

Academic Calendar FAQs

1. Who sets the academic calendar?

The Office of the Registrar develops the academic calendar, which is then reviewed and approved by the Committee on Educational Policies and Planning (CEPP).

2. What criteria are used to set the academic calendar? Why is the academic calendar different across years?

The main force shaping the academic calendar is the state requirement for minimum contact hours. New York State requires a minimum of 2250 minutes for a 3-credit class. We target 39 MWF meetings and 27 TR/MW/WF meetings (study days within the term can count), which allows for some flexibility for class cancellations or unexpected snow days.

- $39 * 55 \text{ minutes} = 2145 \text{ minutes} + 180 \text{ minutes for exams} \Rightarrow 2325 \text{ minutes}$
- $27 * 80 \text{ minutes} = 2160 + 180 \text{ minutes for exams} \Rightarrow 2340 \text{ minutes}$

For the fall semester, classes begin on the Wednesday following Labor Day, and there are no classes Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of Thanksgiving week. We try to schedule final exams so that students can leave campus before the holiday travel rush.

For the spring semester, the first day of classes is usually the last full week of January. There are no classes on MLK Day if it falls within the term, and spring break is generally the 8th week of the term.

While the criteria for the academic calendar do not tend to change year to year, the academic calendars themselves will vary. This is largely due to when Labor Day falls and when Saratoga's track season ends. Because of the demands that track season puts on accommodations in our immediate area, we can't start our semester until the season ends. This is a scheduling limitation unique to our college, and it has important effects on the shape of our calendar.

3. Why do we sometimes have four study days at the end of the term and other times have three study days?

We always try to schedule two study days plus two additional weekend study days. However, due to the state requirements outlined above, there are semesters where we need to reduce the study days by one to ensure contact hour requirements are met.

4. Why can't we have a week-long Thanksgiving break?

In the past, several CEPP committees have explored possibilities for providing a week-long fall break over Thanksgiving week. In short, the academic calendar is currently at the minimum number of contact hours required by New York State; there is no "fat" to cut. Without moving the start or end dates, the full week break would only be possible in some years; some academic years would not allow for this possibility at all. It has been CEPP's consistent

position that any possible fall break should be available every year, to avoid disruption and confusion.

5. Are you sure? Why can't we start earlier? Or end later? Or...something?

A number of possible modifications to the fall semester schedule have been proposed. While any of these changes might allow for a week-long break, they would each create other problems. In the interest of thoroughness, some of the perennial contenders (and the problems associated with them) are detailed below:

a) *Moving the academic calendar start date up (e.g., to begin the fall semester one week earlier than we currently do).* Beginning any earlier than we currently do would bring our schedule into conflict with Saratoga's track season. During the racing season, rental housing and hotel accommodation in Saratoga is less readily available and much more expensive. Thus, an earlier start date would severely limit student, staff, faculty, and family accommodation options at the start of the semester.

b) *Moving the academic calendar end date back (i.e., ending later in December than we currently do).*

On the other end of fall semester, the increased expense of end-of-year travel presents serious obstacles to extending the schedule further into December. In some years, the conflict between the exam schedules and the holidays would lead to students travelling home on the 23rd and the 24th of December, at much greater expense. CEPP is persuaded that this disruption would be worse than the one we currently experience around Thanksgiving.

c) *Dropping two study days from the fall calendar in exchange for vacation days on the Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week.*

There are multiple obstacles to this approach. Students have made it clear to CEPP that they value all of the study days, and that taking even some of them away would have a negative impact on their well-being and academic success. Furthermore, the Monday mid-semester study day counts toward our total state-mandated contact hours, and therefore cannot be swapped for a Thanksgiving week vacation day. End-of-semester weekday study days, in contrast, could be replaced with vacation days. But because they often fall on Thursday and Friday, deleting them from the schedule would not allow us to turn the Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week into vacation days.

d) *Lengthening each class meeting (e.g., moving from 55 to 60 minute class periods).*

This change would allow us to squeeze more contact hours into the same number of class meetings. Cumulatively, however, even small additions would reduce the number of class timeslots available in a day. This would make it impossible to find classroom space for all of our courses.

e) *Altering our academic calendar in a more fundamental way, such as holding final exams over the weekend, switching to trimesters, or moving the fall final examination period into January.*

These changes could allow for consistent week-long Thanksgiving breaks. However, each would bring an additional set of challenges. CEPP, in its conversation with stakeholders, has not detected much appetite for these more drastic solutions, despite understandable ongoing frustration with the absence of a Thanksgiving break.

6. What about a remote option for the Thanksgiving week?

In 2022-2023, CEPP considered a remote learning mandate for the Thanksgiving week. The intent was to provide flexibility in student and faculty travel schedules without sacrificing instructional time. To explore this possibility, the committee reached out to several groups across campus for feedback, including department chairs and program directors. A total of 25 chairs and program directors responded to our request for feedback. The proposal was not popular. While respondents expressed a range of opinions on the remote learning mandate, the large majority expressed either strong opposition, moderate opposition, or neutrality towards this option. Those opposed to the remote learning mandate cited serious concerns about curriculum delivery and student learning.

CEPP also received input from the Office of the Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Affairs, the Student Government Association, the Information Technology Department, and the Registrar's Office. This review highlighted both potential pros (e.g., mitigating travel costs, which disproportionately impact low-income students), and remaining questions (e.g., lack of information regarding the potential impact on board and lodging fees, impact on international students and Residential Life).

After a thorough review, CEPP has decided that the remote learning option does not have sufficient support to be practicable.

7. What are the add/drop deadlines?

The add/drop deadlines are reviewed and approved by the Committee on Academic Standing and are listed on the Academic Calendar. A detailed add/drop calendar is also available on the [Registrar's website](#). The initial add deadline is set to three days from the start of classes (includes the weekend if it falls on a Friday). Students are still allowed to enroll for another week but approval from the instructor is required to ensure everyone is on the same page and the student understands what they need to do to get caught up with the rest of the class.

8. Why are grades due when they are? Why are senior grades due before finals are finished in the spring?

We strive to give faculty the appropriate time to assess all students fairly. Senior grades are due early because Skidmore distributes diplomas at graduation and the timeline to process degree completions and honors is very tight.

9. Why is the final exam schedule not set sooner?

Because the Registrar's Office assigns final exam times based on the regular meeting time and patterns of enrollment across courses, the final exam schedule cannot be developed until after course enrollments have settled in Aug (for fall) or January (for spring).

10. Why do we no longer have Yom Kippur off? How do we decide what religious holidays are accounted for on the Academic Calendar?

In consultation with the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, CEPP decided to no longer list religious holidays on the Academic Calendar and to move instead towards a more flexible and inclusive policy. Under this policy, students are allowed to make up academic work without penalty if religious observance results in absence from class. More information regarding this policy can be found on the [Religious and Spiritual Life website](#).

11. Who can I go to for more information?

For questions about the Academic Calendar, please contact the Registrar (registrar@skidmore.edu) or the current chair of CEPP, listed here:
<https://www.skidmore.edu/cepp/membership/index.php>