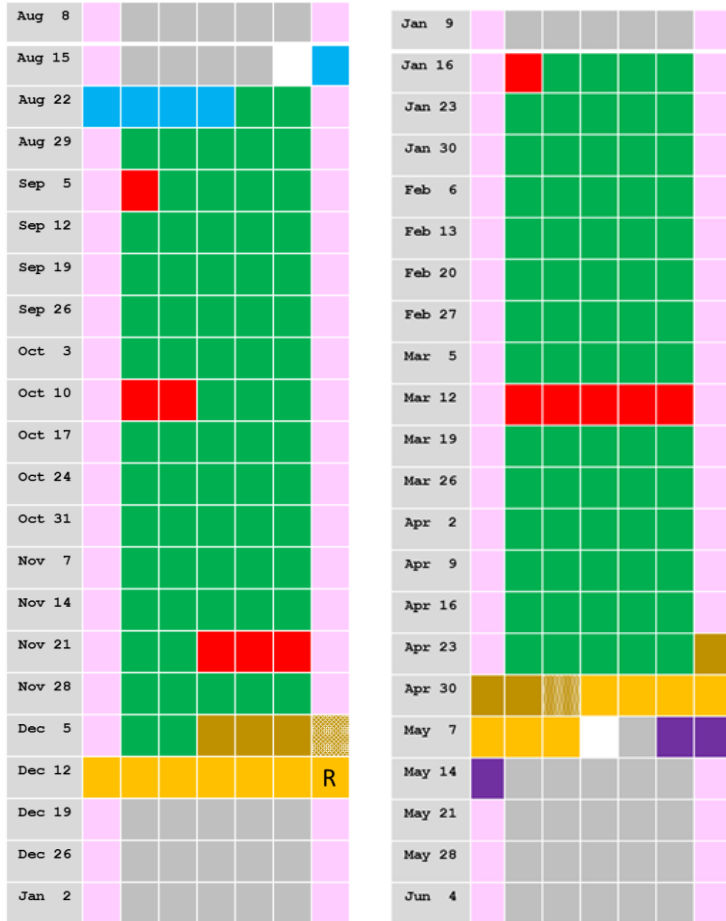
The *Modified Current Calendar* is what we think is the best possible calendar given that Commencement stays on Memorial Day weekend:



**The
Modified
Current
Calendar**

- Instruction Day
- Study Day
- Orientation
- Commencement Weekend
- Break Day
- Exam Day
- Move-In/Out Day
- R Fall Recognition Day
- One-Exam Day

The *Early Commencement Calendar* is what we think is the best possible calendar given that graduation is held two weeks earlier.



The Early Commencement Calendar

- Instruction Day
- Study Day
- Orientation
- Commencement Weekend
- Break Day
- Exam Day
- Move-In/Out Day
- R Fall Recognition Day
- One-Exam Day

It must be remembered that for a given calendar, there are seven fall semester instances and fourteen spring semester instances. It makes a difference if Thanksgiving is early (Nov 22) or late (Nov 28). The above calendar displays are for an academic year that has an “average” Thanksgiving (Nov 25). However, calendar analysis requires that you pay attention to every possible instance and we have done that over the course of our deliberations. We discovered that the super-early 2016 February break won’t happen again until 2032! Here are ten-year snapshots of the [Current calendar](#), the [Modified Current Calendar](#), and the [Early Commencement Calendar](#) and a table listing some of their key attributes:

	Current	Modified	Early
Orientation Days	3	5	5
Fall Break Days	2	2	2
Thanksgiving Break Days	3	3	3
Class Days After Thanksgiving	5	7	7
February Break Days	2	2 (but later)	None
Spring Break Days	5	5	5
Last Exam-to-Commencement Days	4	7	4
Study Days + Exam Days	5+8	4+7	4+7
Commencement	Memorial Day Weekend	Same	2 Weeks Earlier

To facilitate yearly side-by-side comparisons we provide this [ten-year comparison document](#).

2. The Process

Adopting a calendar based on surveys and numbers is like buying a house based on photographs and blueprints. It can work, but only if you have summer/fall/winter/spring snapshots taken from every possible angle and only if the plans capture the right dimensions. For the calendar, no one group can get the big picture by itself. Students, faculty, employees, and alumni must listen and learn from each other if the calendar is to be improved. The process we followed was consistent with that.

Talking

During the past few months we held multiple campus town halls and information sessions that targeted undergraduate students, graduate and professional students, employees, and faculty. We talked to college advising centers, college career offices, various religious groups, Cornell Health, Cornell Police, Engaged Cornell, Global Cornell, and offices in Student and Campus Life. Off campus, we consulted the Ithaca Police, the Cayuga Medical Center, the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce, and various local school districts.

Transparency

A [website](#) was maintained that included the minutes of all our meetings and links to various resources that we found useful in our deliberations.

Research

We are not alone when it comes to in addressing calendar-related issues. In Appendix 1 we report how peer schools handle orientation and their study/exam period. We also compare their break patterns and the time they have between semesters and during the summer. The peer institutions that we considered are the Ivies together with MIT, Duke, Johns Hopkins, Berkeley, Michigan, Stanford, and Chicago.

Online Outreach

Last October we asked the community to respond to a set of thirteen calendar-related issues. Over [1000 responses](#) were received and posted on the website. In Appendix 2 we provide summaries of the responses and links to the raw data.

Based on these responses and our own research we developed two possible fall semester frameworks and four possible spring semester frameworks. We again turned to the community for advice asking our colleagues in March to compare the [six possibilities](#) with the semester calendars that are now in place. The results are presented in Appendix 3. We received well over [3000 responses](#) and it is from those shared insights that we developed the alternative calendars that are presented here.

Our online efforts were not referenda. The surveys were designed to solicit points of view from each constituency. That is the only way to optimize for the overall good of the University.

Final Phase of Input from Governing Bodies

In April the Faculty Senate and the Assemblies will discuss the contents of this report. The report will also be posted on the [Committee website](#) where any member of the community can share their reaction. Towards the middle of May, the Senate and the Assemblies will communicate their calendar preferences to the Provost. The Senate will do this by asking its members to provide a ranking of the three alternatives using the ballot described in Appendix 5.

Final Decision and Timeline for Any Change

After hearing from the Senate and the Assemblies, the Provost will take everything into consideration and decide upon the final calendar. For various practical reasons, the new calendar will not take effect until AY 2018-19.

