

memo

To: Senate

From: Elizabeth Adjin-Tettey, AVP Academic Programs
Wendy Taylor, Acting Registrar

Date: April 19, 2024

Re: **Report on Pilot for Centrally Scheduled Midterm Examination Period**

As many Senators are aware, Senate approved a centrally scheduled midterm examination period pilot at a special meeting on December 13, 2023. The midterm pilot provided an opportunity to test a new way to support students who require additional time on their assessments within a distraction-reduced environment, and allowed instructors who hold midterms outside their regular class time to have these examinations scheduled centrally by the Office of the Registrar and Enrolment Management (OREM).

The proposal included a commitment to bring a report back to the Senate Committee on Academic Standards, and then to Senate, after the midterm pilot had taken place and evaluation had been completed. High-level findings that emerged from the analysis of the feedback included student and instructor concerns with the implementation timelines and scheduling, the measures implemented in the pilot to support access-centred learning were ineffective, and a lack of timely communication about the midterm pilot.

This memo outlines the work that transpired to undertake the pilot, feedback collected, findings and themes, lessons learned as well as the next steps to be considered.

Background

The centrally scheduled midterm examination period pilot was brought forward to Senate for its consideration and approval in response to scheduling challenges created for students and instructors due to midterm exams held outside regular class times as well as the increase in accommodated assessments. The midterm pilot was approved for select courses in the Faculties of Social Sciences, Science and Engineering and Computer Science to take place on Friday, February 9 and Saturday, February 10, 2024. Sunday, February 11 was held in reserve for rescheduled examinations in the event of exam cancellation.

The plan called for a large location to be utilized, holding up to three scheduled time blocks per day for midterm exams invigilated by the course instructor and/or Teaching Assistants. For multi-section courses, all students in the same course (regardless of the section) were to take the midterm examination at the same time and in the same location, for up to a maximum 3-hour block. The time

period was intended to reflect a universal design for learning principle of additional time for all students (for an assessment that should normally take no longer than 2 hours).

To support an inclusive and distraction-reduced environment, cardboard carrels on desks and ear plugs were to be provided. In accordance with current practice, the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) continued to manage more complex accommodation requirements, including during the centrally scheduled midterm examination pilot period. For courses that chose to participate in the February 2024 centrally scheduled midterm pilot, this was the only in-term accommodated assessment that the OREM supported for the January-April term. Instructors that chose to participate in the pilot were responsible for arranging accommodations for additional assessments outside the centrally scheduled midterm period.

The pilot relied on the following existing academic regulations within the undergraduate academic calendar: [Examinations](#), including Final Examination Conflict and Hardship, and [Examination cancellation](#).

The proposal committed to an evaluation of the pilot once complete. In addition, the proposal noted that this pilot was not intended to address all challenges being experienced by students and instructors regarding academic accommodation. A longer-term implementation of a centrally scheduled midterm examination period would also require systems changes, communication and process updates, and changes to the existing exam regulations in the academic calendar. This would ensure that a centrally scheduled midterm examination period would be both informed by the pilot and properly supported through academic regulation and policy.

Midterm Pilot Implementation Activities

After Senate approved the centrally scheduled midterm examination period pilot, VPAC sent a memo to deans, associate deans, chairs and directors to communicate Senate's approval of the pilot. In the week following Senate approval, instructors interested in participating had the opportunity to learn more about the pilot and confirm whether they wished to participate. By December 20, instructors from nine courses within the Faculties of Science and Social Sciences had confirmed their participation. Due to concerns about limiting support for accommodated assessments to a single midterm, instructors in the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science opted not to participate.

After the nine courses were confirmed, OREM created a midterm exam schedule utilizing the same software used to schedule final exams. On December 22, 2023, the midterm exam schedule was shared with participating instructors and their associate deans. While the schedule was under development, the team also began work with the Senior Director, Campus Engagement, to procure the cardboard carrels and earplugs required to support the midterm pilot. Additional activities undertaken in late December included discussions with the Wellness, Recreation and Athletics Department (WRAD) about the use of the CARSA Fieldhouse as the primary location required for the midterm pilot and the availability of the Vikes women's soccer team to support the set up and takedown of this space (as is standard practice for the December and April final exam periods).

After the winter closure, additional investigation determined the Fieldhouse was not a feasible location in which to run the pilot, and an alternate solution was proposed to use the McKinnon Gym. Activities scheduled in the McKinnon Gym during the midterm pilot period (including setup and takedown days) would be moved into the Fieldhouse to enable the use of McKinnon Gym for midterm exams. Both the School of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education (EPHE) and WRAD had bookings in the McKinnon Gym for the agreed-upon midterm pilot dates.

On January 10, 2024, both departments agreed to the changes required to allow the midterm pilot to take place in the McKinnon Gym. EPHE's academic courses were moved to the Fieldhouse on the impacted dates. WRAD cancelled activities in the Fieldhouse to provide space for EPHE's academic courses, and relocated, rescheduled, or cancelled intramural programs that conflicted with the midterm pilot dates.

While these other matters were in progress, a [website](#) to share more information about the midterm pilot and schedule was developed, and published on January 12, 2024.

One of the principles of the midterm pilot was to run the pilot at the same time as classes, as a way to test holding midterms concurrently with classes. Three midterm exams were initially scheduled during the day on Friday, February 9, overlapping with class times. On January 2, one instructor withdrew from the pilot due to anticipated conflicts between their midterm exam and regularly scheduled classes. On January 12, the other two instructors were sent the list of students with conflicts between their midterm exams and regularly scheduled classes.

