

LENGTHENING THE ACADEMIC CALENDAR

MAXIMIZING SUCCESS FOR HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENTS

Current law prevents any UW System institution from starting Fall semester instruction before September 1, primarily to support the tourism industry in Wisconsin. There are exceptions to this law for medical students and fourth-year veterinary medicine students.

Like the standards that apply to medical and veterinary students, professional standards for pharmacy students require a combination of experiential and classroom learning. Those standards have expanded requirements since current law was passed. For that reason, UW–Madison supports legislative proposals that would expand the health sciences academic calendar to include students of the UW–Madison School of Pharmacy (UW SOP) and School of Nursing.

Proposal

Extending the academic calendar by 3 weeks (2 in fall, 1 in spring) for pharmacy students will have a variety of benefits.

Faculty will be able to reschedule classes to create openings for experiential and co-curricular learning opportunities.

Extending the academic calendar will increase teaching hours for faculty within the School of Pharmacy, a concern previously expressed by state legislators.

Private schools in Wisconsin are not bound by this start date which puts UW–Madison programs at a competitive disadvantage. Creating continuity between the health sciences academic calendars of private and public schools would help alleviate potential confusion at clinical sites as well.

A health sciences professional calendar that is longer than the undergrad calendar will allow time for PharmD students to complete dual degrees (MS in population health, public health or translational research; MBA) and tracks and certificates (leadership, rural health, global health, others). Dual degrees and tracks make UW–Madison graduates more competitive for post-graduation education (residency, fellowship) and employment.

UW SOP, the only state-supported school of pharmacy in Wisconsin, has been consistently rated in the top ten relative to its peers. Extending the calendar will help the SOP remain competitive with peer institutions and private schools of pharmacy within Wisconsin and ultimately educate pharmacists who provide high-quality care to Wisconsin citizens.

Current Challenges

1. About one-third of the PharmD curriculum is experiential. Students must complete 100 hours per year during years 1-3 in clerkship sites throughout the state of Wisconsin. Expanding the current academic calendar by a few weeks will allow for student travel to and from clerkship sites (hospitals and pharmacies) and completion of hours without missing classes.
2. Fourth-year PharmD students currently enroll for clerkships during summer months to complete the 1,920 hours required for graduation and licensure. The current undergraduate calendar is not long enough to complete all these hours.
3. Updated accreditation standards from the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (“Standards 2016”) for schools and colleges of pharmacy include new requirements regarding interprofessional education. Alignment with the School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) academic calendar is needed to make these courses available to both pharmacy and medical students.
4. Standards 2016 includes new requirements regarding co-curricular activities. These activities are important for the development of ‘essential skills’ needed for professional practice (e.g. patient advocacy, problem solving, interprofessional collaboration, and entrepreneurship).
5. ACPE Standards 2016 and professional organizations (AACP and ACCP) have expanded topics that must be taught by an accredited school/college of pharmacy, which must be added to an already full curriculum.
6. A trend among top pharmacy schools, such as UCSF, is to reduce the number of years of study from 4 to 3. If in the long term this were to become a consideration for the UW SOP, being able to operate outside the undergraduate calendar would become essential.

Because the new experiential, interprofessional, and co-curricular requirements have been added to the current course load, increasing the stress of pharmacy students, we are requesting a new health sciences professional calendar to allow for these new requirements.

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