

Campus Policies and Guidelines Concerning the Academic Calendar, RRR Week, Exams, and Commencement

THE ACADEMIC CALENDAR

Current Academic Calendar (link)

- **What guides the structure of the UC Berkeley Academic Calendar?**

A Joint Task Force on Exams was convened in September 2008 by Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost George Breslauer and Academic Senate Chair Mary Firestone to investigate and address a set of intertwined problems surrounding exam policies and exam administration on campus. The implementation of Task Force recommendations resulted in changes to the Academic Calendar intended to:

- (1) clarify, modernize, and streamline Senate procedures for approving alternative forms of final student assessment (other than the traditional three-hour written final exam),
- (2) refine campus policies for midterm and final exam scheduling,
- (3) revise the academic calendar to accommodate student desire for a longer reading period prior to final exams and to reduce scheduling conflicts for students (such as religious observances and commencement ceremonies), and
- (4) improve the communication and dissemination of information related to final exams to instructors, students, and administrators.

In Spring 2014, following the campus open comment period, the following adjustments were made: begin Fall semester on a Wednesday; create a non-instructional day the Wednesday before the Thanksgiving holiday. Together, these adjustments allow the number of instructional days to remain at 73.

- **What are some of the policies that pertain to conflicts with the Academic Calendar?**

1. *Accommodation of Religious Creed:*

In compliance with Education code, Section 92640(a), it is the official policy of the University of California at Berkeley to permit any student to undergo a test or examination, without penalty, at a time when that activity would not violate the student's religious creed, unless administering the examination at an alternative time would impose an undue hardship that could not reasonably have been avoided. Requests to accommodate a student's religious creed by scheduling tests or examinations at alternative times should be submitted directly to the faculty member responsible for administering the examination by the second week of the semester.

Reasonable common sense, judgment and the pursuit of mutual goodwill should result in the positive resolution of scheduling conflicts. The regular campus appeals process applies if a mutually satisfactory arrangement cannot be achieved.

2. *Conflicts between extracurricular activities and academic requirements:*

The link to the complete guidelines is available on the Academic Senate website: <http://tinyurl.com/schedconflictguidelines>.

A useful checklist to help instructors and students comply with the guidelines is available on the Center for Teaching and Learning website: <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/checklist-scheduling-conflicts-academic-requirements> .

The Academic Senate has established Guidelines Concerning Scheduling Conflicts with Academic Requirements to address the issue of conflicts that arise between extracurricular activities and academic requirements. They specifically concern the schedules of student-athletes, student musicians, those with out-of-town interviews, and other students with activities (e.g., classes missed as the result of religious holy days) that compete with academic obligations. The guidelines assign responsibilities as follows:

-It is the instructor's responsibility to give students a schedule, available on the syllabus in the first week of instruction, of all class sessions, exams, tests, project deadlines, field trips, and any other required class activities.

-It is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor(s) in writing by the second week of the semester of any potential conflict(s) and to recommend a solution, with the understanding that an earlier deadline or date of examination may be the most practicable solution.

-It is the student's responsibility to inform him/herself about material missed because of an absence, whether or not he/she has been formally excused.

READING/REVIEW/RECITATION (RRR) WEEK

The Academic Senate has posted the [Reading, Review, and Recitation \(RRR\) Guidelines](#) for your review.

- **What is RRR Week?**

Reading, Review, and Recitation (RRR) Week is the week following the end of formal class instruction and preceding the start of final exams and is intended for students to have free time to prepare for exams, to work on final papers and projects, and to participate in optional review sessions and meetings with instructors. RRR week is based on the pedagogical principle that students benefit from time devoted to synthesizing the course material learned over the course of the semester.

- **Do all undergraduate courses (including special studies courses) fall under the RRR policy?**

Yes. All undergraduate courses, including special studies courses, fall under the RRR policy.

- **Do graduate courses fall under the RRR policy?**

Graduate courses do not necessarily follow the same system-wide or campus regulations as those for undergraduate courses, and more instructor discretion in the scheduling and duration of assignments and exams is allowed. However, instructors of graduate courses are encouraged to give their students the benefits of RRR week for synthesis and review and to avoid formal class sessions during RRR week. They should also be aware that graduate students who are GSIs may have teaching responsibilities during RRR week, including ones on a schedule different from that of the formal class instruction period.

