

**Faculty Senate Winter session Task Force  
Final Report  
March 5, 2019**

**Purpose of Winter Session**

As originally conceived, winter session was created to address critical shortages in students access for (a) “bottleneck courses” required for general education or program rotations, but with insufficient sections or scheduling conflicts during regular or summer terms; and (b) prerequisite courses that large numbers of students failed or needed for subsequent enrollments. In addition, there was an expectation that the availability of winter session courses would provide additional flexibility in scheduling to meet the university goal of four-year graduation (total credit hours, minimum GPA, multi-semester or multi-year course rotations).

Has the purpose of winter session evolved into something different? The proportion of upper-level courses in relation to lower-level courses increased from 2011 to 2014, but has remained nearly constant since (see Table 1). Some courses have been added to winter session that are not offered in the regular spring term (UI322 in spring 2014; UI460 in spring 2014, 2016 and 2017). Whether these are “bottleneck courses” or prerequisites for subsequent courses is difficult to determine systematically.

There is no easy way to operationalize “bottleneck” simply in terms of enrollment or student credit hour generation. It is simple to determine if a course has prerequisites, but whether it is a prerequisite for subsequent courses requires a laborious manual course by course search through the entire catalog. Perhaps instead of trying to create a universal standard descriptor, it would make more sense to look at this course by course to establish that any given course under consideration is a critical pre-requisite for subsequent courses in a subject or program rotation. This would shift the onus of justification from a definitional standard to a course proposal justification

Table 1

*Proportion of lower- and upper-level courses in spring term and winter session*

	Spring Term		Winter Session	
	N	%	N	%
<b>201120</b>				
Lower	1295	43.30%	8	72.73%
Upper	1696	56.70%	3	27.27%
<b>201220</b>				
Lower	1306	42.93%	15	68.18%
Upper	1736	57.07%	7	31.82%
<b>201320</b>				
Lower	1315	44.23%	29	64.44%
Upper	1658	55.77%	16	35.56%
<b>201420</b>				
Lower	1342	44.16%	30	58.82%
Upper	1697	55.84%	21	41.18%
<b>201520</b>				

Lower	1370	44.68%	34	53.97%
Upper	1696	55.32%	29	46.03%
<b>201620</b>				
Lower	1311	42.62%	32	54.24%
Upper	1765	57.38%	27	45.76%
<b>201720</b>				
Lower	1296	44.63%	34	54.84%
Upper	1608	55.37%	28	45.16%
<b>201820</b>				
Lower	1317	44.66%	33	55.93%
Upper	1632	55.34%	26	44.07%

A key question regarding the continuation of winter session as a convenience to provide flexibility in student enrollment options is whether this creates new enrollments or merely displaces existing enrollments from regular fall and spring terms. New enrollments generate additional revenue and FTE, if sufficient numbers are enrolled in a section to cover costs. Shifting enrollments not only do not generate additional revenue, they create a new net cost, unless they are counted in regular term faculty load.

Table 2

*Average undergraduate credit load with and without winter session enrollment*

<b>Average UG Credit Load</b>		
	<b>Spring (Excl. INT)</b>	<b>Preceding Fall</b>
201120		
No INT	12.35	13.11
INT	12.39	13.95
201220		
No INT	12.43	13.08
INT	12.59	13.80
201320		
No INT	12.23	12.94
INT	12.31	13.73
201420		
No INT	12.00	12.71
INT	12.54	13.74
201520		
No INT	11.97	12.67
INT	12.7	13.93
201620		
No INT	11.78	12.54
INT	12.43	13.78
201720		
No INT	11.72	12.45

INT	12.40	13.74
201820		
No INT	11.89	12.54
INT	12.63	13.87

Average undergraduate credit load indicates that students who participate in winter session on average take more courses in both spring and fall than students who do not participate in winter session. However, on average, increases in enrollment associated with winter session do not benefit fall and spring terms equally. Students have, on average, higher fall enrollments than spring enrollments for every year that winter session has been offered. Whether this is a differential association constitutes a drain on spring enrollment is difficult to say. There could be any number of interactions between fall and spring enrollment driving this difference, and in any case, both terms appear to benefit, although to differing degrees.

