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Purdue aims to trim costs by adding summer classes ^[1]

Submitted by [Mitch Smith](#) ^[2] on January 12, 2012 - 3:00am

Hoping to increase revenues, triple summer enrollment and accelerate graduations, Purdue University unveiled a trimester system Wednesday.

The goal is to bring the Indiana university's summer enrollment from its current level of 6,000 to 20,000 within a decade, President France Córdoba said at a news conference in Indianapolis. Many institutions have seen summer enrollments grow in recent years, but Purdue's plan is much more dramatic. Administrators believe the increased course offerings will increase opportunities for early or four-year graduation -- Purdue's time to degree average is 4.27 years -- while also benefiting the university's finances.

Two student leaders said they were optimistic about the plan, but questions remain about how the university will staff the new classes and provide financial aid.

As state funding decreases for the university, which has about 30,000 undergraduates on its West Lafayette campus, Córdoba said the trimesters will make more efficient use of facilities and could create more than \$40 million in additional net revenue by 2022.

But it also creates new expenses, namely instructor pay. Financial aid will be another challenge, because many aid programs only cover two academic terms each year. To that end, the university has new scholarship programs in place and summer tuition discounts that could offset some of the costs. In-state tuition for the fall and spring was \$9,478 this year, while summer school cost Indiana residents \$2,369.50.

Purdue, like most colleges and universities, operates on a fall and spring semester schedule. The university offered a limited number of summer classes in past years, but few students stuck around. At some point, the university will adjust its academic calendar to create 13-week trimesters, instead of 15-week semesters, and summer sessions of varying lengths.

Kirsten Gibson, editor-in-chief of Purdue's *Exponent* newspaper, had only about a dozen classmates in her Spanish and international relations classes last summer. "Campus is almost completely dead," the sophomore said. When rumors of a trimester system first started floating around campus, Gibson said students feared summer school would be mandatory. Now assured that attendance is optional, she said many are open to the idea.

"It's definitely now worth considering," she said, "especially with this talk about discounted tuition."

But both Gibson and the student body president, Brett Highley, said the quality of course offerings will determine whether their fellow Boilermakers stay in West Lafayette through June and July. "It's supply and demand on both sides," Highley said. "Traditionally, they haven't had the students who stick around for the summer and, on the other side, they haven't had the courses available."

University leaders said faculty members will be "incentivized" to take on summer classes and that additional staff could be hired.

The \$40 million in extra revenues in 2022 is what Córdoba and Provost Tim Sand called a "conservative" estimate of what the university could expect to yield if 20,000 students take summer courses and if course load is about 25 percent higher than the current summer average of four or five credit hours per student.

Córdoba and Highley, the student government president, were hopeful the trimesters could make internships more attainable. Highley said many aspiring scientists and engineers are hesitant to pursue a fall or spring internship for fear of falling behind in class. Being able to make up those courses in the summer could lessen those concerns, he said.

"The high-tech engineering firms, it's not a seasonal industry," Highley said. "I think the (internship) demand is there from the industry perspective year-round, it's just hard to find the students to fill the spots."

Teaching and Learning ^[3]

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