Proposal for a Summer Semester in the National Capital Region

Background
Graduate Education in the National Capital Region provides many opportunities for faculty to explore different approaches to meet the needs of students, particularly mid-career professionals. One approach proposed by the National Capital Region Faculty Association is implementation of a Summer Semester to replace the two Summer Sessions in the Academic Calendar. Part-time students, who comprise the strong majority of graduate students in the National Capital Region, would greatly benefit from the additional course offerings and greater flexibility afforded by a Summer Semester.

At a recent meeting with the National Capital Region Faculty Association meeting, Dean DePauw requested an in-depth study of the feasibility of implementing a Summer Semester in 2009. In response, an ad hoc committee was appointed to explore issues and propose solutions related to a potential Summer Semester. Members of this committee were Janet Abbate, Csaba Egyhazy, William Frakes, Kathleen Hancock, and David Trauger.

Issues
Nick Stone, National Capital Region Faculty Association President, charged the committee to address the following issues:

- Would the Summer Semester approach be implemented for all programs in the National Capital Region or just for select programs as a pilot?
- Is it possible to detail how this Summer Semester proposal would work for some specific programs?
- How does the Summer Semester concept affect graduate student requirements for full-time enrollment and tuition payments for those on Graduate Assistantships?
- What are the effects of a Summer Semester program on course registration and timetable of classes?
- How would the Summer Semester proposal affect current “summer salary” arrangements from grants, etc.?

The committee was encouraged to develop recommendation to these specific issues, as well as any others that emerged from their deliberations.

Approach
A comparative survey was conducted to determine “summer session” approaches taken at 48 academic institutions, including Virginia Tech. In addition to 8 other colleges and universities in the National Capital Region, this survey included 39 Land Grant and other public universities throughout the United States. The committee also exchanged information by email in preparation for a meeting held to discuss issues and develop recommendations.
Findings
Our peer universities offer a diversity of approaches to education during summer (Appendix I). Most have a conventional Summer I and Summer II format, similar to the approach taken by Virginia Tech. Summer sessions range from 3 to 8 weeks in duration, with most encompassing 5 or 6 week periods (Virginia Tech currently offers two 6-week sessions). A number of universities also offer an additional complex scheme of summer schedules of variable length ranging from 2 to 16 weeks. These sessions may involve programs throughout the entire university, but many are structured around specific course offerings or may vary by college or school.

In our survey, 30 universities offered a continuous Summer Semester conducted over 8-16 week periods, but only 3 institutions had a full 15-16 week semester. Most summer semesters were in the 12-14 week range. Virginia Tech provides an option for offering courses through a combined 12-week Summer I-II period. Several programs in the National Capital Region currently take advantage of the 12-week summer session (e.g., Science and Technology Studies, Natural Resources, Computer Science).

Summer semester starting and ending dates were also quite variable, with most beginning in mid-May immediately after Spring Semester and concluding in mid-August prior to Fall Semester. However, a few schools initiated a summer session or semester before the end of Spring Semester, apparently providing academic opportunities for a different student population.

A review of Virginia Tech’s University Calendar for the 2008-2009 academic year (Appendix II) revealed an opportunity to conduct a 14-week Summer Semester.

Proposal
In 2009 Summer, we propose a Summer Semester for graduate students in the National Capital Region with the following schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes begin</td>
<td>T May 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last day to add classes</td>
<td>F May 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial Day – No classes</td>
<td>M May 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last day to drop classes</td>
<td>F Jun. 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence Day – No Classes</td>
<td>Sa Jul. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last day to resign</td>
<td>F Jul. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes end</td>
<td>M Aug. 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading day</td>
<td>T Aug. 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams begin</td>
<td>W Aug. 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams end</td>
<td>Sa Aug. 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conducting the Summer Semester from May 14 to August 22 provides an opportunity to schedule classes over a full semester between the end of Spring Semester and start of Fall Semester. Classes could be arranged during this period to accommodate the 45-contact-hour semester requirement for a 3-credit course over this 14-week period. Attached is a proposed Timetable of Classes for the 2009 Summer Semester.
This proposal provides expanded opportunities for part-time students to shorten their times to degree, greater diversity in course offerings, higher summer course enrollments, enhanced opportunities for student advising and mentoring, as well as greater flexibility for faculty to schedule time for research or other endeavors.