3. Pairwise Comparisons

The careful ranking of the three possible calendar frameworks requires side-by-side comparisons of their properties. We identify two important calendar attributes:

The length of the December/January break is the number days between the last December exam day and the first January class day.

The length of the summer break is the number of days between the last exam day in May and the first class day in August.

These properties are reported in the following comparison tables.

The Current Calendar

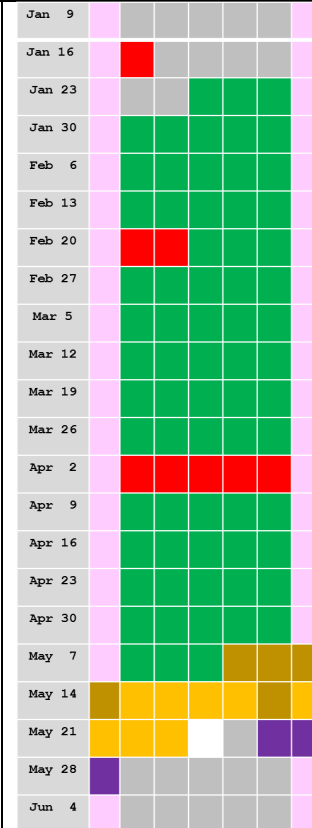
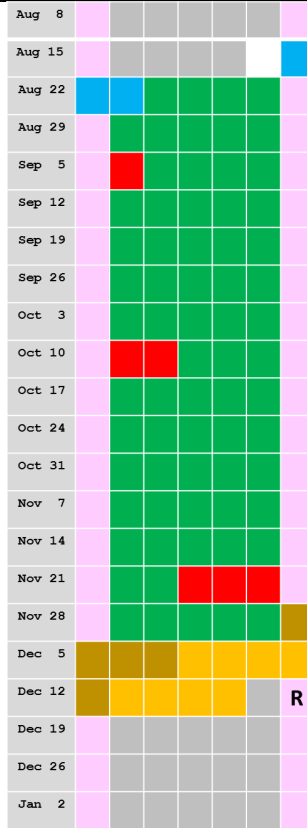
Fall Semester Properties

Class Days 68
 Weekdays 12,14,14,14,14
 First Class Day Aug 21-27
 Last Exam Day Dec 13-19

Spring Semester Properties

Class Days 69
 Weekdays 13,13,15,14,14
 First Class Day Jan 21-27
 Last Exam Day May 19-25

Dec/Jan Break 33 or 40 days
 Summer Break 90 or 97 days



The Modified Current Calendar

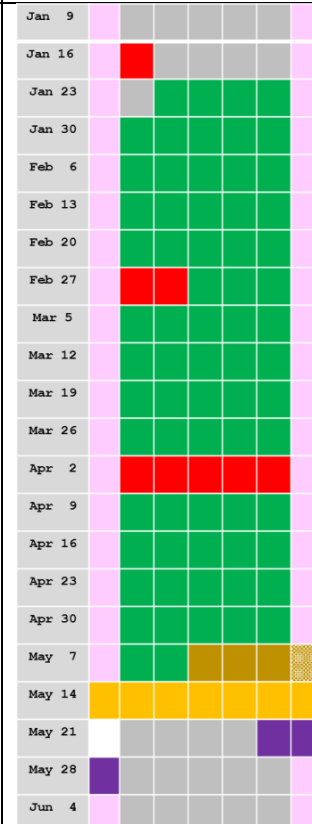
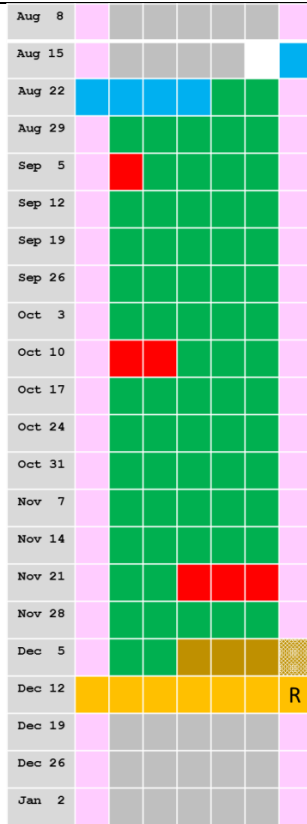
Fall Semester Properties

Class Days 68
 Weekdays 13,14,13,14,14
 First Class Day Aug 23-29
 Last Exam Day Dec 15-21

Spring Semester Properties

Class Days 69
 Weekdays 13,14,14,14,14
 First Class Day Jan 20-26
 Last Exam Day May 16-22

Dec/Jan Break 30 or 37 days
 Summer Break 95 or 102 days



The Current Calendar

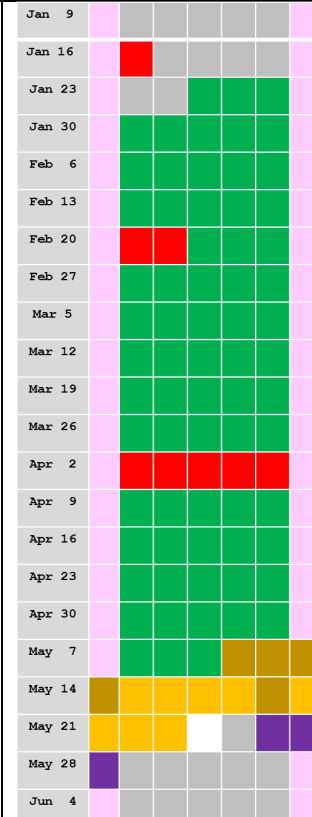
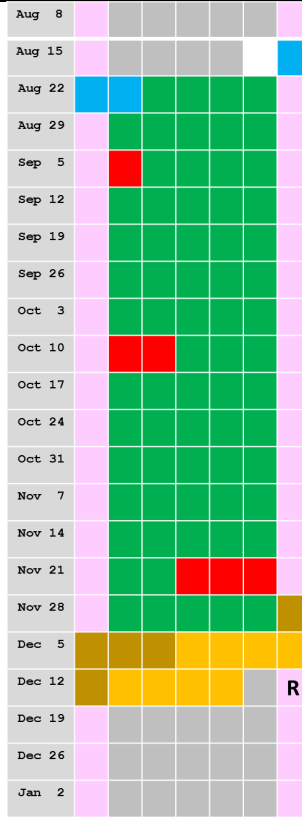
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The Early Commencement Calendar

