

Report from the Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Special Subcommittee for Exploring the Feasibility of a January Term at Shepherd University

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Background

Shepherd currently has an academic year broken into three sessions, fall, winter, and summer. The summer session is further subdivided into two sub-sessions, summer A and summer B. Both the fall and spring sessions are 16 weeks in length. The fall session is 67 instructional days and 5 exam days. Classes are not held on Labor Day, a Thursday and Friday near the mid-point of the session referred to as Fall Break, and the week of Thanksgiving. The spring session is 69 instructional days and 5 exam days. Classes are not held on Martin Luther King Jr. Day and the week of Spring Recess, which occurs near the middle of March. Commencement is held a week following the conclusion of spring session exams. The summer session is composed of a total of 44 instructional days split equally into two approximately 5 week sub-sessions that are each 22 days in length.

Recent academic calendars have only allotted approximately 3 weeks between the conclusion of the fall session and the spring session and have concluded the spring session around May 1st. The faculty has voiced a desire to explore extending the time between the fall and spring session to at least 4 weeks in order to enable more time for professional development and course preparation. During the February 19, 2018 session of the Faculty Senate, the committee members and others suggested the University explore implementing a January term (J-term) to achieve the desired gap between fall and spring semester. A J-term may also enhance academic opportunities for students and curricular options for academic programs, and it may provide additional revenue to the institution and/or cost-reductions in the form of reduced winter utility costs due to starting the spring semester later.

Models of January/Winter Terms at Other Institutions

It is not unusual for institutions of higher learning with missions like Shepherd University's to have January/Winter terms. The following gives examples of two models for J-term classes used at similar institutions, 1) an exclusively online model and 2) a model that mixes online and in-person/hybrid courses.

Shippensburg University (Online Only):

Shippensburg has a 5 week J-Term. Their 2017-2018 academic calendar is as follows:

- Fall 2017: August 23 – Dec 8, with exams ending Dec 15. They have a fall break and their Thanksgiving break was only Wed – Friday.
- J-Term: December 18 – January 19.
- Spring 2018: January 22 – May 4, final exams end May 11.

- Summer 2018: May 21 – Aug 10 (two summer sessions)

Eastern Connecticut State University (Online and In-Person):

Eastern Connecticut is a COPLAC school. Most of their J-term courses are 3 weeks long and the in-class courses meet Mon – Fri for 3 hours 45 minutes. They also offer in-person intensive 2 week courses that meet Mon – Fri from 9 am – 4:15 pm. Their 2017-2018 academic calendar is as follows:

- Fall 2017: August 29 – December 9, exams ending December 17. They do not have a fall break and their Thanksgiving break was only Wed – Friday.
- J-Term: December 26 (both online and in-class) – January 12
- Spring 2018: January 16 – May 5, final exams end May 13
- Summer 2018: June 1 – August 16 (they have three overlapping summer sessions)

Johnson State College (Online, In-Person, and Hybrid)

Johnson State College is a COPLAC school. This institution considers the J-term courses part of the spring semester in terms of financial aid. Most of their J-term courses are 3 weeks long and are online or in-class or hybrid. The in-class courses meet a variety of times depending on credit hours. They have special topics courses that are 1-2 credits and traditional 3 credit courses. Their 2017 – 18 academic calendar is as follows:

- Fall 2017: August 28 – December 15 (they have 2 week-long breaks in the fall semester)
- J-Term:
- Spring 2018: January 22 – May 11 (they have 2 week-long breaks in the spring semester)
- Summer 2019: May 22 – August 16 (two summer sessions). Note this is 2019 because they are merging with another university in summer 2018 and don't appear to offer any classes that summer.

A Model for J-Term at Shepherd University

The following explores how a hypothetical 4-week J-term at Shepherd University would affect the academic calendar and what the day-to-day class schedule of a 3-credit J-term course would look like. Currently at Shepherd, classes are in session or exams are being administered a total of 42 weeks out of the year. So, at first glance there appears to be ample time to accommodate a 4-week J-Term. However, this would require reshuffling existing academic sessions. The following shows how the 2019-2020 academic calendar could be modified to include a J-term:

Current 2019-2020 Academic Calendar:

- Summer A: May 21 – June 20 (approx. 5 weeks)
- Summer B: July 8 – August 6 (approx. 5 weeks)
- Fall: August 26 – December 13 (16 weeks)

- Spring: January 13 – May 1 (16 weeks)
- Commencement: May 9 (1 week following the conclusion of the spring session)

Hypothetical 2019-2020 Academic Calendar:

- Summer A: June 12 (Wednesday) - July 12 (approx. 5 wks., 22 instructional days)
- Summer B: July 22 – August 20 (approx. 5 wks., 22 instructional days)
- Fall Term: - September 3 (Tuesday) – December 20 (16 wks., 67 instructional days, 5 exam days)
- January Term: January 6 – January 31 (4 wks., 19 instructional days)
- Spring: February 10 – May 29 (16 wks., 67-69 instructional days, 5 exam days)
- Commencement: June 6 (1 wk. following the conclusion of spring session)

This hypothetical schedule includes at least a week buffer between each session to allow for grades to be posted. There are two weeks between the conclusion of the fall session and the beginning of J-term coinciding with the winter holidays.