Discussion
Implementation of this Summer Semester proposal in the National Capital Region raises a number of questions and related issues, but none are considered insurmountable or irresolvable. Most of these matters can be handled internally in the region or within the programs, but a few accommodations will be required by offices on the Main Campus in Blacksburg. Below are discussion points and related comments considered by committee members.

- **Summer Semester Options:** The question of whether the adoption of the Summer Semester proposal should be optional or mandatory was considered. Although there seems to be strong arguments both for and against mandatory implementation throughout the region, the committee concluded that providing maximum flexibility for programs or faculty members was preferable during the initial “pilot” year. Some program directors seem to be either strongly for or against the Summer Semester option. We think that decisions on participation should be negotiated between individual faculty members and their respective program director based on specific program, professional, and personal considerations.

- **9-Month Appointments:** Currently, faculty members are on appointments that typically run from August 15 to May 15. The proposal for a Summer Semester would require adjusting the 9-month appointments to run either from January 15 – October 15 or September 15 to June 15, depending on whether the faculty member took a break during the Fall or Spring Semester, respectively. Administratively, this flexibility in scheduling could easily be accommodated, because most 9-month faculty salaries are already paid over a 12-month period. Any other payroll adjustments due to funding sources or start dates and end dates are already accommodated through the payroll system.

- **Committee Work:** Faculty members are involved in two major types of committee work that may be affected by the Summer Semester proposal, namely Administrative Committees and Graduate Advisory Committees. Adjusting 9-month appointments of the faculty may present some participation obstacles for the former type of committee work, the impact on the latter may be enhanced. Typically, most faculty members participate in assigned committee work of both types whenever it is scheduled. Any committee work scheduled during periods of absence by the faculty member could easily be accommodated through use of available technology.

- **Graduate Assistantships:** Graduate students on assistantships must be enrolled full-time. The conventional definition of “full-time” relates to enrollment in 12 credit hours during Fall and Spring Semesters. However, this definition could and should be easily changed by the Graduate School, working closely with the participating programs to accommodate the affected students. Furthermore, Graduate Teaching Assistants will be needed for the expanded Summer Program, and Graduate Research Assistants could benefit from greater
flexibility in scheduling to align with needs and opportunities from grants and other sponsored programs. Some programs already circumvent these constraints informally.

- **Registration:** The Graduate Dean should work with the University Registrar to develop the administrative procedures for accommodating a Summer Semester in the National Capital Region. This should not be an onerous obstacle, but the scheduling of courses, enrolling of students, and recording of grades may require some adjustments in the Banner system. Our view of these issues appears to be merely a matter of some computer programming, e.g., Designating some courses as Summer Semester versus Summer I or Summer II; a one-time entering of grades for Summer Semester courses; and modifying the Timetable of Classes. Although there may be increased costs associated with these modifications, there should be some administrative efficiency that accrues by not having to support two independent Summer Sessions. And for those program already engaged in the 12-week Summer I-II session, there surely be savings of program support staff time, because the “X” grades will no longer need to be changed.

- **Summer Enrollment Credit:** Credit for summer student enrollments is a long neglected issue that needs to be fixed whether there is a Summer Semester or not. Currently, students enrolled in summer courses do not count in the university’s student FTE census. Consequently, colleges, departments, and programs do not get credit for their actual teaching loads. This issue is particularly important for the National Capital Region where many programs already offer ambitious summer academic opportunities. With the Virginia Tech’s recent initiatives to increase summer enrollments, procedures for accounting for summer enrollment may already be under revision.

**Conclusions**

Establishing a Summer Semester for the National Capital Region will be feasible, desirable, and beneficial. This proposal provides academic programming opportunities that could contribute to increasing summer enrollments and should provide greater flexibility for both students and faculty. The potential exists that an expanded summer academic program could lead to more students attracted to enroll in graduate education offered by Virginia Tech. In addition, the summer program will provide the impetus to upgrade some administrative processes, better use academic facilities, and to improve some operating procedures. There are few downsides and many more positives to implementing a tri-semester program for the National Capital Region. A pilot feasibility trial program during Summer 2009 will pave the way to successful endorsement by administrators and faculty throughout the region and the university.