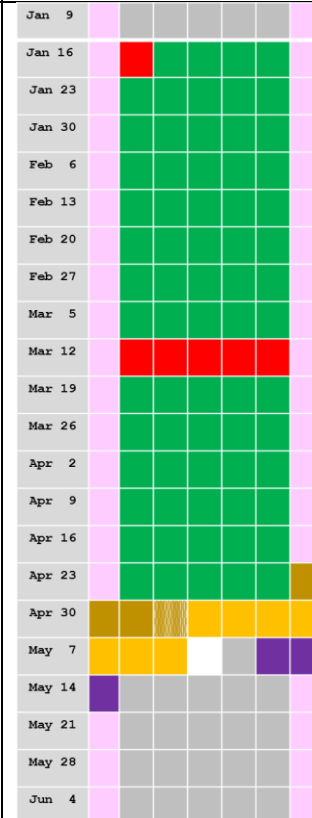
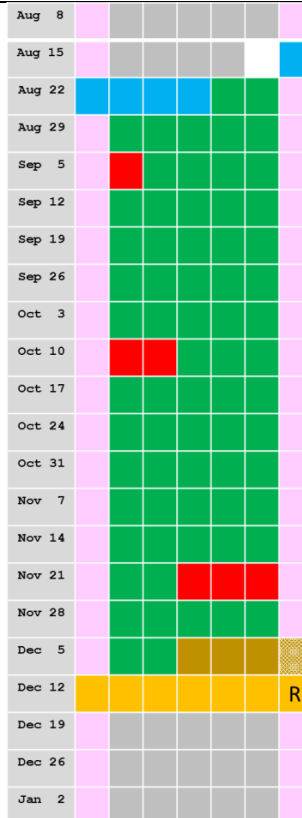
Fall Semester Properties

Class Days 68
 Weekdays 13,14,13,14,14
 First Class Day Aug 23-29
 Last Exam Day Dec 15-21

Spring Semester Properties

Class Days 69
 Weekdays 13,14,14,14,14
 First Class Day Jan 12-19
 Last Exam Day May 5-11

Dec/Jan Break 22 or 30 days
 Summer Break 106 or 113 days



The Modified Current Calendar

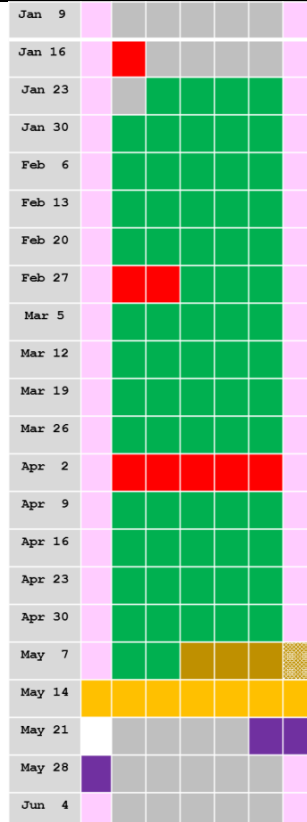
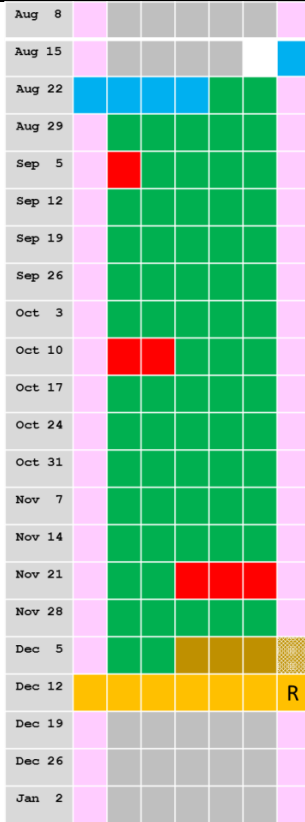
Fall Semester Properties

Class Days 68
 Weekdays 13,14,13,14,14
 First Class Day Aug 23-29
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Spring Semester Properties

Class Days 69
 Weekdays 13,14,14,14,14
 First Class Day Jan 20-26
 Last Exam Day May 16-22

Dec/Jan Break 30 or 37 days
 Summer Break 95 or 102 days



The Early Commencement Calendar

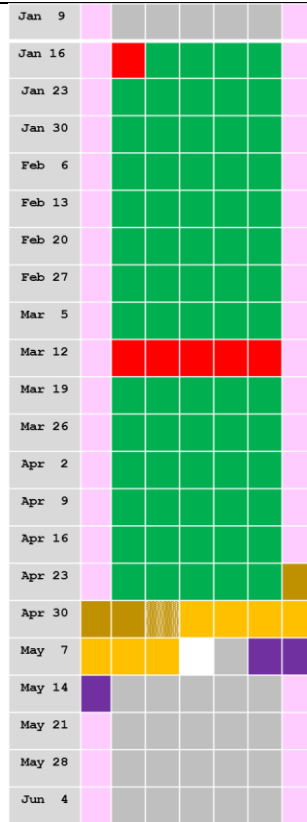
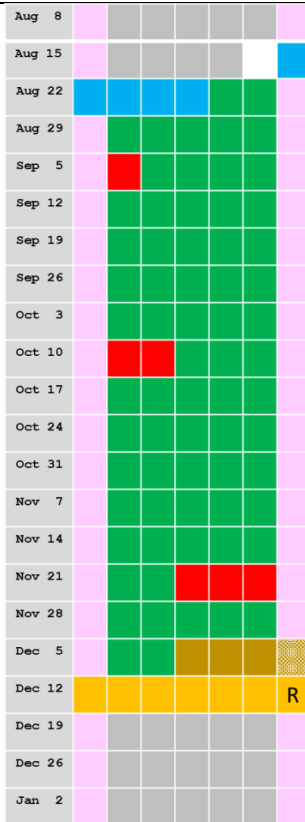
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Spring Semester Properties

Class Days 69
 Weekdays 13,14,14,14,14
 First Class Day Jan 12-19
 Last Exam Day May 5-11

Dec/Jan Break 22 or 30 days
 Summer Break 106 or 113 days



It must be remembered that for any calendar implementation, due to year-to-year changes in the secular calendar, there are seven possible fall semester instances and fourteen possible spring semester instances. This variability impacts two extremely important calendar attributes: the length of the between-semester break and the length of the summer break. Here is a tabulation of these and related features for the next ten years. The entries are color-coded for clarity:

Current Calendar
Modified Current Calendar
Early Commencement Calendar

Academic Year	Fall Start	Fall End	Between Term Days	Spring Start	Spring End	Summer Days	Summer Work Weeks
2018-19	Aug 21	Dec 13	40	Jan 23	May 21	97	13
	Aug 22	Dec 22	37	Jan 22	May 18	101	14
	Aug 22	Dec 22	30	Jan 14	May 7	112	15
2019-20	Aug 27	Dec 19	33	Jan 22	May 19	97	13
	Aug 28	Dec 21	30	Jan 21	May 16	101	14
	Aug 28	Dec 21	22	Jan 13	May 5	112	15
2020-21	Aug 25	Dec 17	40	Jan 27	May 25	90	12
	Aug 26	Dec 19	37	Jan 26	May 22	94	13
	Aug 26	Dec 19	30	Jan 19	May 11	105	14
2021-22	Aug 24	Dec 16	40	Jan 26	May 24	90	12
	Aug 25	Dec 18	37	Jan 25	May 21	94	13
	Aug 25	Dec 18	30	Jan 18	May 10	105	14
2022-23	Aug 23	Dec 15	40	Jan 25	May 23	90	12
	Aug 24	Dec 17	37	Jan 24	May 20	94	13
	Aug 24	Dec 17	30	Jan 17	May 9	105	14
2023-24	Aug 22	Dec 14	40	Jan 24	May 21	97	13
	Aug 23	Dec 16	37	Jan 23	May 18	101	14
	Aug 23	Dec 16	30	Jan 16	May 7	112	15
2024-25	Aug 27	Dec 19	33	Jan 22	May 20	97	13
	Aug 28	Dec 21	30	Jan 21	May 17	101	14
	Aug 28	Dec 21	22	Jan 13	May 6	112	15
2025-26	Aug 26	Dec 18	33	Jan 21	May 19	97	13
	Aug 27	Dec 20	30	Jan 20	May 16	101	14
	Aug 27	Dec 20	22	Jan 12	May 5	112	15
2026-27	Aug 25	Dec 17	40	Jan 27	May 25	90	12
	Aug 26	Dec 19	37	Jan 26	May 22	94	13
	Aug 26	Dec 19	30	Jan 19	May 11	105	14
2027-28	Aug 24	Dec 16	40	Jan 26	May 23	90	12
	Aug 25	Dec 18	37	Jan 25	May 20	94	13
	Aug 25	Dec 18	30	Jan 18	May 9	105	14

If a summer has twelve “work weeks” then there are twelve contiguous Monday-through-Friday “pay periods” between the last exam day in May and the first class day in August.

The current calendar has a relatively short summer, which impacts employment and internship opportunities for our students. Correcting this has been a major concern for the Committee and from the above table we see that both of the new calendar options provide more summer work weeks.

4. The Fall Semester: Issues and Improvements

The two proposed calendar frameworks do not differ from each other in the fall, but differ in important ways from the current fall calendar. Let's start by discussing our recommended design of that semester.

Semester Start

The first day of class in the fall is one day later than is currently the case. Many expressed an interest for starting later, but this would involve a sacrifice because the total number of class days plus exam days must be 75 according to New York State Education Department rules.

Given that constraint, here are the options for starting two days later:

- (a) reducing fall break to one day
- (b) making Labor Day a class day
- (c) making the Wednesday before Thanksgiving a class day
- (d) adding another class day after Thanksgiving and reduce the number of study days by one

None of these options are acceptable to the Committee.

New-Student Orientation

The Cornell has a much shorter orientation period compared to all our peers. See Appendix A2.1. We strongly support the restoration of longer orientation. The proposed calendars offer a 5-day orientation.

Fall Break

There is broad consensus that fall break is properly positioned and that it supports academic success, therefore no changes are proposed.

Thanksgiving Break

Several of our peers have a 5-day Thanksgiving break and community polling suggests that many would like for Cornell to adopt this. (Informally, many students already take a 5-day Thanksgiving break, and class attendance is low on the Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week.) However, we decided against this option because the two lost class days would have to be made up through either an earlier August start or an unacceptably compressed study/exam period.

Post-Thanksgiving Classes

The five class days after Thanksgiving are in many ways as devalued as the two class days before Thanksgiving. It is hard to introduce any new material in this period, and these five days are often tight and stressful as students rush to complete large end-of-semester assignments. By adding two class days after Thanksgiving we are creating an opportunity for faculty to bring their courses to a more graceful

and academically sound conclusion through review and course wrap-up. Students with end-of-semester projects would have a weekend to bring them to completion. All of our peers (except Harvard) have eight or more class days after Thanksgiving. [Berkeley](#), [Stanford](#), and [Yale](#) go further with policies that shape the last week of class so that it maximizes learning and bridges nicely to the final exam period.

5. The Spring Semester: Issues, Tensions, and Improvements

“February break serves no purpose because it is way too early.” That was perhaps the most commonly heard criticism of the current calendar when we started our work. We discovered that it is also a polarizing topic with many undergraduates and faculty on opposite sides of the fence.

How to end earlier in May is also controversial. Many faculty and graduate students like the long between-semester break for research-related reasons. International students enjoy the long break to travel home. Many undergraduates would like to have a longer summer for academic and job-related reasons.

At first glance, it would seem that a serious lengthening of the summer would have to come at the expense of the between-semester break.

The Spring Semester structure for the Modified Current Calendar and the Early Commencement Calendar address these tensions differently.

The Breaks

The Modified Current Calendar keeps the two breaks but proposes a repositioning to better align with the prelim schedule and the need to mitigate the effects of fractional weeks. It does this by staging the February break after 24 instructional days every year. Currently, the February break falls either 13 or 18 instructional days depending on where MLK day falls.

The Early Commencement Calendar does away with the 2-day break altogether. Those in favor of doing this regard the 2-day break as disruptive. It should be noted that among peer schools, only Brown and Cornell have a two-break spring semester.

Ending Earlier

Because Ithaca College stages its commencement the weekend before Memorial Day weekend, we are faced with a stark choice. Either we leave graduation alone or we move it two weeks earlier in the year. (We briefly toyed with the idea of a weekday graduation, but decided that it was not a practical option.)