Both instructors had over 100 students each with conflicts between their midterm exam and classes. Neither instructor had anticipated this high volume of conflicts, nor had they understood that instructors/academic units would be responsible to make alternate arrangements for students with conflicts. In response to requests for alternate time slots from both instructors, the OREM Exams team found an option for each course with the fewest conflicts and hardships and the instructors were informed and agreed to their new scheduled time slot. In alignment with final exam scheduling practices, written approval from the dean was required in order to move these midterms to the newly proposed dates and times.

The setup required for the pilot was almost identical to what is required for final exam periods, with the addition of the cardboard carrels in all locations. Setup and takedown procedures normally occur over a two-day period, while takedown is completed in a single day. External movers deliver floor mats to the gym which are set up and cleaned by the Vikes women's soccer team. The following day, 800 desks and chairs are set up in rows. Additional tables, chairs and chalkboards are delivered and set up for invigilators. Cardboard carrels were delivered by Facilities Management to McKinnon gym and the four large lecture theatres used for the pilot, and the carrels were affixed to each desk by the soccer team and OREM staff with adhesive putty. As the classrooms were in use for regular classes on the Friday of the pilot, six casual employees were hired to assist four regular OREM staff in the setup of approximately 600 carrels in these spaces.

Takedown of the classroom spaces began Saturday morning as classrooms used for midterms on the Friday evening were required for other activities. Two classrooms were still in use for the pilot on Saturday night, so OREM staff removed carrels from these spaces early on Monday, February 12 before classes began that day.

Evaluation and Feedback

Informal feedback was received during the creation of the midterm pilot schedule and leading up to the dates of the midterm pilot. After the midterm pilot concluded, formal feedback was solicited through confidential, anonymous surveys as well as emails and meetings.

Surveys were distributed to all students registered in courses participating in the pilot. Students registered in participating courses were asked to respond to 8 questions (see Appendix A). The survey distributed to students registered with CAL included the same 8 questions, plus one additional question designed to assess what barriers to access-centred learning were experienced by students during the pilot (see Appendix B). Surveys were also distributed to participating instructors and Associate Deans (see Appendix C), with an

invitation to distribute the survey to teaching assistants (TAs) and others within their respective academic units who provided support for the midterm pilot.

Surveys were distributed on Monday, February 12, 2024, and remained open for a two-week period concluding on February 26, 2024. Reminder emails were sent on Thursday, February 22, 2024.

Response rates for the surveys were as follows:

- Students registered in courses participating in the pilot (not registered with CAL) (2475) – 686 respondents (30%)
- CAL-registered students (217) – 103 students (47%)
- Instructors and Associate Deans (15) – 10 respondents (67%)

Feedback was also solicited via both email and meetings with impacted campus partners, including academic units, CAL, the OREM Exams and Accommodated Assessments teams, and WRAD.

Findings and Themes

After the surveys closed, all data collected was compiled and analyzed. Three key themes emerged: implementation timeline and scheduling, barriers to access-centred learning, and communication. This section outlines each theme in more detail. Many of the survey questions included opportunities for free-form responses from survey participants. In order to protect confidentiality for those that participated in feedback opportunities, only a subset of the qualitative data collected has been shared in this report. Quoted survey feedback from instructors and students has been shared verbatim below and redacted only where necessary to preserve confidentiality.

Implementation Timeline and Scheduling

With less than two months between the approval of the pilot and the midterm exam period itself, it is unsurprising that much of the feedback received from both students and instructors spoke to tight timelines and scheduling challenges.

Lack of Advanced Notice

The midterm exam schedule was finalized prior to the university's winter closure in December to enable instructors to include information about the pilot and their midterm exam dates in their course outlines for the Spring 2024 term. Nevertheless, a common complaint from students was a lack of notice regarding scheduling and other aspects of the pilot. In the case of the two rescheduled exams, this may have been exacerbated by scheduling changes in the second week of the term. However, students in other courses also reported learning about the pilot and how their accommodations would be met just days before their scheduled exams, resulting in negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing.

"I was only informed a few days before my [midterm] that I would be writing it in the gym with hundreds of other students, and the short notice of the change caused me a high level of anxiety leading up to the exam."

"I would've liked to be aware this would be how I was writing, my prof only let me know a few days in advance which isn't appreciated. I feel that I did not have enough time to even mentally prepare."

"As a CAL OREM student I did not receive any information about how the pilot program would affect my midterms until a few days before they were scheduled to take place. This caused unnecessary stress."

Scheduling Challenges

Students were asked how they felt about midterm exams held outside of regularly scheduled class times. Survey responses indicate that a clear majority – 83% of students registered with CAL and 67% of students without accommodations – prefer to take exams during class time. In fact, one of the most prominent themes identified from the student survey data was a strong belief that holding exams in the evenings and on weekends greatly challenges students' ability to balance school, work, family and/or other commitments alongside rest and personal time.

"...students already have so much time taken up by all of their classes and outside homework, reading, etc. This adds an extra stress, and time taken away from the little open time we have. Having exams on a weekend means we have school 6 days a week with only one day of rest, which can lead to burn out. Furthermore, it is expected to not have mandatory class/exams during the semester on weekends, and so this is time for many to go home, work, etc. And this pilot program takes that opportunity away, and makes for more planning (like getting your weekend shifts covered and not making any money that week)."