- **Do professional school programs fall under the RRR policy?**

Professional schools with programs on unique academic calendars are exempted from RRR week policy. Undergraduate courses in professional school programs on the regular academic calendar are subject to the RRR policy. Graduate courses in professional school programs on

the regular academic calendar are encouraged to give their students the benefits of RRR week for synthesis and review; however, they do not necessarily follow the same system-wide or campus regulations as those for undergraduate courses (see the preceding FAQ on graduate courses).

- **When is the "last day of instruction"?**

The "last day of instruction" corresponds to the last day of the RRR period, since RRR days are counted as days of instruction by the state legislature and in federal financial aid guidelines. The academic calendar includes a notation for the end of formal classes as well as for the "last day of instruction" to mark this distinction.

- **How is RRR week different from the previous UC Berkeley "dead days" or "dead week"?**

On the previous calendar, the term "dead days" referred colloquially to the two days between the end of classes and the start of final exams. "Dead week" referred for some to the 15th week of classes, based on the 1984 and 1991 Academic Senate recommendations that instructors not present any new material the 15th week of classes. This reconfirmed earlier [guidelines](#) issued by the UC Office of the President in 1954. In contrast, the new RRR week is intended both to provide more time for students to study between the end of classes and the beginning of final exams and to serve as a time of active engagement between instructors and students for consultations, reviews, and feedback. Instructors are expected to be in attendance as during other days of instruction and to interact with students through individual consultations and/or optional activities that may vary depending on the nature of the course. Thus, RRR days are counted as days of instruction, even though formal classes do not meet during this period.

- **What types of learning and teaching activities are encouraged during RRR week?**

Instructors are encouraged to use the RRR week for the following activities:

- Synthesis and review of course material by students on their own or in study groups.
- Work on final projects and papers by students.
- Optional review sessions.
- Optional recitation activities such as poster sessions, oral presentations of research and debates.
- Required submission of papers, projects, or other homework assignments that are not substitute forms of final assessment.

Activities may include both face-to-face and electronic modes of contact and communication. Activities should be optional, except in special cases noted in the exceptions below.

Instructors are encouraged to schedule recitations outside RRR week whenever possible, but time and venue constraints may make the RRR period the only feasible time to do so. In such cases, instructors should maximize flexibility and scheduling options because students are likely to have other academic commitments during the RRR week.

- **What types of activities should not be scheduled during RRR week?**

The following activities should not be scheduled during RRR week:

- Mandatory exams, quizzes, or activities (exceptions noted below).
- Required submission of papers or projects that are assigned in lieu of a written final exam.

Instructors are encouraged to give students the full benefit of the RRR week for consultation with their instructors and revision. Due dates should ideally be set for the day on which the

written final exam would have been given and may not be set any earlier than the first day of the final exam period.

- **Are there any exceptions granted for mandatory scheduled activities during RRR week?**

A limited number of exceptions are automatically granted for "special format" courses, such as performance- or studio-based courses, and for courses that require a capstone presentation that cannot be scheduled prior to RRR week due to time and venue constraints. Instructors are encouraged to schedule these activities outside of RRR week whenever possible. However, the campus recognizes that such courses may need to use the flexible scheduling opportunities presented by the RRR week for mandatory culminating performances, studio critiques, or capstone presentations that count toward students' final grades, particularly those activities that may require special venues.

Additionally, an exception may be granted for make-up classes necessitated by lengthy disruptions such as campus closure (see also COCI's Guidelines for Single-Incident Disruptions of Classes).

- **Are there campus resources for instructors seeking to strategize classroom activities around RRR Week?**

The Center for Teaching and Learning provides a number of suggestions that instructors may find useful when planning a syllabus (<http://teaching.berkeley.edu/ideas-rrr-week>).

- **As a student, what recourse do I have if my instructor is not following the RRR week policies for my undergraduate course?**

Students are encouraged to discuss the activity, assignment, or due date under question with their instructor(s), either individually or as a group. Good communication between instructors and students is an important first step.