The Modified Current Calendar keeps graduation on the same weekend, but the final exam period ends earlier in the year. This shifts the study/exam period so that students and faculty can start their summers earlier. The move, combined with a slightly later August start increases the summer break by

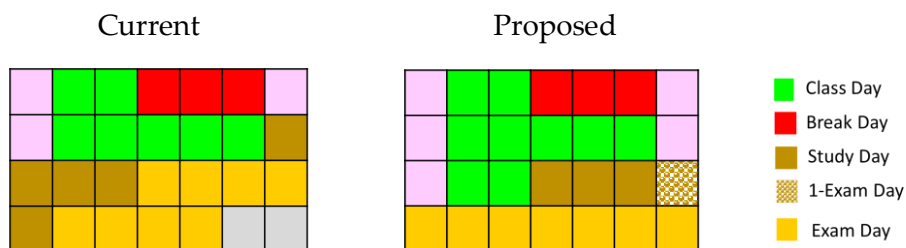
5 days and one whole work week. This also means that “Senior Day Events” do not have to overlap with study days and exam days which is currently the case.

The Early Commencement Calendar moves graduation to two weekends before Memorial Day weekend. If no other adjustments were made, this would imply a 2-week earlier start in January—a possibility strongly disliked by faculty and international students. However, by doing away with February break the January start is pushed back by just 8 days.

6. The Proposed Study/Exam Period

We focus on the fall first, recalling that both the Modified Current and Early Commencement calendars have identical fall semesters. Adding two class days after Thanksgiving requires a modification of the current study/exam period so that it does not end too late. This requires reducing its length from 13 to 11 days and to having slightly less than four full study days at the start. (This is not a radical move when compared to our peers. See Appendix A1.2.)

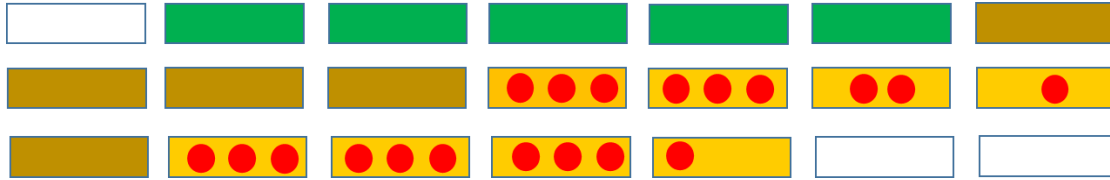
To put this “reduction” in the proper context we display the last four weeks of the semester so as to highlight how the closing class days “interact” with the study/exam period:



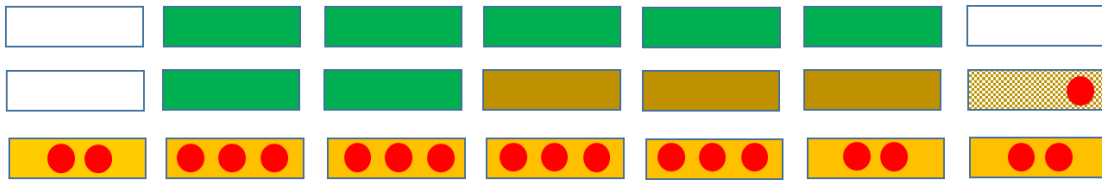
We believe that the last seven class days of the semester are made much more effective by having the two extra class days after Thanksgiving. New material taught just after the Thanksgiving break can be properly reviewed and integrated with earlier course content. Instead of ending classes with a 5-day frenzy, instructors can plan a course wrap-up that works well for students as they begin preparing for finals. Moreover, the weekend after Thanksgiving weekend gives students more time to complete end-of-term projects and papers.

With respect to the number of study days and the number of exam days, it will probably be necessary to have a single late-afternoon final exam slot on the first Saturday of the period in order to minimize the overall number of conflicts and back-to-back exams. Even with slightly less than four full study days at the start we feel that the new arrangement will induce less stress when the entire end-of-term structure is considered.

Regarding the number and positioning of the exam slots, we are still running simulations to ascertain the best pattern to follow if the new exam schedule is adopted. Currently we have 19 exam slots distributed as follows during the fall semester:



It may well be that a similar distribution works nicely with the new schedule:



However, there are many other alternatives and we will scientifically evaluate them all.

Finally, we mention that the above discussion carries over to the spring semester. Moreover, the fall and spring semesters end exactly the same way in the Modified Current calendar. Thus, an enlightened end-of-semester strategy that exploits the last two class days can be applied both terms.

7. Other Recommendations and Follow-Up Work

AY 2017-18 should be used to “get ready” for the new calendar which will most likely be introduced during AY 2018-19. Here is a “to do” list:

Develop More Effective Rules and Academic Guidelines for the end-of-semester and Study/Exam Period

We suggest that additional thought and guidance be given to the best academic use of the final days of instruction, study days and exam days.

Promote the Early Availability of the Final Exam Schedule

We recommend that the final exam schedule continue to be published before the start of the drop/add period. This will make end-of-semester travel easier to arrange. Moreover, some students may want to take into account the final exam schedule when they “shop around” for courses to take.

Consider Weekday Renaming if Necessary

An ideal calendar would have equal numbers of each weekday for instruction, to facilitate labs and equalize instruction across various class schedules (MWF; Tu/Th, etc.) The Modified Current and Early Commencement calendars come as close as possible to this given that the fall and spring semesters have 68 and 69 class days respectively. On the other hand, the current calendar has significant weekday imbalance. If we decide to keep the current calendar, we recommend considering the use of weekday renaming in order to achieve approximately equal numbers of class days that Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. To illustrate, suppose a semester calendar had 14 Mondays but 12 Tuesdays, 12 Wednesdays, 12 Thursdays, and 12 Fridays. If classes followed a Tuesday schedule on the first Monday of the semester, then over the course of the term the weekday distribution would be 13, 13, 12, 12, and 12. A concern about weekday renaming is that it is confusing and if an extreme event occurred on a renamed day, this could weaken our risk management procedures.

Make Sure the Published Calendar Recognizes Indigenous Peoples’ Day

We support the Student Assembly and Senate resolutions that call for the recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ Day on the academic calendar. See Appendix 4.

Make it Easier to Administer Extended-Time Exams

The number of students approved to have extended time on an exam is about 700, approximately double what it was six years ago. We should look into ways that can simplify the administration of these exams.

Rethink the Final Grade Submission Timeline

Both proposed calendars would move fall exams closer to the winter holidays. Some changes in the timelines for grade submission (and their sequelae, such as student academic reviews) should be considered.

Make it Easier for Students to Request and Obtain Alternative Exams for Reasons of Religious Practice

Experiences across campus vary. We need clearer protocols and best-practice examples to guide the faculty.

Think More About the Role of Exams and Breaks and How They Connect to Class Days

Consider reducing the length of final exams to two hours. Revisit the enforcement of the rules associated evening prelims and work-over-break.

