

**From:** [Office of the MSU Provost](#)  
**Subject:** Planning details for Fall Semester 2021  
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**Attachments:** [image004.png](#)

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**MONTANA**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of the Provost

Dear Colleagues,

I hope this message finds you and your families well. As we look forward to a bright future on the near horizon, I want you to know how much I personally appreciate your flexibility, creativity and very hard work over the past 10 months. Your extraordinary efforts to advance our important mission in the midst of a pandemic are highly commendable and will be remembered and described for generations to come.

I have received questions about the recently announced academic calendar and I am writing today to reinforce a few points regarding planning for Fall Semester 2021, which represents a step forward in our transition to recapturing the on-campus living and learning experiences for our students and is the backbone of our land grant mission.

The calendar for Fall 2021 was developed to keep us in accordance with our regional accreditor, federal financial aid guidelines, Carnegie credit hour requirements, Montana Board of Regents policies and the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education guidance. The Fall 2021 calendar contains 16 instructional weeks with the expectation that the last week of classes will be used for instructional purposes including examinations. The earlier start for Fall 2021, which is a temporary adjustment, was made so that MSU could continue to offer Snowmester '21/'22 while meeting all federal, state and accreditation requirements.

Over the next three weeks, the Registrar's Office will work with faculty and administrators in colleges and departments to build the catalog of courses and section offerings for Fall 2021 with an emphasis on providing students with a majority of courses in-person, using Fall 2019 as a starting template for room assignments and instructional modality. This is similar to the process that MSU uses each year and represents an encouraging indicator that we are making positive progress to recapture the vibrant on-campus teaching and learning environment that we have missed these past nine months.

The schedule of classes will emphasize in-person course delivery and generally align with room assignments used in Fall 2019, with flexibility for updates and adjustments as needed. We anticipate most courses will be offered with students fully in-person except

for courses that are traditionally offered online. I expect only a small number of courses will need to be offered in a blended format in which all students cannot attend class at the same time. We encourage faculty to continue to make full use of technology and new methods of teaching developed during the pandemic to enhance learning. New and creative approaches for hybrid teaching, flipped classes and active learning are all good examples of the innovative methods our faculty use to synthesize learning both in and out of the classroom. These types of best practices and creative teaching methods will continue to be encouraged and supported by the university.

The academic calendar for Fall 2021 is a transitional step and includes experimental components that will be assessed for future adoption, modification or discontinuation depending on feedback and outcomes. Examples of some temporary changes include: no classes during the entire week of Thanksgiving; the fall calendar starts roughly a week earlier than some past fall calendars; classes end on a Thursday with Commencement on Friday; and the finals week schedule will not be modified for common hour exams or extended examination periods.

The last week of classes is counted as instructional time and faculty are expected to meet with students for instructional purposes. The methodology and pedagogy that is used during this class time is the prerogative of each faculty instructor; for example, it could include a written assessment (final exam), student presentations, active learning exercises or lectures. The only change from previous years is that the class schedule over the last week of classes (Dec. 6-9) will not be modified for extended examination periods.

The elimination of a modified exam schedule in Fall 2021 partially stems from the pandemic where we learned that modified and common hour exam schedules place an increasingly difficult burden on students who have jobs, athletic practices, artistic performances, childcare commitments, nighttime security concerns and extra travel difficulties when commuting from communities spanning from Butte to Big Timber, and even further in some cases. But to be clear, the elimination of common hour, extended time exams does not mean you have to eliminate a final exam.

If you normally give exams the last day of class of the semester, then you may retain that approach for learning assessment. Furthermore, if you believe it is necessary to provide more than 50 minutes of exam time, the calendar provides enough instructional time such that the last week of the semester could be used for administering an exam in two parts. The MSU Center for Faculty Excellence provides helpful resources and training to assist faculty in developing alternative approaches for assessing student learning.

Two additional details to note: 1) The last start time for courses on the final day of the semester, Thursday Dec. 9, will be 4:15pm. 2) As is standard for finals week, laboratory classes are not required to meet during the final week of the semester (Dec. 6-9).

In closing, I reiterate how much I appreciate all your efforts, hard work and willingness to learn and innovate new ways of teaching and delivering course content. I encourage you to continue to experiment and try new approaches, and to assess, adapt and implement new teaching and learning strategies that lead to increased student success.

Most respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob". The letters are cursive and fluid.

**Dr. Robert L. Mokwa | Executive Vice President and Provost**  
Montana State University  
Tel. 406-994-4371

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Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost  
Montana Hall | P.O. Box 172560 | Bozeman, MT 59717-2560  
[www.montana.edu](http://www.montana.edu) | [provost@montana.edu](mailto:provost@montana.edu) | 406-994-4371