It has been suggested that an added benefit of the flexibility of winter session scheduling is to shift student class load to ease stress in spring semester. However, winter session undergraduate students attempt, on average, more credit hours in the regular spring session than undergraduates who do not attempt a winter session course. Only about 40% of undergraduates who do not enroll in winter session attempt 15 or more credit hours in spring semester. Combining spring term and winter session, over 70% of undergraduates who enroll in winter session attempt 15 or more credit hours. Whether winter session students would shift the additional credit hours to the regular spring semester or other alternatives (summer) is difficult to answer. For some students, scholarship requirements might limit their alternatives.

The question of flexibility and conveniences applies to faculty as well, as they consider whether to offer a course in winter session. Initially, winter session was promoted as an opportunity to increase earnings off-salary following the summer compensation plan. Alternatively, faculty were offered an option of reduced teaching assignments during the spring semester as compensation. If a faculty member opted for both winter session and a full teaching assignment during spring with the additional credit hours would be added as “overload” in the spring semester. Some departments followed the summer salary model, while others considered winter session to be “in-load,” with any excess credit hours counted as overload. This disparity creates substantial differences in salary, which, in turn has a large effect on the cost of winter session. (This will be discussed later in this report).

### **Progress/Evaluation**

In 2011, there were 11 winter session classes. This doubled in 2012, and has expanded to 59 in 2018. The number of unique winter session students increased rapidly from 278 in 2011 to 749 in 2012, to 1209 in 2013. For the last four years, however, the student enrollment for winter session has basically levelled off, peaking in 2016 and slowly declining since.

Table 3

#### *Winter session enrollment, 2011-2018*

Term	Unique Students	% Change YoY
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	Winter Session	
201120	278	
201220	749	169.4%
201320	1209	61.4%
201420	1394	15.3%
201520	1642	17.8%
201620	1796	9.4%
201720	1720	-4.2%
201820	1638	-4.8%

Again, it is important to examine how much of this growth represents displacement from regular term classes. Seven courses have been offered every year both in winter session and the following spring semester: CF102, FE200, FN235, HL120, PS103, UI300, and UI400 (See Table 4). Four of the seven courses have a negative correlation, meaning that as winter session enrollment increased spring semester enrollment decreased. Only one course, HL120, had a strong negative correlation while FN235 has a weak negative correlation. Negative correlation does not necessarily mean the winter session caused drops in regular semester enrollment for these courses. In fact, FE200 showed a strong positive correlation. It may be, for example, that curriculum changes, unaccounted for here, may be the larger factor at play.

Table 4

*Correlation between winter session and spring enrollments, 2011-2018*

Course	Correlation Coefficient
CF102	-0.35
FE200	0.84
FN235	-0.17
HL120	-0.75
PS103	0.31
UI300	0.24
UI400	-0.42

Before any decision should be made to reduce or discontinue winter session, it is also important to determine if courses with high enrollment in winter session could be accommodated in spring and fall semesters without overloading existing sections in the regular term. Table 5 shows the six courses with the largest enrollment in winter session 2018 (December 2017). It seems the answer is course-dependent. Just looking at 2017-2018 PS103, FE200, FN235, and LI220 may have capacity in either fall or spring. However, HL113 and MG470 do not. If HL113 and MG470, for example, were not offered in winter session, additional sections would need to be added to regular fall or spring terms to accommodate the shift in enrollments.

Table 5

*Enrollment in six largest winter session courses compared to fall and spring semesters*

Course	201820 Winter Session Sections	201820 Winter Session Enrollment	201820 Winter Session Students Per Section	Fall 17 Sections	Fall 17 Enrollment	Fall 17 Students Per Section	Spring 18 Sections	Spring 18 Enrollment	Spring 18 Students Per Section
PS103	2	78	39.00	40	925	23.13	34	820	24.11
FE200	1	66	66.00	15	301	20.07	13	200	15.38
HL113	1	56	56.00	1	28	28.00	1	29	29.00
MG470	1	55	55.00	1	32	32.00	1	33	33.00
FN235	1	54	54.00	27	235	8.70	23	235	10.22
LI220	2	53	26.50	15	307	20.47	12	243	20.25

There is also an obligation to online-only programs, which may or may not have built a dependence on winter session enrollment into course rotations. From the beginning, a small, but significant number of winter session enrollments have been in online programs (Table 6).