A standard 3-credit course during the fall or spring sessions meets for 40 50-minute classes for a total of 33 hours and 20 minutes of instructional time. Compressing this instructional time into a 4-week J-term would suggest a typical 3 credit course would meet 125 minutes a day, 4-days per week, over the 4-week period. If the J-term was further compressed to 3-weeks this would require a typical 3 credit course to meet approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes a day, 4-days a week. Of course, a 4-credit lab or studio course would require additional meeting time.

Next Steps: Exploring Our Goals

During our initial discussion in the faculty senate, the conversation veered into discussions about the purpose of a J-term, what classes would be offered, when would classes be scheduled, and whether a J-term is even appropriate for Shepherd to consider. The members of this sub-committee agree that we need to further explore and prioritize our goals/objectives regarding implementing a J-term before questions like these can be answered. These goals/objectives will drive the formulation of the model used should Shepherd pursue a J-term. The following summarizes some possible goals/objectives for a Shepherd J-term:

- We aim to generate revenue.
- We aim to offer introductory and core curriculum courses to facilitate progress toward degree completion.
- We aim to offer study away/abroad courses, service learning courses, and/or special topics courses to add value to academic programs and the Shepherd learning experience.
- We aim to jumpstart capstone courses and projects for the spring semester.

- We aim to increase retention by using J-term to re-offer courses needed for students to stay on rotation, or to get ahead.
- We aim to reduce course sizes during the spring and fall semesters.
- We aim to reduce credit-hours carried by students during the spring and fall semesters.
- We aim to require all students to take at least one J-term.

As we explore our goals/objectives for a J-term at Shepherd, it is necessary to consider the following implications:

- In-person classroom delivery will require on-campus housing and dining services. Of course, these auxiliary services are also potential sources of revenue.
- If we offer core curriculum courses, we will most likely have more robust enrollment during J-term than if we offer upper-division, special topics, study away/abroad, or service-learning courses. But this will also potentially decrease the need for many sections of core curriculum courses during the fall and spring semesters.
- If our priority is to offer more specialized, upper-division courses for reasons articulated by the departments wanting to offer them, lower enrollment will reflect this choice. Of course, the reasons for offering each type of course differ. These need to be considered before scheduling the classes so that we do not use only one factor (i.e. enrollment size) as the primary indicator of success.
- The types of courses/opportunities we wish to offer may dictate if J-term needs to be a 3-week, 4-week, or 5-week term.
- If a J-term is worked into the four-year schedule of a degree, overall institutional enrollment may be impacted positively or negatively.
- If one enrolls in more than one J-term, one could potentially graduate early.
- If one or more J-terms is required, it may offer flexibility students do not have at present.

Next Steps: Getting Feedback and Input from Stakeholders

The subcommittee recommends that the Senate distribute this document to campus stakeholders with the goal of soliciting feedback and input. This feedback and input should be brought back to the Senate as part of our future deliberation on this topic. Campus stakeholders include:

- The Office of the Registrar
 - How would a compressed timeframe between academic sessions affect posting grades, certifying degrees, etc.?

- The Office of Financial Aid
 - How will students pay for J-term? Is it treated just like a course during a summer session or is one J-term course built into the price of four years of tuition?
- Academic Affairs
 - How would a J-term course figure into faculty workload? Will faculty be paid at the adjunct rate like they current do for teaching a course during a summer sessions?
 - How many students will be needed for a J-term course to “make”? Will it be 5 or more like a summer session course?
- The Calendar Committee
- Academic Departments
 - How would each department rank the goals/objectives outlined above? Are there any other goals/objectives that need to be considered? How would each academic program choose to use a J-term?
- Residence Life
 - How would housing be provided for students during J-term?
- Student Affairs
 - How will student activities be impacted by a J-term?
 - How will disability support services and health services be provided during J-term?
- Dining Services
 - What will be the dining options during a J-term?

Respectfully Submitted By: Jeff Groff, Julia Sandy, and Robert Tudor