

**Heard, Julia**

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**From:** Office of the MSU Provost <provost@montana.edu>  
**Sent:** Monday, July 19, 2021 8:17 AM  
**Subject:** Updates to the Final Week schedule for Academic Year 2021-22



Office of the Provost

Dear Colleagues,

As we look forward to the start of fall semester on Aug. 25, I'm pleased to announce that Final Week for fall and spring semester will more closely resemble a pre-pandemic end of the semester. As described in this message, the schedule for Final Week will be fine-tuned based on lessons learned during the previous academic year 20-21 (AY20-21) and feedback we received from students, faculty and department heads.

### **Final Week Schedule**

The last day of regularly scheduled classes for fall semester 2021 will be Friday, Dec. 10. Final Week will be Dec. 13-16 and will consist of a modified two-hour block schedule, which can be found at: <https://www.montana.edu/registrar/Schedules.html>

This block schedule allows 110-minute periods for summative assessment, spreads final meeting periods for students over the week to minimize schedule conflicts and back-to-back exams, and allows for final group meeting periods for high-enrollment, multi-section courses. The updated schedule coincides more closely with the regular class schedule to reduce impacts to students who work or have childcare needs. Posting the Final Week schedule prior to the start of the semester should help minimize scheduling conflicts. Fall and spring semesters will have similar Final Week scenarios.

### **Background**

Montana State University employed an altered final week schedule in AY20-21 because of social distancing requirements and other COVID related restrictions. Faculty responded with creative adaptations. Additionally, the MSU Center for Faculty Excellence's resources and workshops on best practices inspired reflection and discussions about improvements to assessing student learning.

In addition to invoking new approaches for evaluating student learning, we heard from many of you that:

- A longer block of time (more than 50 minutes) is helpful in some courses to facilitate a summative assessment, which could be an exam, student presentations, in-depth class discussion or other pedagogically related activity.

- Students experienced a substantial stacking of workload at the front of the final week, leading to increased stress and poorer performance.
- Additional faculty/staff effort was required in multi-section courses to create multiple versions of exams.
- The frequency of exams on the last day of Final Week (Friday) should be minimized.

Based on your feedback, a working group was formed to investigate opportunities for improvement. The working group recommended a return to the previous model consisting of 110-minute time blocks for each course section and to schedule meeting times over a 4-day-long Final Week, rather than the previous 5-day schedule.

### University Policy

The long-standing university [final exam policies](#) still apply for Final Week, including:

- **The Final Week period is considered instructional time and it is expected that instructional use is made of this period** (excluding one-credit courses). Acceptable uses include: examinations or other summative assessments, presentations, final discussions, final critiques, etc.
- Except for one-credit courses, final examinations are scheduled by the Registrar and may not be rescheduled nor given prior to the Final Week. Final examinations in one-credit courses, if given, are administered during regular class periods.
- A student who has three or more final examinations in any one day or an exam schedule that exceeds five consecutive hours of examination should first contact the instructors of the courses to see if one exam can be rescheduled. If this rescheduling cannot be resolved, then the student should contact the assistant dean of his or her college at least one week before the beginning of Final Week to assist in resolving the conflict.

**The University expects all instructors to meet with their classes during Final Week according to the published schedule.** This Final Week time is counted in our overall instructional requirements. How to best use that time is the instructor's prerogative; however, cancelling or not meeting class is a violation of University policy and has broader implications with accreditation and federal requirements.

### Conclusion

We listened to your suggestions and ideas for improving the schedule of the last week of classes and these changes to Final Week are a result of that feedback. We trust that the return of Final Week and the extended meeting times will support your efforts in creating high-quality learning opportunities for all our students.

I appreciate our opportunities to collaborate on better ways of doing our work in a spirit of continuous improvement. Take care and see you in August!

Best regards,



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