Slope Day

The scheduling of Slope Day needs to be revisited. Depending upon the calendar adopted, the last day of classes could be a Tuesday, a Wednesday, or a Friday and each of these days poses a Slope Day issue. There also needs to be a careful, broad-community discussion about the time of day when the event starts and whether or not it should be staged on a class day.

Appendix 1. Comparisons with Peer Institution Calendars

It is instructive to look at the properties of the calendars put together by our peers. We tabulated how they handle orientation, study/exam periods, length-of-summer, and breaks.

A1.1 Orientation Periods

School	Style	Ugrads	Grads	Length	What it Looks Like
Cornell	Semesters	14300	7400		
Current				3	Sat-Sun-Mon
Modiifed				5	Sat-Sun-Mon-Tue-Wed
Early				5	Sat-Sun-Mon-Tue-Wed
UPenn	Semesters	11500	13300	5	Thu-Fr-Sat-Sun-Mon
Columbia	Semesters	8100	19500	9	Sun-Mon-Tue-Wed-Thu-Fri-Sat-Sun-Mon
Harvard	Semesters	15200	6700	7	Wed-Thu-Fri-Sat-Sun-Mon-Tue
Yale	Semesters	5500	6900	6	Sat-Sun-Mon-Tue-Sat-Sun
Princeton	Semesters	2700	5400	10	Sun-Mon-Tue-Wed-Thu-Fri-Sat-Sun-Mon-Tue
Brown	Semesters	6300	2200	8	Sun-Mon-Tue-Wed-Thu-Fri-Sat-Sun
Dartmouth	Quarters	4300	2100	6	Tue-Wed-Thu-Fri-Sat-Sun
U Chicago	Quarters	5500	9900	9	Sat-Sun-Mon-Tue-Wed-Thu-Fri-Sat-Sun
Stanford	Quarters	7000	9300	6	Tue-Wed-Thu-Fr-Sat-Sun
MIT	Semesters	11400	6900	8	Sun-Mon-Tue-Wed-Thu-Fri-Sat-Sun
Johns Hopkins	Semesters	6500	14900	5	Sat-Sun-Mon-Tue-Wed
Duke	Semesters	6600	8200	5	Wed-Thu-Fr-Sat-Sun
Berkeley	Semesters	27100	11100	8	Tue-Wed-Thu-Fri-Sat-Sun-Mon-Tue
U Michigan	Semesters	28300	16400	5	Thu-Fri-Sat-Sun-Mon

Notes

Although some schools have new-student activities on move-in day, we did not count move-in day as an orientation day in the above table. Orientation days that are also weekdays are more attractive to staff and faculty.

A1.2 Study/Exam Periods

School	Style	Ugrads	Grads	Study Days	Exam Days	Exam Periods	Exam Length
Cornell	Semesters	14300	7400				
Current				5	8	19	2.5
Modified				3+	7+	?	2.5
Early				3+	7+	?	2.5
Penn	Semesters	11500	13300	4	6	24	2
Columbia	Semesters	8100	19500	5	5	20	3
Harvard	Semesters	15200	6700	7	11	22	3
Yale	Semesters	5500	6900	5+	7	16	3
Princeton	Semesters	2700	5400	11	10	21	3?
Brown	Semesters	6300	2200	5	9	18	3?
Dartmouth	Quarters	4300	2100	1	5	13	2
Chicago	Quarters	5500	9900	4	5	19	2
Stanford	Quarters	7000	9300	2+	5	20	3
MIT	Semesters	11400	6900	3	5	9	3
Johns Hopkins	Semesters	6500	14900	5	8	17	3
Duke	Semesters	6600	8200	4	6	16	3
Berkeley	Semesters	27100	11100	2+	5	20	3
Michigan	Semesters	28300	16400	4	6	20	2

Notes

This information was gleaned from the “academic calendar” webpages maintained by the schools. It is sometimes not obvious what counts for a study day. Thus, the numbers, while generally correct, may be subject to off-by-one errors.

A1.3 Between-Semester Break Length and Summer Break Length

School	Style	Fall Start	Last Exam	Dec-Jan Days	Spring Start	Last Exam	Senior Days	Graduation Day	Summer Length
Cornell	Semesters								
Current		Aug 23	Dec 15	40	Jan 25	May 23	4	May 28	90
Modified		Aug 25	Dec 17	37	Jan 24	May 20	7	May 28	95
Early		Aug 25	Dec 17	30	Jan 17	May 9	4	May 14	106
Penn	Semesters	Aug 30	Dec 22	19	Jan 11	May 9	5	May 15	111
Columbia	Semesters	Sept 6	Dec 23	24	Jan 17	May 12	4	May 17	115
Harvard	Semesters	Aug 31	Dec 20	33	Jan 23	May 13	11	May 25	108
Yale	Semesters	Aug 31	Dec 21	29	Jan 20	May 10	11	May 22	110
Princeton*	Semesters					May 26	9	June 5	108
Brown	Semesters	Sept 7	Dec 21	34	Jan 25	May 19	8	May 28	110
Dartmouth	Quarters					June 5	5	June 11	97
Chicago	Quarters					June 9	0	June 10	106
Stanford	Quarters					June 14	3	June 18	103
MIT	Semesters	Sept 7	Dec 22	46	Feb 7	May 26	13	June 13	102
Johns Hopkins	Semesters	Aug 31	Dec 19	34	Jan 23	May 18	5	May 24	115
Duke	Semesters	Aug 29	Dec 19	22	Jan 11	May 6	5	May 12	113
Berkeley	Semesters	Aug 24	Dec 16	31	Jan 17	May 12	0	May 13	102
Michigan	Semesters	Sept 6	Dec 22	12	Jan 4	April 27	2	April 30	130

Notes

The data in the table is based on AY 2016-17.

A "Senior Day" is a day in between the last exam day and Commencement.

* Princeton's Fall semester ends in January

**For schools on the quarter system it does not make sense to talk about the length of the between-semester break.

A1.4 The Breaks

School	Style	Fall Break Length	Thanksgiving Break Length	Post Thanksgiving Class Days	Spring Break Lengths
Cornell	Semesters				
Current		2	3	5	2+5
Modified		2	3	7	2+5
Early		2	3	7	5
Penn	Semesters	2	2	11	5
Columbia	Semesters	2	2	11	5
Harvard	Semesters	1	3	5	5
Yale	Semesters	3	5	10	10
Princeton	Semesters	5	3	15*	5
Brown	Semesters	1	3	8	2+5
Dartmouth	Quarters				
Chicago	Quarters				
Stanford	Quarters				
MIT	Semesters	2	2	13	5
Johns Hopkins	Semesters	1	5	10	5
Duke	Semesters	2	3	10	5
Berkeley	Semesters	1	3	8	5
Michigan	Semesters	2	2	12	5

Notes

The notation "2+5" means one break with length 2 days and a second break with length 5 days.