"Exams at 9 AM on a Saturday are cruel. Many students work on the weekends, have children to take care of, or have other commitments outside of scheduled class time."

"Also, transportation to campus is much harder on a Saturday night, as the bus to my house stopped running at 7:30pm so I was forced to spend money on an uber home. I do not believe I should have to give up family time, a work shift, as well as money on transportation to write an exam outside of the class period."

Feedback from students also highlighted that the condensed nature of the two-day pilot led to increased pressure during an already busy time in the term. Of the students participating, 23 students were scheduled to write three exams during the pilot and one student was scheduled to write four exams. Other students reported having several assignments due and/or writing multiple exams, outside of the pilot but within the same week.

"Both of my midterms were on Saturday, and I also had 2 midterms during the week. Not having the midterms during class time added so much extra stress because classes and assignments continued as normal, which added on to the workload. It made an already stressful week 6 days long. I don't feel I did as well as I could have due to the timeframe the exams were scheduled."

"I had 3 midterms within a 4-day span while having assignments due for other courses and classes."

"Scheduling exams like this while regular classes continue is far too demanding. It is not the same as having normal midterms in the same week. Exams like this only work during finals because there aren't any classes happening so people can study."

Additional scheduling-related concerns voiced by students included exams of differing durations being held concurrently within the same space.

"Next time don't put a three-hour exam in the same room as a 50-minute exam because when all the students from the shorter exam get up and leave it is very distracting for EVERYONE."

"There should also only be exams of equal length at one time so that one class does not have to focus while the other class is handing in their exams and leaving."

Timing

Initially, the pilot was intended to include three faculties: Engineering and Computer Science, Science, and Social Sciences. Following the approval of the pilot at Senate on December 13, several interested instructors within the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science met with OREM staff to discuss the pilot in further detail. Despite initial interest, instructors opted not to participate due to concerns about limiting OREM support for accommodated assessments to a single midterm. Another instructor expressed support for the concept and willingness to administer a single midterm, but decided not to participate in the pilot as they believed that holding the midterm so early in the term would negatively impact student success.

Barriers to Access-Centred Learning

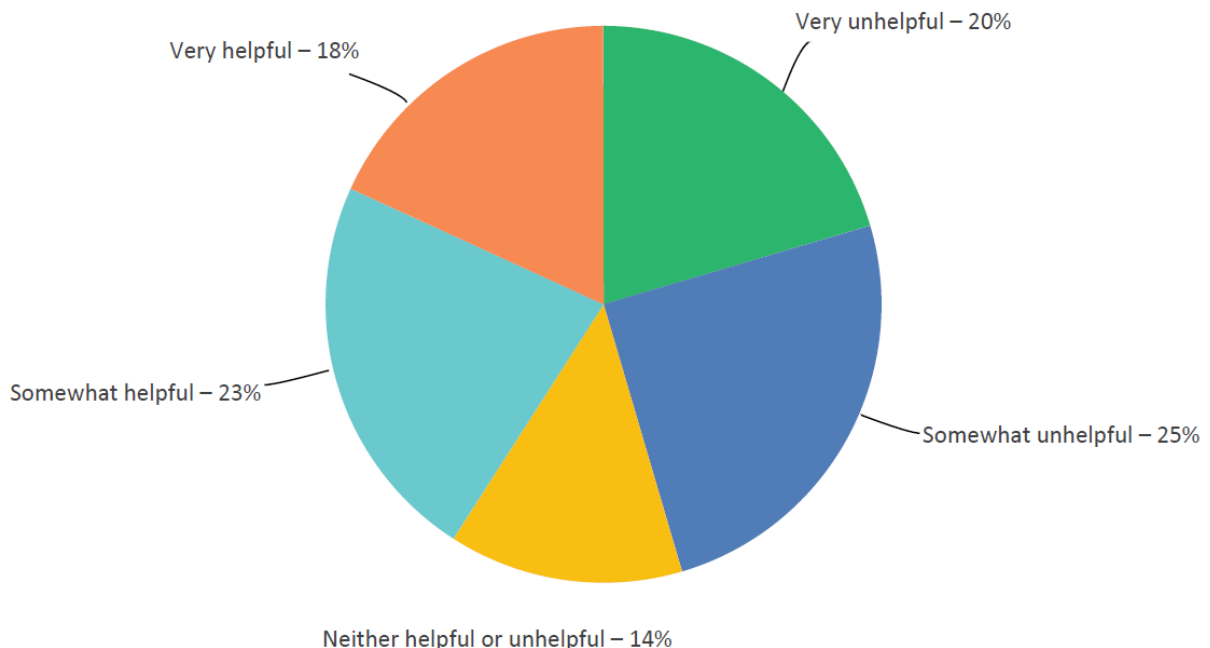
During the midterm pilot, students with more complex accommodation requirements wrote their midterm exams with CAL as usual, while students with accommodations for additional time, a distraction-reduced environment, supervised breaks, and additional allowable materials wrote their exams alongside their classmates in the gym (or another large classroom setting).

Distraction-Reduction Measures

To support an inclusive environment and reduce distractions for students, all desk spaces used in the pilot were outfitted with cardboard carrels. Interestingly, 57% of instructors reported that the cardboard carrels and earplugs appeared to have been helpful to students. In contrast, feedback from students registered with CAL indicated that not only were these measures ineffective in reducing distractions, but they also exacerbated anxiety for many students.