Table 6

*Percentage of winter session students in online programs*

Winter Session Unique Student Count			
Term	Count	Online Program Count	% of Winter Session Students in Online Program
201120	278	15	5.4%
201220	749	38	5.1%
201320	1209	90	7.4%
201420	1394	110	7.9%
201520	1642	132	8.0%
201620	1796	173	9.6%
201720	1720	180	10.5%
201820	1638	158	9.6%

Total annual enrollment increased by small increments from 2011 to 2015, but for the last four years has been steadily declining by 1.0 to 2.2% (See Table 7). The growth and subsequent decline in winter session enrollment also increased from 2011 to 2015, by much larger margins, but far more dramatically at first. This growth momentum continued in 2016, although total enrollment had begun to decline. Since 2016, winter-session has tracked the overall enrollment decline, but at more than double the overall decline rate. Online-only enrollments have shown consistently robust growth in both regular

spring semesters and winter sessions, only beginning to falter in winter session, but not in regular spring semesters, in the last two years.

Table 7

*Enrollment and percent annual change, 2011-2018\** Excludes CGP students

Term	Unique Students Regular Spring Term	% Change YoY	Online Program Regular Term	% Change YoY	Unique Students Winter Session	% Change YoY	Online Program Winter Session	% Change YoY
201120	10428		331		278		15	
201220	10611	1.8%	399	20.5%	749	169.4%	38	153.3%
201320	10741	1.2%	532	33.3%	1209	61.4%	90	136.8%
201420	10940	1.9%	667	25.4%	1394	15.3%	110	22.2%
201520	10994	0.5%	806	20.8%	1642	17.8%	132	20.0%
201620	10889	-1.0%	884	9.7%	1796	9.4%	173	31.1%
201720	10720	-1.6%	1114	26.0%	1720	-4.2%	180	4.0%
201820	10480	-2.2%	1262	13.3%	1638	-4.8%	158	-12.2%

\*Excludes CGP students and GR609-only students. Regular spring term excludes students only found in winter session.

Gross revenues do exceed direct, short-term costs and do support the university as a whole, but this is complicated by considerations such as minimum enrollment standards that differ from those in effect in the regular term, variable faculty compensation under the summer salary model, and the question of whether faculty salary should be “in-load,” overload, or part-time adjunct pay, as well as (minimal) funding for technology infrastructure and personnel.

Gross revenue per credit hour generated is determined by the tuition rate, which is currently \$206.10 per credit hour. Following the summer salary model, faculty costs per credit hour generated vary based on the faculty member’s base salary and the number of students enrolled in the class. Salaries range from \$1,054 to \$3,217 per credit hour plus benefits (if not considered as part of spring semester). The average salary per credit hour is \$1,988 plus benefits. The median salary per credit hour is \$1,895.

For a three hour class, faculty costs range from \$3162.45 to \$9655.77 base pay. Credit hours generated range from 36 to 105 per three hours compensated. An average three hour class, with 28 students, generated 85 credit hours with an average compensation of \$120.86 per credit hour. At a tuition rate of \$206.10 per credit hour, this yields an average gross “profit” of \$85.24 per credit hour.

If a winter session course were included in spring load (such as the math department does), or if current fall/spring offerings were able to absorb the enrollments from winter session, there would be no additional costs. If additional sections were necessary in fall or spring to accommodate increased enrollments at the part-time/overload rates, there would be additional costs, but (depending on faculty base pay) greatly reduced compared to the summer salary model. The current rate for a PhD adjunct is \$1,014 plus benefits. For a Masters plus 30 is \$922 plus benefits. Tech support costs are minimal for

winter session as it is offered now, because many of the additional hours and resources are staffed by student employees. This would amount to between \$1,500 and \$2,000.