Respectfully submitted,
Janet Abbate
Csaba Egyhazy
William Frakes
Kathleen Hancock
David L. Trauger

March 10, 2008
### Proposed Time Table of Classes --- 2009 Summer Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRN</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Cr</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NR 5024</td>
<td>Environmental Education</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>Huff/Arendt</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10:00 AM</td>
<td>NVC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR 5724</td>
<td>Conservation Ecology</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>Thomhill</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>7:00 PM</td>
<td>NVC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR 5194</td>
<td>Environmental Ethics</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>Plyler</td>
<td>(ARR)</td>
<td>(ARR)</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR 5684</td>
<td>Foundations of Federal Land Management</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>Evans</td>
<td>(ARR)</td>
<td>(ARR)</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Summer I</td>
<td>Summer II</td>
<td>Summer III</td>
<td>Summer IV</td>
<td>Summer Semester</td>
<td>Special Session</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Capital Region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech</td>
<td>6 Weeks: May 19-June 28</td>
<td>6 Weeks: June 30-August 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12 Weeks: May 19-August 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Mason University</td>
<td>5 Weeks: May 17-June 20</td>
<td>5 Weeks: June 30-August 4</td>
<td>8 Weeks: June 2-July 24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Maryland</td>
<td>6 Weeks: June 1-July 10</td>
<td>6 Weeks: July 13-August 21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johns Hopkins University</td>
<td>6 Weeks: May 19-June 26</td>
<td>6 Weeks: June 30-August 7</td>
<td>3 Weeks: May 19-June 6</td>
<td>7 Weeks: May 12-June 26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13 Weeks: May 27-August 22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distance Learning Consortium</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Idaho</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15 Weeks: May 12-August 19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Montana</td>
<td>5 Weeks: May 19-June 20</td>
<td>5 Weeks: June 5-July 25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 Weeks: May 19-July 25</td>
<td>13 Weeks: May 19-August 19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Arizona University</td>
<td>5 Weeks: June 2-July 1</td>
<td>5 Weeks: July 7-August 5</td>
<td>3 Weeks: May 12-May 30</td>
<td>10 Weeks: June 2-August 5</td>
<td>12 Weeks: May 12-August 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania State University</td>
<td>6 Weeks: May 19-June 30</td>
<td>6 Weeks: July 2-August 15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12 Weeks: May 12-August 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina State University</td>
<td>6 Weeks: May 19-June 24</td>
<td>6 Weeks: July 8-August 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Tennessee-Martin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 Weeks: June 2-August 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen F. Austin State University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land Grant and Selected Other Universities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona State University</td>
<td>5 Weeks: May 27-June 27</td>
<td>5 Weeks: June 30-August 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 Weeks: May 27-July 18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State University</td>
<td>4 Weeks: May 19-June 13</td>
<td>4 Weeks: June 16-July 11</td>
<td>8 Weeks: June 16-August 8</td>
<td>12 Weeks: May 19-August 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan State University</td>
<td>7 Weeks: May 12-June 26</td>
<td>7 Weeks: June 30-August 14</td>
<td>14 Weeks: May 12-August 14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa State University</td>
<td>8 Week: May 19-July 11</td>
<td>8 Weeks: June 16-August 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>12 Week: May 18-August 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University</td>
<td>5 weeks: May 27-June 27</td>
<td>5 weeks: July 1-August 4</td>
<td>10 Week: May 27-August 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington State University</td>
<td>8 Week: June 2-July 25</td>
<td>6 Week: June 16-July 25</td>
<td></td>
<td>11 Week: May 5-July 25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Arizona</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California-Davis</td>
<td>6 Week: June 23-August 1</td>
<td>6 Week: August 4-September 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13 Weeks: May 12-August 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Florida</td>
<td>6 Week: May 12-June 20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12 Weeks: May 12-July 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Georgia</td>
<td>4 Week: June 5-July 2</td>
<td>4 Week: July 7-July 31</td>
<td>9 Weeks: June 2-July 31</td>
<td>12 Week: May 12-July 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Illinois</td>
<td>4 Week: May 12-June 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 Week: June 9-August 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Massachusetts</td>
<td>8 Weeks: April 29-June 20</td>
<td>7 Weeks: June 25-August 15</td>
<td></td>
<td>13 Weeks: June 2-August 20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Minnesota</td>
<td>3 Week: May 27-June 13-</td>
<td>6 Weeks: June 16-July 25</td>
<td>16 Weeks: April 29-August 15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Varies by Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Missouri</td>
<td>4 Week: June 9-July 3</td>
<td>4 Week: July 7-August 1</td>
<td>8 Week: June 16-August 8</td>
<td>13 Week: May 27-August 22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Vermont</td>
<td>6 Weeks: May 19-June 27</td>
<td>6 Weeks: June 30-August 8</td>
<td>8 Weeks: June 9-August 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Washington</td>
<td>5 weeks: June 23-July 23</td>
<td>5 weeks: July 24-August 22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9 Week: June 23-August 22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fall Semester 2007