If you do not feel comfortable approaching the instructor or if such discussion does not provide a satisfactory outcome and if it still seems that RRR week activities for a particular course violate campus policy, students have several options. Students may follow up with:

- the Chair of the department in which the course is taught
- The [Ombuds Office For Students and Postdoctoral Appointees](#) – this office provides an informal dispute resolution process and can be contacted at any point, including consultation before talking with the instructor or the department chair
- The [ASUC Student Advocate's Office](#), Academic Division – a student-run organization that can help students with academic disputes.

- **I am an instructor and I would like to hold an optional review session for my class during RRR week. Can I use my regularly scheduled class time and room for the review session?**

Instructors may request their regularly scheduled room to hold optional activities during RRR week through the "opt-in" process. Instructors must inform the department scheduler of all RRR week classroom needs by the 9th week of the semester. **If an instructor does not opt-in to reserve a room, a room will not be held.** An instructor may also request a room reservation that differs from their regularly scheduled place and time through the same opt-in process.

First priority will be given to instructors in their regularly scheduled classrooms, provided they indicate their needs by the 9th week of the semester. The Academic Senate views this "opt-in" policy as important because it clearly differentiates the RRR week from regular instruction and

frees up rooms for instructors to hold RRR activities outside of their normally scheduled class times.

- **How will the RRR days affect the work of GSIs? What types of activities will be expected of GSIs during this period?**

During the RRR period, GSIs are expected to work the number of hours stipulated in their official Letter of Appointment.

The faculty member serving as the Instructor of Record for the course should convey to GSIs what activities will be required of them during the RRR week. Possible activities may include conducting voluntary face-to-face or online review sessions, meeting with study groups, offering additional face-to-face or electronic office hours, responding to individual student questions, and giving student feedback on written work.

In the event that the activities required of GSIs during the RRR week are significantly different from those outlined in the Letter of Appointment or Supplemental Documentation, an updated Supplemental Documentation letter reflecting these changes must be sent to the GSI as soon as reasonably possible.

As with faculty, GSIs teaching in undergraduate courses may not introduce new material during the RRR week, nor may they administer final exams or have due dates for final written work during RRR week. They should also be made aware that student participation in all activities during the RRR week is voluntary (except in those courses with pre-approved exemptions).

In considering the activities that will be required of GSIs, faculty must ensure that the number of hours required for assigned activities falls within the hours relating to the percentage of the Academic Student Employee (ASE)'s appointment. For more information, see Article 34, "Workload," of [the Collective Bargaining Agreement for ASEs](#).

- **Can written final examinations in undergraduate courses be given before or during RRR week?**

No. Academic Senate and campus policies prohibit the scheduling of written final examinations before or during the RRR week.

- **Can written final exams or alternative forms of final exams for undergraduate courses be administered or be due before the final exam period?**

No. Academic Senate and campus policies regarding undergraduate courses prohibit written final exams or alternative forms of final exams from being administered or due before the final exam period. A limited exception is provided for "special format" courses, such as performance- or studio-based courses, that require a capstone presentation as an alternative form of final exam that cannot be held during the final exam period due to venue or time constraints.

- **Can final papers or final projects in undergraduate courses that are assigned in lieu of a written final exam be due before or during RRR week?**

No. Papers or projects that are assigned in lieu of a written final exam cannot be due before or during the RRR week, according to Academic Senate and campus policies. Instructors are encouraged to give students the full benefit of the RRR week for consultation with their instructors and revision. Due dates for final papers or projects that substitute for final exams should ideally be set for the day on which the written final exam would have been given and may not be set any earlier than the first day of the final exam period. The only exception is several special cases noted [above](#).

- **Can papers, projects or other homework assignments that are not substitute forms of final assessment be due during the RRR week?**

Yes. Papers, projects or other homework assignments that are not substitute forms of final assessment may be due during the RRR week.

- **Can written final exams or alternative forms of final exams for undergraduate courses be administered or be due before the final exam period?**

No. Academic Senate and campus policies regarding undergraduate courses prohibit written final exams or alternative forms of final exams from being administered or due before the final exam period. A limited exception is provided for "special format" courses, such as performance- or studio-based courses, that require a capstone presentation as an alternative form of final exam that cannot be held during the final exam period due to venue or time constraints (see the [Academic Senate Guidelines for RRR Week](#) for more information).