If winter session were retained with a reduction in the number of courses, the question arises of whether there is a minimum number of classes in order to remain financially viable. One measure of viability would be a gross calculation of gross revenue less direct costs. A realistic assessment it may be more about the combination of the correct course offerings and the minimum class enrollments than number of sections. Current minimum class enrollments of 10 and 12 do not align with fall and spring minimums. Also courses are allowed to be offered at a pro-rated schedule below this. Considering that some of the higher compensated faculty must have 20 students to “break even,” we may need to consider the minimum enrollments allowed for a course to be offered in winter session

### **Prognosis – Where do we go from here?**

There are qualitative limitations that must at least be acknowledged, although they may be difficult to quantify and assignment of value will be largely subjective. The time frame of winter session presents several basic obstacles. One must wonder, whether a 3 ½ week net time frame (considering 10-12 days university is shut down for holidays) is sufficient to “cover” a full semester course. Other institutions, including the University of South Florida and University of Louisville, have reported success with a 3-week winter session (<http://louisville.edu/wintersession>). Of course, it is difficult to tell without more data how that would or would not transfer to our own situation.

Participation in winter session requires a commitment to forgo the full benefits of vacation time that students and faculty need in order to decompress between semesters, complete with competing family and travel obligations. There have also been reports of frustration with limited tech support while the university is down or running on reduced hours.

Additionally, there is the very real question of whether it is reasonable to expect that a student who failed a course in a 16-week semester would be able to pass the same course in 3 ½ weeks. There is the corollary question of whether academic rigor, or breadth and depth of content is compromised. There have been persistent suspicions and anecdotal reports of grade inflation or “watering down coursework.” Setting aside such biased labels, do any winter session courses show notable variations in grade distribution when compared to the same courses offered in regular sessions – including an analysis of courses that have lower grades and higher failure rates as well as those posting higher grades?

There were 79 courses taught in both winter and non-winter sessions for which we were furnished a full grade distribution with complete data for both groups. For each of these two groups, data were aggregated by course, with multiple sections and multiple instructors. Three courses had too few students in one or both groups to provide comparable data (8W, 1W, 1R/6W). Of the remaining 76 courses, two had minimum enrollment -1 (11 students, if those students were all in the same section and session).

There were 16 courses that posted an aggregate difference of 20% increase in A's during winter session compared to the regular terms (See Table 8). One course posted an aggregate difference of 20% DECREASE in A's (and another was 19.7%). If A's and B's are considered together, a more nuanced picture of grade differential emerges. There were 19 courses that showed more than 10% increase in combined A's and B's compared to regular terms. However, 8 courses posted more than 10% DECREASE

in combined A's and B's in winter session. Not surprisingly, courses that posted more A's or more A's and B's combined also had fewer F's and W's, and vice versa.

Table 8

*Grade differentials between winter session and regular terms*

Course	> 20% increase in A's in winter	> 10% increase in A's & B's combined in winter	> 20% decrease in A's in winter	> 10% decrease in A's & B's in winter	Diff. %F+W
AG371	X	X			-1.4
AR112	X	X			-6.7
BA490				X	+10.5
CF120	X	X			-11.9
EC101	X	X			-15.0
EN140			X	X	+21.0
FE200		X			-1.5
GG150				X	+10.2
HL120	X	X			-3.8
HL510			19.7%	X	+9.1
LE499	X				+4.0
LI256		X			-10.7
MA023		X			+1.2
MA155				X	+14.2
MC101		X			-5.2
MG470	X				-0.4
MG560		X			+0.3
PS103	X	X			-8.5
PY101	X	X			-13.9
QM258		X			-9.1
UI306	X				-5.5
UI313				X	+7.9
UI354	X	X			-4.3
UI355	X	X			-5.9
UI400				X	+10.9
UI427	X	X			-13.4
UI436				X	+9.7
US105	X	X			-3.8
US107	X	X			-0.3
WH125	X	X			+4.5

The philosophical/pedagogical explanation for increases in higher grade evaluations as “inflation” is a question of attribution. At the very least, there may be some built-in, justifiable, bias for higher grades in a repeated course, based on more familiarity with the subject and instructor. There is also the possibility that a single class in winter session presents fewer distractions, compared to a full student load in the regular semester, and students may well be more motivated to do well.



