

2021 Pilot January Term Rationale

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To mitigate public health risk owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the task force charged with developing plans for safely re-opening campus for the 2020-21 academic year has recommended that the spring 2021 semester start on January 25. Beginning classes on this date would create a one-of-a-kind opportunity to pilot a 3-week January term. Participation by faculty in this term would be voluntary and compensated with supplementary salary.

A permanent January term could provide some valuable benefits. First, a January term would provide students with an additional opportunity beyond summer to complete an experiential requirement, such as an internship or the general education curriculum's Beyond the Classroom or After Mary Washington requirement. Second, it could create a new scheduling window for faculty to offer self-contained international programs that need not continue into the spring semester. Academic activities could be fully integrated into the travel experience (e.g. UVA's winter break tropical ecology course in Belize). Third, it would allow faculty to maintain engagement with students over the winter break, for those who seek it and whose academic progress would benefit from it. Some students might benefit from a chance to maintain academic momentum during January. Fourth, a January term may add an attractive element to UMW's program offerings for prospective students. Other institutions in the Mid-Atlantic region, with whom UMW competes for high quality applicants, offer winter terms. Finally, a January term might generate modest revenue for the university that could compensate for budget cuts to programs such as undergraduate research and creativity that are central to UMW's mission and identity. Team taught continuing education courses, modeled after this summer's COVID-19 course, could be marketed to community members and alumni for a fee. *Again, the 2020-21 academic calendar changes afford a unique opportunity to determine whether the benefits enumerated above could reasonably be achieved through an experimental January term.*

Current registration, payment, supplementary salary structure, and cancelation policies applied during the summer session would apply to the pilot January term. All safeguards would need to be in place to ensure that the program does not result in revenue loss. Extension of any form of winter break academic program beyond the 2020-21 academic year would require consideration by faculty governance and a full faculty vote.