FINAL EXAMS

- **What is the campus final exam schedule? When and where is this information available?**

The four exam periods are 8-11 am, 11:30 am-2:30 pm, 3-6 pm, and 7-10 pm, during five days of exams, given Monday through Friday.

The final exam group is listed on the Online Schedule of Classes during Tele-BEARS enrollment for all formally-approved undergraduate courses with written final examinations, and for graduate courses in which written final exams are typically given.

Instructors must also state the date and time of the written final exam or the due date for the final paper, project, or other alternative final assessment in the course syllabus given out during the first week of classes.

- **Why does the campus use a four-final-exams-per-day schedule?**

By following a four-per-day exam schedule, the campus is able to create a full week of RRR days, eliminate Saturday exams (and thus conflicts with Saturday religious observances and weekend family obligations), and eliminate conflicts between commencement activities and final examinations. In addition to these many benefits, this academic calendar brings the Berkeley campus exam schedule in line with other UC campuses, all of which use a four-exam-per-day schedule successfully (except for UC Irvine with a five-exam-per-day schedule).

- **The evening exam may end as late as 10 pm. What are my options for night safety?**

Safety Patrol Officers (SPOs) will be assigned to patrol venues where evening final exams are taking place.

UCPD's Night Safety Services are FREE to all, 365 nights a year, and will be fully staffed during finals week. For info, call 2-WALK, [(510) 642-9255], or visit [Bearwalk 2.0 Night Safety Services](#).

- **Do large numbers of students have three or more final exams per day?**

On the four-exam-per-day schedule, less than 4% of students (984 of 25,540) had three exams scheduled in one day in Fall 2010, and only a very small handful of students (20 of 25,540) had four exams scheduled in one day. These numbers represent an upper limit of students. The actual numbers are likely lower for two reasons:

- The numbers do not include instructors who assigned an alternative form of final exam (paper or project) and did not hold an in-class final, but did not have an exemption.

- They also do not take into account students who received voluntary accommodation from instructors.

The percentages are also less than what we might expect from a random distribution, suggesting that, for the most part, students are able to optimize their exam schedules successfully. In addition, an effort is made to distribute exam groups across the week to minimize these percentages, particularly for students taking large, lower division courses in which written final examinations are common. Instructors can help maintain these low percentages by not requesting a change in final exam times except under exceptional circumstances; if such circumstances do apply, instructors should request such a change at least two weeks before the first day of instruction for that semester (see [Final Exam Time Change FAQ](#) below).

- **What can students do to optimize their final exam schedules?**

First, consider the exam schedule when planning your class schedule and enrolling in classes. Each class is assigned to a final exam group that you will see on Tele-BEARS and the [Online Schedule of Classes](#). You may be able to avoid having multiple final exams in one day by enrolling in a different lecture section of the same course, if available. It is also possible that one or more of the courses may have an alternative form of final exam, such as a final paper or project, which should be announced in the syllabus at the first class meeting. If you confirm that sit-down final exams are required and that you will, in fact, have three or four exams on the same day, you should speak with your instructor right away (during the first two weeks of class) to see if alternate exam arrangements can be made. Instructors are not obligated to provide an alternate exam day for you, but they may be able to assist you if they have sufficient advance notice.

- **I am an instructor and I would like to have alternate seating for my final exam. How do I request this?**

All classes are assigned an exam room with seats equal to the enrollment by the end of the seventh week, unless alternate seating (i.e., one empty seat between students) is requested. To secure alternate seating for an undergraduate exam, instructors must notify departmental schedulers of their needs at the earliest possible date (and no later than the fifth week of class). The department scheduler will work with the Office of the Registrar to make the appropriate accommodation and room assignments. Requests for "double alternate seating" (i.e., two empty seats between students) cannot be accommodated due to space limitations.

- **Are all undergraduate courses required to have a written final exam?**

UC System-wide Academic Senate Regulations 770 and 772 stipulate that all undergraduate courses require a written (when practicable) final exam [[SR 770 & 772](#)]. However, these regulations also stipulate that exemptions from these regulations for individual courses may be approved by each campus' Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI). The Joint Task Force on Exams, with input from key Academic Senate committees, recommended that campus procedures for approving alternative forms of final student assessments be clarified, modernized, and streamlined in order to reflect changes in pedagogy in a number of academic disciplines and to facilitate compliance with the system-wide regulations. These new procedures are described in the following FAQs.