Some courses are pedagogically and practically more amenable to winter session. Other courses, because of high demands for practice time, project development, or cognitive processing challenges are less amenable to the radically shortened, compressed schedule. Courses that post notably lower percentages of A's and B's and/or markedly higher failure and withdrawal rates (e.g. EN140 and HL510; or BA490, GG150, UI400, and UI436), may not be well suited to the abbreviated course schedule of winter session. One category of courses almost universally posted higher failure and withdrawal rates during winter session compared to regular terms, despite having, in most cases, comparable – but low – percentages of A's and B's. These were all math classes (See table 9). Unfortunately, math classes are among those most often cited as high-needs “bottleneck” courses.

Table 9

*Failure rates for math classes in regular terms and winter sessions*

<b>Course</b>	<b>% F + W Regular term</b>	<b>% F + W winter</b>	<b>Change in F + W</b>
<b>MA023</b>	37.5	38.7	+1.2
<b>MA055</b>	41.5	47.8	+5.7
<b>MA102</b>	27.7	32.1	+4.4
<b>MA106</b>	61.2	5.05	-9.7
<b>MA123</b>	26.7	40.1	+13.4
<b>MA134</b>	39.9	50.9	+20.0
<b>MA155</b>	25.0	40.8	+14.2

Finally, there is the continuing question of obligation to meet the needs of online-only programs. Online students tend to be especially transient – if they can meet scheduling needs more easily elsewhere, they do not generally have high brand loyalty, especially non-traditional students taking classes part-time.

*If winter session is discontinued:*

High-needs bottleneck courses may over-enroll or experience backlogs. The resulting higher student/teacher ratio may negatively affect achievement as well as student satisfaction. Lack of opportunities to make up missed prerequisites or failed classes may result in missed rotations and possible delays in on-time graduation. It is possible that Southeast may lose students to other institutions, either as single-course enrollments to make up missed classes, immediate transfers due to dissatisfaction, delayed transfers as students build positive experiences elsewhere, or defections by online students who have little brand attachment to any given provider.

*If winter session is continued:*

We would need to define a critical course with a criterion-based rubric, including:

- Is the proposed section a high-needs prerequisite or crucial to program rotation?
- Will the course meet or exceed the minimum enrollment threshold?
- Can anticipated enrollments be absorbed in existing regular term sections?
- Is the proposed section for a lower-level course? If an upper-level course, why is it critical to program rotation or on-time graduation?
- Is the course amenable to extreme time compression?

- Does the proposed section primarily or exclusively serve students in online programs?
- Is the class cost effective?
- Are there extenuating circumstances that warrant a single-instance exception?
- (Other considerations determined as necessary)

Use of a consistent rubric would provide a more objective basis by which department chairpersons and individual faculty members would be able to establish clear and competitive rationale for a proposed course, with clear criteria for justify and support the proposal based on evidence and need.

### **Salary and Load Considerations**

We agree that the primary considerations driving the continuation (or discontinuation) of winter session should be whether the initiative effectively serves the needs of our students and if it continues to be sufficiently cost-effective to maintain operations. However, considerations of salary and load complicate this priority.

There are fundamental issues of inconsistency in pay, despite “the same amount of work for the same amount of time.” Shifting to an online pay structure would equalize pay as a consistent stipend, with course load and pay counted “in-load” and the additional hours paid as an overload stipend or based on adjunct pay rates. However, if winter session pay moved to a flat (adjunct) stipend or overload model, how many courses would be dropped because of lack of faculty support? Would assignment to an adjunct instructor negatively impact rigor or quality of instruction? Would a shift to adjunct instruction negatively affect student outcomes, graduation timelines, program requirements, or retention of students? Finally, if a course (or winter session as a whole) is not sufficiently “profitable,” how would we prioritize extenuating considerations that would still justify its continuance?