

From: [President Waded Cruzado](#)
Subject: New Dates for 2020-21 Academic Year
Date: Friday, May 15, 2020 9:13:32 AM



Dear MSU Community,

Yesterday, Montana Commissioner of Higher Education Clayton Christian provided additional guidance for a healthy [return to campus for the Fall 2020 Semester](#). In order to help reduce the risk of infection by the COVID-19 virus, campuses are encouraged to plan and design an academic calendar that allows for the completion of the fall semester by Wednesday, Nov. 25.

We are proud of the fact that the state of Montana has implemented successfully a number of executive directives that have resulted in one of the lowest rates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the nation. At Montana State University, we want to continue doing our best job in terms of mitigation while balancing the need to reestablish full academic functions for the benefit of our students, faculty and staff. Therefore, in adopting these adjustments to the academic calendar, we want to share this information with you as soon as possible so that you can plan accordingly in the next 90 days.

In the interest of protecting the safety of our constituents and providing students with a top-quality education, the first day of classes for the fall semester will be **Monday, Aug. 17**.

Starting two weeks earlier gives the campus optimal conditions: taking advantage of a period of expected lower case rates as well as excellent weather, which positions us better to complete the academic work of the semester in its entirety. Given the amount of planning that has been conducted already, Montana State will be prepared to implement extensive mitigation plans, including education and hygiene measures, screening and, when necessary, quarantine plans for students who live in campus residence halls. Montana State University is also in coordination with city, county and state public health entities to identify effective protocols for testing and screening.

Following the Commissioner's guidance, this also means the Fall Semester will end earlier. Final exams — the last day of the semester — will be concluded on **Wednesday, Nov. 25**, the day before Thanksgiving.

So that graduates can spend Thanksgiving with their families — and to facilitate access to air travel accommodations for loved ones who live out of state — Montana State University has tentatively marked **Sunday, Nov. 22**, as the date for our Winter Commencement celebration, dependent of course upon public health considerations at that time. As has been the case since our foundation 127 years ago, graduating seniors will need to complete the necessary academic

requirements in order to obtain their degrees, but they will be able to participate, in this case, in the Winter Commencement Ceremony.

In addition to the public health benefits outlined above, the adjusted dates eliminate the need for students, faculty and staff travel between the Thanksgiving holiday and the conclusion of the semester. With these new dates, the campus will wrap up the semester on **Wednesday, Nov. 25**, for a winter break that will last until the start of Spring Semester 2021 on **Monday, Jan. 11, 2021**.

We are excited to share that this alternative also opens the additional possibility of offering a winter session (preliminarily, we are calling it the "MSU Snow-semester") with select online courses students need to stay on track, catch up or simply take advantage of the extended winter break. Please stay tuned for specific information in the very near future.

According to public health officials, this plan will help reduce campus and community density — and therefore virus transmission — during the typical late fall and early winter influenza season. It is another step forward in keeping the safety of our students, faculty and staff as our paramount priority while also fulfilling the mission of our land-grant university.

To summarize, the important dates mentioned in this memo for the 2020-21 Academic Calendar:

- **Monday, Aug. 17, 2020** - First Day of Classes for the Fall Semester
- **Wednesday, Nov. 25, 2020** - Last Day of Classes for the Fall Semester
- **Sunday, Nov. 22, 2020** - Fall Commencement Ceremony
- **Monday, Jan. 11, 2021** - First Day of Classes for the Spring Semester

The decisions described in this message were not made lightly and are based on public health guidelines and protocols to mitigate the risk of infection. These decisions were made in consultation with, and with the endorsement of, Faculty Senate Leadership, and included input from the [Academic Continuity Task Force](#), the [University Reconstitution Committee](#) and reviewed by the university executive leadership as well as the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

Additionally, we consulted with the Bozeman School District, the Gallatin City-County Health Department, ASMSU leadership and the university's own health care professionals. We also took into consideration feedback from students and faculty this spring semester that finding a safe way to provide a quality, on-campus, in-person education was preferred, when possible. I know our students miss us and we certainly miss our students.

We recognize that these decisions might impact some of your previous plans. Please know those disruptions are not lost on us, and we sincerely appreciate your flexibility and collaboration. With the COVID-19 situation, we have learned to choose not between a good and a bad option, but rather between options that will afford the best long-term benefits for the largest number of people in our communities.

I acknowledge that, given the promptness of this communication, we all have questions and situations to address. We will follow up with more pertinent information in coming weeks, but for now, I wanted to ensure that you received this information, as well as my heartfelt gratitude, as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Waded Cruzado



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President, Montana State University

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