One of the survey questions asked students to indicate if they used earplugs during the midterm pilot. 45% of students registered with CAL chose to use earplugs during their midterm exams; of these, only 41% described the earplugs as either very helpful or somewhat helpful in reducing distractions while writing.

Chart 1 - CAL-Registered Students Response to Question 6 (Appendix B)



Many students who used earplugs did not find that they adequately reduced noise-related distractions. Other students found instead that the earplugs prevented them from hearing important announcements from the instructor, such as a correction to an error in the exam. Still others were concerned about missing key announcements or found the earplugs too uncomfortable to use and opted instead to cope with noise-related distractions throughout the exam.

“I was significantly more distracted in the pilot, as the earplugs were unhelpful and i could still hear the 200 other students writing their tests/getting up to hand them in, which was very distracting.”

“Limiting my awareness of my surroundings actually makes my focus_worse_ because it significantly increases my anxiety. The earplugs are the main source of this issue for me and don’t replace a quiet environment. I felt forced to make a choice between being distracted by all of the noise in the room or distracted by anxiety caused by not knowing what’s going on around me.”

“For myself, I could not even utilize the ‘accommodation’ of using earplugs, because I have sensory issues that prevent me from wearing them, so I had to choose from two equally bad options, which is EXACTLY the kind of situation accommodations are in place to prevent.”

Conversely, amongst students without accommodations, only 11% made use of earplugs, with 80% of these reporting that the earplugs were helpful in reducing distractions during the exam. Another survey question asked students to rate the use of the cardboard carrels on a scale from very helpful to very unhelpful. While 53% of students without accommodations found the carrels either very helpful or somewhat helpful in reducing distractions, only 42% of students registered with CAL reported the same.

Chart 2 - Students Without Accommodations Response to Question 4 (Appendix A)

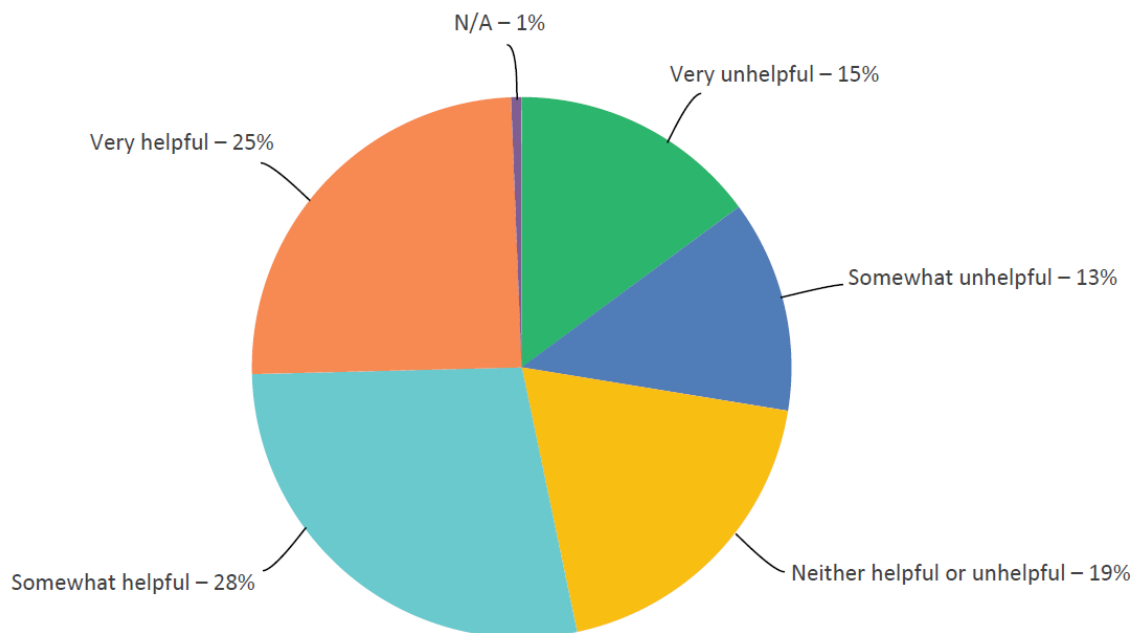
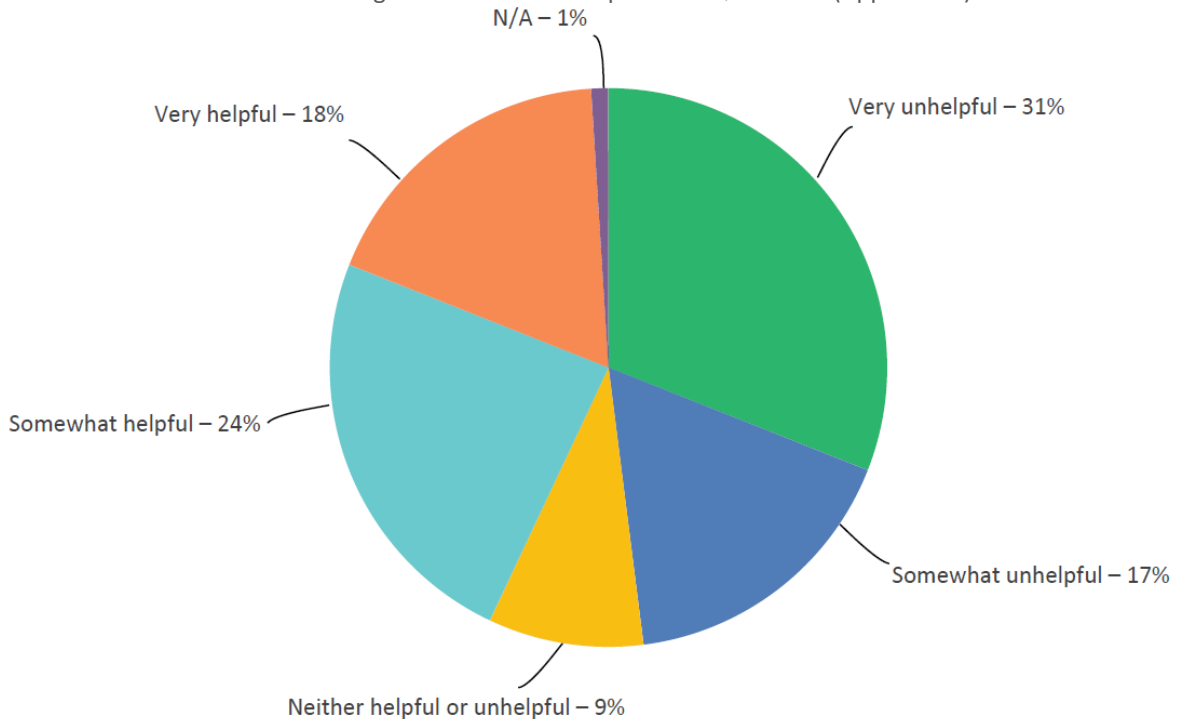