- **Are special studies courses numbered 98/198, including but not limited to DE-Cal courses, required to have a final exam?**

No, the Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI) has approved a permanent exemption from the final exam requirement for special studies courses numbered 98/198, including but not limited to DE-Cal courses. Assignments may be due in the last week of classes, as long as they are not designated as final exams or assessments. In general, such assignments should not have significantly more weight than other assignments given during the semester.

- **Are graduate courses required to have a final exam?**

No, final examinations are not required in graduate courses; they are optional at the discretion of the instructor.

- **What alternatives are there to written final exams for undergraduate courses?**

As methods of pedagogy have changed in a number of academic fields over the years, alternative forms of final assessment, such as final projects or papers, have increasingly been substituted for a traditional, three-hour written final exam. The Center for Teaching and Learning provides a number of recommendations for [alternative methods of final assessment](#). The COCI procedures for approving new courses or for making changes to existing courses recognize that such methods of assessment are not exceptional or unusual and may indeed be preferred in many disciplines.

- **As an instructor, how do I request a temporary or permanent alternative to a written final exam in an undergraduate course?**

Instructors have several means of establishing, either for a given semester or permanently, a final student assessment other than the traditional in-person three-hour final exam:

To change the format of a final student assessment for a course for a given semester, the instructor need only inform the students in the syllabus given out during the first week of classes and obtain approval from the chair of the department and, if applicable, the department's teaching and curriculum committee. The chair will then inform the Registrar (via the departmental scheduler) before the first day of classes that s/he has approved this form of final student assessment and that a room for a written final exam will not be needed. Such approvals by the chair can occur on a semester-by-semester basis indefinitely.

To request a permanent change to the final student assessment format for a course or to eliminate a final exam all together, a Course Approval Form (CAF) should be completed and submitted to COCI for approval. The CAF form reflecting this new policy and procedure is now available on the [UC Berkeley Academic Senate](#) website and is explained in the updated [COCI Handbook](#). Note that a permanent change goes with the course and not the instructor. Thus, if a different instructor wishes to change the final assessment format of a course, either the department chair can approve such a change for the course for that semester or another CAF for the change needs to be submitted to COCI.

- **Can an instructor change the day and/or time of a written final examination for an undergraduate course from that officially scheduled by the Registrar?**

In general, no. Under exceptional circumstances, an instructor may request a change to the exam group for a course from that originally scheduled by the Office of the Registrar and published in the [Online Schedule of Classes](#). To do so, s/he should submit this request at least two weeks before the first day of instruction for that semester to the Office of the Registrar and COCI on the [Petition for Exam Group Change form](#) in order for COCI to review the request prior to the start of instruction. Note that COCI will not review requests after the fifth week of classes. If the request for a change in final exam time is received by COCI too late to review the request before the start of instruction (but in any case no later than the fifth week of classes) and it is approved, the final exam must also still be given at the originally scheduled time in addition to the new time. This is intended to ensure fairness for students who have carefully planned the distribution of their final examinations based on information in the [Online Schedule of Classes](#) and on the syllabus given out the first week of classes and to prevent students from feeling coerced into joining a "unanimous" class vote to change an exam time. Instructors may accommodate religious or other scheduling conflicts that a student or a small group of students in their course may have with the official final exam time without obtaining COCI approval (see, for example, the [Religious Creed Policy](#) and the [Checklist for Scheduling Conflicts with Academic Requirements](#)).

- **Can an instructor change the method of final student assessment for an undergraduate course after the first week of classes?**

If an instructor wishes to change the method of final student assessment (e.g., paper, project, or written exam) after the first week of classes for an undergraduate course, the department chair must give approval (as noted above), and students must be given the option of being evaluated by the method originally described in the syllabus given out the first week of classes. [[Back](#)]

- **Can an instructor change the day and/or time of a written final examination for a graduate course from that officially scheduled by the Registrar?**

As noted above, final examinations are not required in graduate courses; they are optional at the discretion of the instructor. Changes to the schedule of a graduate course's final examination do not require COCI's approval, but the department must notify Classroom Scheduling at osoc@berkeley.edu.