One-day holidays (Labor Day, Indigenous People's Day, Veteran's Day, MLK Day, and President's Day) are not counted as breaks.

Appendix 2. Community Discussion of Calendar-Related Issues

The community posted over [1000 comments](#) that related to specific calendar issues. Here is a summary of the major concerns that were identified by this process.

[The Fall Semester Start](#)

Every Cornell class day before Labor Day poses a day care issue for faculty and staff with school-age children. How students use August (jobs, internships, time with family) argues for a later start. The volume of instruction (68 class days) cannot be reduced because of NYS Education Department regulations. Thus, if we start later then possible implications include (a) a shortened final exam period. (b) an exam period that ends closer to Christmas and (c) reducing Fall break to 1 or 0 days.

[The October Break](#)

The timing of the Fall break is good when considering the prelim cycle and the need to split the Labor Day-Thanksgiving interval. The Fall break is also a local school break. There is disappointment that it does not generally synchronize with the Jewish holidays. There is some willingness to sacrifice Fall break in order to have a full week at Thanksgiving.

[The Thanksgiving Break](#)

Some felt that the staff should get the preceding Wednesday off. Strong sentiment to make it a weeklong break as the Monday and Tuesday are devalued because of very low attendance. It may be necessary to have two weeks of class after a week-long Thanksgiving break, partly because the total number of class days cannot be reduced and partly because it is hard to teach new content on a 5-day “island” that is positioned at the very end of the semester. Even with a week-long Thanksgiving break, some students cannot go home because of financial reasons.

[The Fall Semester End](#)

This issue is tightly coupled to the issue of when we start the Fall semester and the length of the fall and Thanksgiving break. Ending later can create holiday travel problems and grading-till-Christmas problems. All things considered, many feel that ending a few days later would be an OK price to pay for a later semester start and a serious post-thanksgiving class period. Ending later does not appeal to those who cannot go home over Thanksgiving.

[The Spring Semester Start](#)

Among our peers, we have one of the longest between-semester breaks. Those who see this as a positive cite that it creates valuable time for research, proposal writing, field work, and conferences. It also makes it possible for faculty, TAs, and students to prep for spring courses. Other reasons against starting earlier in January include building maintenance, office staff work associated with wrapping up the Fall semester, and international student travel.

Undergraduates generally favor a shorter break if it implies ending earlier in May. Also, the social value of the break doesn't require 5-6 weeks. Starting one week earlier is a suggested compromise. Graduate student stipends are correlated with the start and finish of the semesters. Important to pay attention to this detail if those dates are modified.

[The February Break](#)

Nobody likes the position of the February break except those who value coordination with the local schools. Many favor doing away with it altogether and returning to a single-break spring semester. Fractional weeks a.k.a. 2-day breaks disrupt the academic flow and impose difficult travel constraints, both of which increase stress. Enforcing a "no university business" rule might increase its value. Some feeling among those who favor a 2-break spring semester that the longer one should come first. The staff do not get Presidents Day off.

[The Spring Break](#)

The current spring break is forced to be late because of February break. Some feel that we should either do away with February break and return to the single break idea or that we should swap the order of the two breaks staging the week long break in early-to mid March where it has increased value. Other thoughts about repositioning the 1-week break cite stress-relief, coordination with local school breaks and coordination with religious holidays. There is a "schedule-this-after-spring-break" mentality. This gets disruptive the later one stages spring break.

[The Spring Semester End](#)

Internships and summer employment is essential for many, many undergraduates. The late summer start and shortened summer disadvantage Cornell students. Summer stipends for graduate students are not routine so care has to be exercised should the summer period be lengthened.

[The New-Student Orientation Period](#)

The current calendar reduced the amount of time allocated to orientation programs. Consensus appears to be that the reduction was too extreme and that one or two days should be added to the orientation period. We currently have the shortest orientation when compared to our peers.

There are Friday night/weekend-related issues because of religious concerns and faculty-with-family concerns. Orientation involves new graduate students too and the message is the same: the current orientation period is just too short. The short orientation period belittles the advising process and good advising impacts student stress.

[The Study/Exam Period](#)

Strong preference of publishing the final exam schedule before the start of the drop-add period, i.e., before the first day of class. There are two competing big course issues. There needs to be enough time to finish grading big courses before the exam period ends. This suggests that big courses should have their exams early in the period. However, frontloading the exam period with big-course finals

disadvantages freshman and sophomores who typically populate the big courses. So care has to be exercised.

There are several weekend exam day issues. These revolve around religious practice concerns and childcare concerns. There is also a “biorhythm”, weekend psychology that we are all used to. It says “take it easy on Saturday and Sunday.”

The conflict issue. The number of exam days and the number of exam time slots needs to be examined as there seems to be a longing for the “old way” of scheduling exams.

We need to ask the question, why does Cornell require more exam days than is typically the case among its peers? Courses without final exams may have big “last assignments” and “course projects.” How should this be factored into our exam-period thinking?

Having finals end midweek creates a “fractional week” issue with the summer. By certain standards, the length of the summer is measured in terms of number of whole weeks rather than the number of days. It is also easier for parents to pick up their kid on the weekend rather than midweek.

[The Senior Days Issue](#)

Those who do not like to have a long gap between the last exam and graduation cite (a) an anxiousness to get on with summertime jobs and research and (b) the idea that the Senior Days period sets students up for bad behavior related to alcohol. On the other hand, some think that a properly organized Senior Day period can be an affordable and very positive experience for the vast majority of students. It is pointed out that Seniors tend to have fewer final exams so in fact “Senior Week” is really more than just those empty days between the last exam and Commencement.

[Having Commencement on Memorial Day Weekend](#)

The staff do not like working on Memorial Day weekend—keeps them from their families on a major holiday. Moving graduation to a 2-day weekend has financial implications for a travelling family. Some interest in shortening the festivities by doing away with Convocation. Travel on the busy Memorial Day weekend is harder and more expensive than on a normal weekend. Faculty attendance would be better if graduation was staged earlier.