Chart 3 - CAL-Registered Students Response to Question 4 (Appendix B)



Some students described the cardboard carrels as being too short to fully block distractions, while others experienced anxiety as a result of being unable to see their instructor, the clock, etc. or felt that the carrels constrained their movements.

"I couldn't fit shoulders/arms in it without knocking it off the desk. After knocking it onto myself/off the desk 3 times I gave up and folded the divider up and stuffed it under my desk. It limits space and doesn't substantially change the vision of others in my opinion."

"I could not see the clock and therefore had no idea how much time had passed, which stressed me out...The carrels on the desk also really reduced the amount of desk space I had, which made me feel super claustrophobic."

Many students noted that while the carrels helped to minimize visual distractions, they did nothing to alleviate anxiety associated with writing alongside hundreds of students within a large space.

"I found it too anxiety inducing with so many people. I almost had a panic attack as I was having sensory overload."

"A large space with many people is overwhelming for me, even with the cardboard."

"As a student with anxiety, being around all of those people was stressful to the point of feeling physically ill."

Students reported that these measures also failed to adequately mitigate vibrations across large spaces caused by invigilators circulating throughout the room, students leaving as they completed their exams, etc.

"The carrels on the desk also really reduced the amount of desk space I had, which made me feel super claustrophobic. Also, because of the size of the room, everything echoed, and when people

walked by, I could feel the vibrations on the floor. This had me in a cycle of getting distracted, being anxious about said distraction and its potential effect on my score and then having to calm myself down.”

“The numerous students getting up and leaving, writing with pencils, tucking in their chairs, etc. were all very distracting.”

In addition, both formal and informal feedback received from participating academic units highlighted concerns that the use of cardboard carrels would not permit invigilators to see students easily and the worry about the potential for academic integrity violations.

Overall, the data demonstrates that while the provision of earplugs and cardboard carrels did improve the exam-writing experience of some students, these measures did not adequately reduce distractions for CAL-registered students with an accommodation allowing for assessments to be completed in a distraction-reduced environment.

Additional Time and Privacy Concerns

The midterm pilot adhered to a universal design principle of additional time for all students. Students with accommodations for additional time were scheduled to write their exams alongside their peers, with all students being granted the same length of time up to a maximum of three hours, for an assessment designed to normally take no longer than two hours.

CAL-registered students reported via the survey, and via CAL advisers, that at least one instructor chose not to allow universal additional time. Instead, the instructor announced one end time for students without accommodations and then allowed CAL-registered students to continue writing, leading to both individual discomfort and concerns about privacy.

“They announced to everyone not in CAL that their time was done putting down people with disabilities. This poorly executed system needs to take a step back and realize their ablism.”

“I have anxiety and when people called out exam over only Cal students stay, I felt very self-conscious and uncomfortable and as a result was rushing the exam.”

Students also referenced concerns about privacy with respect to accessing other accommodations to which they are entitled in front of their peers. For example, several students noted that they were uncomfortable exercising their accommodation to take supervised breaks during their exam as they did not wish to draw attention to themselves as a student with accommodations.

Discrepancies in exam length – while not uncommon during the final exam period – were far more prevalent during the midterm pilot, in part due to differing approaches to standard midterm assessments and in part due to the application of the principle of additional time. As outlined above under “Implementation timeline and scheduling,” both CAL-registered students and those without accommodations highlighted distractions brought about by large numbers of students exiting the space at the conclusion of an exam while another exam was still in-progress.

Communication

Communication was a common thread throughout much of the informal and formal feedback received. When asked if they felt they had received enough information about what to expect as a student participating in the pilot, only 40% of students registered with CAL and 47% of students without accommodations said yes. As noted above, many CAL-registered students indicated they had not

received notice of their participation in the pilot and how this would impact them until just a few days prior to their exams. Moreover, many students without accommodations voiced that they were unaware of the pilot until they received a request to complete the feedback survey.

“I did not learn that the exams I had during this period were a part of a pilot program until the week before! This was rather upsetting finding this out so last minute.”