- **As a student, what recourse do I have if my instructor is not following the campus final exam policies for my undergraduate course?**

Students are encouraged to discuss issues with final exam scheduling or format with their instructor(s), either individually or as a group. Good communication between instructors and students is an important first step.

If you do not feel comfortable approaching the instructor or if such discussion does not provide a satisfactory outcome and if it still seems that RRR week activities for a particular course violate campus policy, students have several options. Students may follow up with:

- the Chair of the department in which the course is taught
- The [Ombuds Office For Students and Postdoctoral Appointees](#) – this office provides an informal dispute resolution process and can be contacted at any point, including consultation before talking with the instructor or the department chair
- The [ASUC Student Advocate's Office](#), Academic Division – a student-run organization that can help students with academic disputes.

- **As a member of the UC Berkeley community, how do I find out more about my rights and responsibilities surrounding final exams?**

Students, instructors, department chairs, the Registrar, and other campus groups have certain rights and responsibilities with regard to final examinations. Knowledge of these will help keep the system running smoothly and minimize conflicts and misunderstandings. Please visit the Office of the Registrar's [Final Exam Responsibilities](#) website (which is also accessible from the [Online Schedule of Classes](#)) for concise and up-to-date information as well as links to more detailed discussions of campus policies and procedures.

MIDTERM EXAMS

- **As an instructor, what are my responsibilities in scheduling midterm examinations?**

The specific date and time of midterm exams that will be held outside the regularly scheduled class time must be stated in writing in the syllabus distributed by instructors during the first week of classes. Conflicts should be handled as outlined in the [Religious Creed Policy](#) or [Checklist for Scheduling Conflicts with Academic Requirements](#)) for extracurricular activities.

- **As an instructor, how do I request a room for a midterm examination I want to schedule at a time and place different from that of the class?**

A large number of high enrollment classes combine midterm exams for sections into one date, necessitating alternate seating in campus auditoriums. As enrollment increases for these large classes, there may not be enough seats within the available auditoriums to accommodate alternate

seating Faculty should contact your departmental scheduler as early as possible to request a room for a midterm exam, since the campus is now at capacity for large rooms during key weeks in the semester. **It is highly recommended that requests are submitted prior to Tele-BEARS enrollment to avoid student schedule conflicts.** Your scheduler will submit the request to the Office of the Registrar. In some cases, the Office of the Registrar may be able to notify you of potential conflicts with other large enrollment courses.

- **As a student, what are my responsibilities in regard to midterm exams?**

Students are responsible for making sure they check their class syllabus for midterm exam dates and time; it's possible that the classes' midterm exam date may be held outside of regularly scheduled class time and must resolve any class conflicts. Midterm exams held within regularly scheduled class time will be communicated to the students via the faculty.

- **Where can students search for information about midterm exams that have been scheduled outside of the regularly scheduled class time?**

Students can check their course syllabus for information on their midterm exam. If it's not published, then please consult your instructor as early as possible for confirmed information.

- **As a student, what are my responsibilities if I have a conflict with a midterm examination?**

Students are responsible for notifying instructors within the first two weeks of classes about foreseeable conflicts and for proposing potential solutions to the conflicts. For unanticipated conflicts, students should contact their instructor as soon as possible. Conflicts should be resolved according to the [Religious Creed Policy](#) or as outlined in the [Checklist for Scheduling Conflicts with Academic Requirements](#)) extracurricular activities. Be aware that multiple, unresolvable conflicts with extracurricular activities may prohibit you from taking a particular course.

COMMENCEMENT

- **Can commencement ceremonies be held during final exam week?**

Campus policy requires that graduation ceremonies must take place after final examinations have concluded, with the exception of professional schools with graduate students only.

- **I am a graduating student. How do I find out when the Commencement Convocation and my departmental commencement ceremony will be held?**

Information about Commencement Convocation, the campus-wide event for all graduating students hosted by the Chancellor, is posted online: [Commencement](#).

Information about departmental commencement activities will be posted on this site as they are confirmed. If your department's information is not listed, please contact the unit directly.