[Synching with Local School Calendars](#)

Clearly a major issue for the hundreds of faculty and staff with school-age children. However, there are difficulties associated with coordinating with local school calendars. The public school spring break comes far too late in April for there to be overlap with our spring break. Local schools have NYS testing constraints that torque their calendars so they are not exactly free to compromise with us.

Appendix 3. Community Discussion of Several Possible Calendar Frameworks

Based on the community input detailed above and our own research, we devised two possible fall calendar frameworks and four possible spring calendar frameworks. In an effort to see how the community would go about balancing trade-offs, we floated a Qualtrics survey and received [over 3000 responses](#). Below are descriptions of these frameworks and a summary of the community’s reactions to them. The alumni respondents are typically 2014, 2015, and 2016 graduates. We contacted that group because they have experience with both the current calendar and its predecessor.

The entries in the tables below are percents.

Fall Calendar Framework F1

This framework moves four August class days to December, has a 3-day Thanksgiving break, and a finals period with 4 study days and 7 exam days.

The survey asked if F1 is better than the current fall calendar.

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Undergrad	31.7	55.4	12.9
Grad	43.1	42.4	14.5
Staff	57.2	18.7	24.1
Faculty	70.1	17.0	12.9
Alumni	27.2	57.2	15.6

Fall Calendar Framework F2

This framework moves two August class days to December and has 4-day orientation period, a 5-day Thanksgiving break, and a finals period with 4 study days and 7 exam days.

The survey asked if F2 is better than the current fall calendar.

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Undergrad	51.4	34.3	14.3
Grad	51.5	31.8	16.7
Staff	49.1	26.7	24.2
Faculty	39.5	41.3	19.2
Alumni	38.2	45.6	16.2

Spring Calendar Framework S1

This framework is basically the same as the current spring calendar except that February break is delayed by one week and it has a finals period with 4 study days and 7 exam days.

The survey asked if S1 is better than the current spring calendar.

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Undergrad	37.5	38.5	24.0
Grad	41.2	30.6	28.2
Staff	30.7	36.7	32.6
Faculty	29.4	41.3	29.3
Alumni	49.7	26.5	23.8

Spring Calendar Framework S2

This framework is basically the same as the current spring calendar except that the 5-day break comes before the 2-day break February break and it has a finals period with 4 study days and 7 exam days.

The survey asked if S2 is better than the current spring calendar.

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Undergrad	30.1	53.7	15.2
Grad	40.1	46.3	13.6
Staff	38.7	31.6	29.7
Faculty	35.6	31.6	29.8
Alumni	28.5	56.7	14.4

Spring Calendar Framework S3

This framework is essentially the same as the current spring calendar except that everything (including Commencement) is two weeks earlier. It has a finals period with 4 study days and 7 exam days.

The survey asked if S3 is better than the current spring calendar.

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Undergrad	52.8	34.9	12.3
Grad	40.1	46.3	13.6
Staff	47.2	33.0	19.8
Faculty	27.0	59.5	13.5
Alumni	28.8	56.7	14.4

Spring Calendar Framework S4

This framework stages commencement two weeks earlier and has no February break. It has a finals period with 4 study days and 7 exam days. Classes start in January eight days earlier than is the case with the current spring calendar.

The survey asked if S4 is better than the current spring calendar.

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Undergrad	29.3	58.9	11.8
Grad	29.1	59.0	11.9
Staff	44.1	37.1	18.8
Faculty	36.8	49.0	14.2
Alumni	15.6	71.8	13.6

Appendix 4. Indigenous Peoples’ Day

The Committee was asked to respond to [Student Assembly Resolution 46](#), a recommendation that the academic calendar identify the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples’ Day. Senate [Resolution 126](#) voices support for this idea.

We recommend that the [academic calendar webpage](#) be modified accordingly and offer the following before-and-after example:

What the Current Fall Calendar Looks Like		
Residence Halls Open	Friday	August 19
Instruction Begins	Tuesday	August 23
Labor Day-No Classes	Monday	September 5
Fall Break begins	Saturday	October 8
Instruction Resumes	Wednesday	October 12
Thanksgiving Recess Begins	Wednesday	November 23
Instruction Resumes	Monday	November 28
Last Day of Classes	Friday	December 2
Study Period	Saturday-Tuesday	December 3-6
Scheduled Exams	Wednesday-Thursday	December 7-15

What an Amended Calendar Might Look Like		
Residence Halls Open	Friday	August 19
First Day of Classes	Tuesday	August 23
Labor Day—no classes	Monday	September 5
Fall Break	Monday-Tuesday	October 10-11
Indigenous Peoples Day	Monday	October 10
Veteran’s Day—classes held	Friday	November 11
Thanksgiving Break	Wednesday-Friday	November 23-25
Last Day of Classes	Friday	December 2
Study Period	Saturday-Tuesday	December 3-6
Scheduled Exams	Wednesday-Thursday	December 7-15

Note that there is an indication of Veteran’s Day on the amended calendar.

Appendix 5 Ballot for Ranking the Three Calendars

We recommend that the Faculty Senate and the Assemblies communicate their calendar preferences to the Provost by having each of their members rank the three possibilities. Of course, those bodies can pass resolutions that provide further comment for the Provost.

The ballot should be structured as follows:

Please provide a strict ordering of the following calendar frameworks. No ties.			
1 = favorite 2 = next-to-favorite 3 = least favorite			
1	2	3	<p>Current Calendar Framework</p> <p>It features a 3-day orientation, a 2-day October break, a 3-day Thanksgiving break, 5 class days after Thanksgiving, a 2-day February break, a 5-day spring break, a 13-day finals period with 8 exam days, and 4 days between the last exam day and Commencement. Commencement is held on Memorial Day Weekend.</p>
1	2	3	<p>Modified Current Calendar Framework</p> <p>Similar to the Current Calendar except that it has a 5-day orientation, 7 class days after Thanksgiving, repositioned spring-semester breaks, and an 11-day finals period with 7 exam days. The summer break is 5 days longer and the between-semester break is 5 days shorter. In the Spring semester there are 7 days between the last day of exams and Commencement. Commencement is held on Memorial Day Weekend.</p>
1	2	3	<p>Early Commencement Calendar Framework</p> <p>Similar to the Current Calendar except that it has a 5-day orientation, 7 class days after Thanksgiving, a single 5-day break in the spring semester, and an 11-day finals period with 7 exam days. The summer break is 15 days longer and the between-semester break is 10 days shorter. Commencement is held two weeks before Memorial Day Weekend.</p>