“Communication to the students could have definitely been improved. We were not told that this was an experiment...”

“I was not told anything about the Exams Pilot in any of my classes and was very confused at how my luck was so terrible to have 3 midterms within a few days. None of my professors mentioned the project.”

In advance of the pilot, a [Midterm exams pilot webpage](#) was created to share scheduling information and answer anticipated questions. The webpage included information regarding which CAL-registered students would write their exams at CAL and which would write with their classmates in the gym – one of the most common points of confusion identified in the survey data. Unfortunately, only 22% of students without accommodations and 35% of CAL-registered students reported having visited the webpage.

Many students voiced frustration that they had not been made aware of the website, and that more complete information had not been forthcoming from their instructors, CAL, and/or OREM. Several students noted Brightspace and social media could have been used as effective means for mass communications.

Similarly, just 40% of participating instructors felt they had received clear and timely communication around their roles and responsibilities. Feedback from faculty who felt unprepared to address questions from students was supported by feedback from students who found that their instructors were unable to answer their questions, in particular with respect to how student accommodations would be met.

“My professor shared details of what the setup would be like, but they didn’t really know what it would be like.”

“I had emailed my teachers and advisors and Cal advisor for advice on how my accommodations would be met and was given no answers. It seemed like no one knew what was going on and that we were just expected to complete the exam without any accommodations.”

“It was frustrating because it wasn’t clear what we could accommodate.” (Instructor)

“Greater clarity on what the set up was going to be earlier would have helped communicating with students to reduce fears and concerns that we had to deal with.” (Instructor)

In the weeks leading up to the pilot, several significant points of confusion were identified. Although the original memo to Senate outlined that midterm exams would be scheduled during classes on the Friday in order to test the feasibility of running a midterm period concurrently with regular classes, this point was not well understood.

One instructor believed their midterm would be scheduled during their regular class time to prevent conflicts and withdrew from the pilot due to concerns about anticipated conflicts when they learned

that would not be the case. Conversely, another instructor voiced objections to their midterm overlapping with their regularly scheduled lecture, as this would cause a loss of instructional time. As outlined earlier, two instructors faced with large numbers of class conflicts had not understood they would be responsible to make alternate arrangements for these students and requested their midterms be rescheduled as a result.

Several instructors were unaware that by participating in the pilot, they would not be eligible to request OREM support with accommodations for other in-term assessments for their course.

Instructors for one course had not fully understood the purpose of the cardboard carrels and requested to have them removed from the gym for their exam due to concerns with academic integrity. There was also a lack of clarity regarding who would be responsible for ensuring accommodations outside of additional time and a distraction-reduced environment (e.g., word processing accommodations and supervised breaks) would be met. This resulted in OREM needing to plan for students requiring a word processor on very short notice.

In consideration of these experiences and all the feedback received, it is clear communication was not sufficient with respect to many of the details of the midterm pilot. In hindsight, a more robust communication plan was needed for key faculty and staff in both academic and administrative units participating in and/or supporting the midterm pilot. In addition, there should have been more proactive large-scale student communications via email or social media.

Lessons Learned

The implementation of the February 2024 midterm pilot took place within an accelerated timeframe and required strategic allocation of resources to uphold the proposed and Senate-approved parameters of the pilot. Feedback collected from students, faculty and staff clearly demonstrates the many valuable lessons learned during the pilot, especially as pertains to timelines and scheduling, barriers to access-centred learning, and communication.

Based on student feedback, it is evident that the use of cardboard carrels and earplugs did not effectively mitigate distractions for students requiring a distraction-reduced environment. Should the University consider a centrally scheduled midterm examination period in the future, an alternative approach will be necessary for CAL-registered students who require a distraction-reduced environment in which to write assessments. It may be feasible to provide carrels on an optional basis to these students within smaller, dedicated classroom spaces; however, costs and logistics will need to be considered.

The structure of the pilot did not provide adequate accommodation for students requiring supports other than or in combination with additional time. It also revealed a lack of understanding about what students with certain accommodations are entitled to receive. To illustrate, several students referred in their survey responses specifically to their accommodation for a smaller or private exam-writing space not being met. Outside the midterm pilot, students with an accommodation for a distraction-reduced environment normally write their assessments in a small classroom. Moving forward, it will be important to ensure both students and instructors have a clear understanding of the different types of accommodations and how each type, or types in combination, can be met and supported.

Early in the process, it became clear that the number of conflicts created by scheduling midterm exams concurrently with classes were such that instructors could not reasonably be expected to effectively resolve these conflicts. In addition, students voiced significant concerns regarding the increased pressures and workload of a centrally scheduled midterm period alongside regularly scheduled classes.

This points to a need to explore the possibility of cancelling classes during any future centrally scheduled midterm exam period, along with the subsequent impacts to the Academic important dates. Any potential cancellation of classes for future midterm exam periods would also need to consider how to ensure the minimum number of instructional days per term remains within the established range as outlined in the 10-year calendar.

Should a future midterm period be pursued, dates must be established and communicated well in advance of each term. This approach would be similar to that taken with final exam period dates, to ensure this information can be included in course outlines as well as the academic important dates in the calendar, and to enable students and instructors to plan accordingly. This planning would also be critical in mitigating impacts to both academic and recreational activities in McKinnon gym, and the associated workload for staff in WRAD and the affected academic units.