Classes begin M Aug. 20
Last day to add classes F Aug. 24
Labor Day - classes DO meet M Sep. 3
Last day to drop classes F Sep. 28
Fall Break - NO classes/offices open M Oct. 8
Last day to resign M Oct. 15
Thanksgiving break begins Sa Nov. 17
Thanksgiving break ends Su Nov. 25
Classes end W Dec. 5
Reading day R Dec. 6
Exams begin F Dec. 7
Exams end R Dec. 13
Fall Commencement Ceremonies F Dec. 14

Spring Semester 2008

Classes begin M Jan. 14
Last day to add classes F Jan. 18
MLK Holiday - NO classes M Jan. 21
Last day to drop classes F Feb. 25
Spring break begins Sa Mar. 1
Spring breaks ends Su Mar. 9
Last day to resign M Mar. 17
Classes end W Apr. 30
Reading day R May 1
Exams begin F May 2
Exams end W May 7
Univ. Commencement Ceremonies F May 9
Spring Commencement* Sa May 10

* College Ceremonies

Summer I 2008

Classes begin M May 19
Last day to add classes W May 21
Memorial Day - NO classes M May 26
Last day to drop classes M Jun. 2
Last day to resign M Jun. 9
Classes end R Jun. 26
Exams begin F Jun. 27
Exams end Sa Jun. 28

Summer II 2008

Classes begin M Jun. 30
Last day to add classes W Jul. 2
Holiday - NO classes F Jul. 4
Last day to drop classes M Jul. 14
Last day to resign M Jul. 21
Classes end R Aug. 7
Exams begin F Aug. 8
Exams end Sa Aug. 9

Fall Semester 2008

Classes begin M Aug. 25
Last day to add classes F Aug. 29
Labor Day - classes DO meet M Sep. 1
Last day to drop classes F Sep. 26
Fall Break - NO classes/offices open F Oct. 10
Last day to resign M Oct. 20
Thanksgiving break begins Sa Nov. 22
Thanksgiving break ends Su Nov. 30
Classes end W Dec. 10
Reading day R Dec. 11
Exams begin F Dec. 12
Exams end R Dec. 18
Fall Commencement Ceremonies F Dec. 19

Spring Semester 2009

MLK Holiday - NO classes M Jan. 19
Classes begin T Jan. 20
Last day to add classes M Jan. 26
Last day to drop classes M Feb. 23
Spring break begins Sa Mar. 7
Spring breaks ends Su Mar. 15
Last day to resign M Mar. 16
Classes end W May 6
Reading Day R May 7
Exams begin F May 8
Exams end W May 13
Univ. Commencement Ceremonies F May 15
Spring Commencement* Sa May 16

* College Ceremonies

Summer I 2009

Memorial Day - NO classes M May 25
Classes begin M May 26
Last day to add classes R May 28
Last day to drop classes M Jun. 8
Last day to resign M Jun. 15
Classes end R Jul. 2
Exams begin F Jul. 3
Exams end M Jul. 6

Summer II 2009

Classes begin T Jul. 7
Last day to add classes R Jul. 9
Last day to drop classes M Jul. 13
Last day to resign M Jul. 20
Classes end R Aug. 13
Exams begin F Aug. 14
Exams end Sa Aug. 15