Impacts to recreational programming represent just one of the ways in which a midterm exam period affects student wellness. Student feedback emphasized a strong preference to write assessments during class time and avoid having assessments in the evenings or on weekends. Students referenced lost wages as well as additional expenses incurred for childcare. Some survey respondents also noted challenges with limited availability of public transit services in their area in the evenings and on weekends. Students also highlighted impacts on family responsibilities and leisure and wellness activities because of evening and weekend assessments. Any future exploration of a formal midterm period will need to consider not only the impacts on academic classes and other institutional programming, but also the university's commitment to student wellbeing and academic success.

Thorough planning and implementation of the midterm exam pilot was challenged due to tight timelines. In collaboration with CAL, OREM identified additional communications and processes to support students and invigilators participating in the midterm pilot. Unfortunately, the teams lacked the capacity to implement these ideas in full due to significant increases in workload introduced by this pilot. As such, there were missed opportunities for the two teams to collaborate and provide improved support and clarification to participating faculty and students in advance of the midterm exam pilot.

The midterm pilot was costly to implement and administer in terms of supplies, space and associated logistics, and staff resources. Consistent with the final exam period, OREM facilitated printing of exams for academic units upon request, with seven out of eight courses electing to make use of this service. In addition to the standard costs associated with preparing the gym for a formal exam period, 1800 carrels and 1800 earplugs were ordered to support the provision of a distraction-reduced environment, with additional costs incurred for the delivery and setup of these supplies to all exam locations. WRAD also incurred expenses in relocating equipment required for academic classes from McKinnon to CARSA, and in issuing refunds to intramural teams for whom no alternative space nor time was available.

Lastly, the importance of effective communication cannot be overstated. Any future efforts to implement a midterm period will require increased and clearer communication between OREM, CAL, academic units/instructors, and students. With adequate time and resources in place to facilitate such an approach, the pilot would have benefitted enormously from additional communications to students, instructors, staff, and academic and administrative leaders. These communications would enable all participants, and those supporting them, to understand the roles and responsibilities of each area, how to ensure accommodations are met, where to find information, and where to direct questions and concerns.

Conclusion

The midterm pilot provided an opportunity to test centralized scheduling of midterm exams alongside a new way of supporting students with specific accommodations.

The original proposal to Senate noted that, should the February 2024 pilot be successful, the university could look to regularize a centrally scheduled midterm examination period for Terms 1 and 2 of the Winter Session. After analyzing the feedback collected and identifying recurring themes, it is clear that time is required to reflect on and consider how to respond to the lessons learned before committing to a longer-term plan. It will be especially important to consider how enhanced communication for students, faculty and staff and an adjusted approach to accommodated assessments can contribute to student success.

Once a thorough review has been completed, there will be an opportunity to consider a subsequent midterm pilot that incorporates and applies this learning. To ensure sufficient time is provided to complete this review, a pilot will not be proposed for Winter Session 2024-25. The proposed timing, scope and parameters for a subsequent pilot will be brought forward as a future proposal for the consideration of the Senate Committee on Academic Standards, and Senate.

Appendix A – Midterm Exam Period Pilot- Student Survey

We invite you to share your feedback as a student who wrote one or more exams during UVic's centrally scheduled midterm exam period pilot on February 9 & 10, 2024.

The survey should take approximately **5-10 minutes** to complete and will remain open until **Monday, February 26 at 11:59 pm PST**.

The pilot was intended to provide students with an environment with fewer distractions and more time to write, as well as help instructors with scheduling and management. Your responses will help inform UVic's planning and approach to midterm exams in the future.

All survey responses are voluntary and confidential. Responses will not be identified by individual and will be compiled and analyzed as a group.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and taking the time to complete this survey.

1. In advance of the pilot, a [Midterm Exams Pilot webpage](#) was created to share scheduling information and answer anticipated questions. Did you find the webpage content helpful?
 Yes, I found the webpage helpful and informative.
 No, I accessed the webpage but I did not find the information I needed.
 I did not visit the webpage before writing my exam(s).

2. This pilot was a new initiative. Do you feel like you received enough information about what to expect as a participating student?
 Yes
 No

If you answered no, we invite you to share feedback about how communication could have been improved.

3. As part of the pilot, your midterm exam(s) took place outside of your regularly-scheduled class time(s). How do you feel about this?
 I prefer exams to take place during regularly-scheduled class times.
 I prefer exams to take place outside of regularly scheduled class time (as was the case in this pilot).
 I do not have a preference.

4. To support an inclusive environment and reduce distractions for students writing exams, desks were outfitted with cardboard carrels. How helpful were these carrels in reducing distractions while writing?

Very unhelpful Somewhat unhelpful Neither helpful or unhelpful Somewhat helpful Very helpful N/A

5. To support an inclusive and distraction-reduced environment, ear plugs were made available. Did you make use of the ear plugs?

Yes, I used ear plugs.

Very unhelpful Somewhat unhelpful Neither helpful or unhelpful Somewhat helpful Very helpful N/A

No, I did not use ear plugs.

6. The pilot was an opportunity to test a universal design principle of additional time for all students (e.g., a 3-hour time block could be provided for an assessment that would normally take no longer than 2 hours). How helpful was this additional time allowance?

Very unhelpful Somewhat unhelpful Neither helpful or unhelpful Somewhat helpful Very helpful N/A

7. Please specify the course(s) for which you wrote exams. Select all that apply.

BIOC 299, Section: A01

BIOL 150B, Section:

A01

A02

CHEM 102, Section:

A01

A02

CHEM 150, Section: A01

MATH 101, Section:

A01

A02

A03

A04

A05

A06

PSYC 210, Section: A01

PSYC 243, Section: A01

- PSYC 251, Section:
 - A01
 - A02
- Prefer not to specify

8. Do you have any further feedback to share about your experience or thoughts on how the pilot Could have been improved? Please comment below.

Appendix B – Midterm Exam Period Pilot – CAL-Registered Student Survey

We invite you to share your feedback as a student who wrote one or more exams during UVic’s centrally scheduled midterm exam period pilot on February 9 & 10, 2024.

The survey should take approximately **5-10 minutes** to complete and will remain open until **Monday, February 26 at 11:59 pm PST**.

The pilot was intended to provide students with an environment with fewer distractions and more time to write, as well as help instructors with scheduling and management. Your responses will help inform UVic’s planning and approach to midterm exams in the future.

All survey responses are voluntary and confidential. Responses will not be identified by individual and will be compiled and analyzed as a group.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and taking the time to complete this survey.

1. In advance of the pilot, a [Midterm Exams Pilot webpage](#) was created to share scheduling information and answer anticipated questions. Did you find the webpage content helpful?

Yes, I found the webpage helpful and informative.

No, I accessed the webpage but I did not find the information I needed.

I did not visit the webpage before writing my exam(s).

2. This pilot was a new initiative. Do you feel like you received enough information about what to expect as a participating student?

Yes

No

If you answered no, we invite you to share feedback about how communication could have been improved.

3. As part of the pilot, your midterm exam(s) took place outside of your regularly-scheduled class time(s). How do you feel about this?

I prefer exams to take place during regularly-scheduled class times.

I prefer exams to take place outside of regularly scheduled class time (as was the case in this pilot).

I do not have a preference.

4. To support an inclusive environment and reduce distractions for students writing exams, desks were outfitted with cardboard carrels. How helpful were these carrels in reducing distractions while writing?

Very unhelpful Somewhat unhelpful Neither helpful or unhelpful Somewhat helpful Very helpful N/A

5. To support an inclusive and distraction-reduced environment, ear plugs were made available. Did you make use of the ear plugs?

Yes, I used ear plugs.

Very unhelpful Somewhat unhelpful Neither helpful or unhelpful Somewhat helpful Very helpful N/A

No, I did not use ear plugs.

6. The pilot was an opportunity to test a universal design principle of additional time for all students (e.g., a 3-hour time block could be provided for an assessment that would normally take no longer than 2 hours). How helpful was this additional time allowance?

Very unhelpful Somewhat unhelpful Neither helpful or unhelpful Somewhat helpful Very helpful N/A

7. Please specify the course(s) for which you wrote exams. Select all that apply.

BIOC 299, Section: A01

BIOL 150B, Section:

A01

A02

CHEM 102, Section:

A01

A02

CHEM 150, Section: A01

MATH 101, Section:

A01

A02

A03

A04

A05

A06

- PSYC 210, Section: A01
- PSYC 243, Section: A01
- PSYC 251, Section:
 - A01
 - A02
- Prefer not to specify

8. Do you have any further feedback to share about your experience or thoughts on how the pilot could have been improved? Please comment below.

9. Throughout this pilot, did you experience any disability-related barriers?

Yes

If you answered yes, and feel comfortable sharing more, please expand on any barriers experienced and how those barriers could have been better addressed.

No

Appendix C – Midterm Exam Period Pilot – Instructor Survey Questions

We invite you to share your feedback as an instructor/participating faculty member in UVic’s centrally scheduled midterm exam period pilot on February 9 & 10, 2024.

The survey should take approximately **10 minutes** to complete and will remain open until **Monday, February 26 at 11:59 pm PST**.

There are several open-ended questions with text fields throughout the survey. We welcome your written feedback and greatly appreciate any insights you can provide. Your responses will help inform UVic’s planning and approach to midterms in the future.

All survey responses are voluntary and confidential. Responses will not be identified by individual and will be compiled and analyzed as a group.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and taking the time to complete this survey.

1. Given that the pilot was a new initiative, do you feel like you received clear and timely communication around your roles and responsibilities and understood what the experience would be like as a participating faculty?

Yes

No

If you answered no, please describe how communication could have been improved.

2. In advance of the two-day pilot, did you receive questions from students who required accommodations?

Yes

If you answered yes and would like to provide examples, please share them below.

No

3. Please describe your experience in supporting students with accommodations throughout this pilot.

4. Did students in your course(s) experience exam conflicts?

Yes

If you answered yes, is there anything you would like to share about how you dealt with those scenarios?

No

5. Did students in your course(s) experience exam hardships?

Yes

If you answered yes, is there anything you would like to share about how you dealt with those scenarios?

No

6. To support an inclusive environment and reduce distractions for students, desks were outfitted with cardboard carrels and ear plugs were provided. According to your observations, did those measures appear to be helpful to students?

Yes

No

If you answered no, please expand on how the exam-writing environment could have been improved.

7. How long was your exam designed to take for most students? Did any of your students seem to struggle to finish within the allotted time?

8. Students have also been invited to complete a survey. Have you received any feedback from students that you feel comfortable sharing? If yes, please expand.

9. Do you see value in pursuing a dedicated midterm period in future winter session terms?

Yes

No

Regardless of whether you answered yes or no, we invite you to share why.

10. If you have any further comments or reflections on the pilot, please share them below.