

# Maymester Lessons Learned:

*The Implementation and Evaluation  
of a Summer Session Intensive Term*

Carol D. Mehls & Anne K. Heinz  
*University of Colorado at Boulder*

## **Introduction**

For the Summer 2000, the University of Colorado at Boulder instituted a three-week intensive term called Maymester. This was a pilot program designed to allow students to enroll in one course from May 15 through June 2, 2000. Maymester classes met five days per week, Monday through Friday, for slightly over three hours per day.

Maymester was modeled after successful programs at Clemson, Cornell, Iowa, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. The CU-Boulder program was developed in conjunction with the Committee of Summer Session Deans and faculty from the schools and colleges.

Seventy-five faculty submitted Maymester proposals describing how their course content would be adapted to the intensive format. Summer Session Deans reviewed and ranked proposals for their colleges. Summer Session administration selected the final 50 classes, assuring that all schools and colleges interested in participating offered at least one class. Most of the classes had been previously offered on campus. However, the College of Engineering and Applied Science offered three new classes in partnership with SUN Microsystems.

A range of class levels was offered, including two graduate classes

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and two Law classes. Approximately 70% of the classes were upper division. Eighty percent of the classes were taught by tenured or tenure stream faculty. The College of Arts & Sciences, the College of Engineering and Applied Science, the College of Business and Administration, the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, the School of Law, and the College of Music participated in the pilot program.

Because Maymester 2000 was a pilot program, evaluation was a key element. Students, faculty and staff were asked to assess their experiences. These evaluations were reviewed by the faculty, department chairs, Council of Associate Deans, Summer Session administration, the Summer Session Deans, and the Provost. Due to favorable evaluations, Maymester 2001 was planned.

### **Faculty and Student Preparation**

Summer Session at CU-Boulder traditionally has been configured in five, eight and ten-week blocks. A few courses have been offered in intensive formats, primarily in Music and Education. Summer Session staff recognized that the intensive format would be a culture change for faculty and students, and worked to aid the transition.

To prepare faculty for the challenges of teaching in an intensive block, staff from the Faculty Teaching Excellence Program developed a Saturday afternoon workshop held in December 1999 featuring Colorado College faculty and students. Thirty CU-Boulder faculty members who taught in Maymester participated in the FTEP program. Under the direction of Dr. MaryAnn Shea, the FTEP model is that faculty learn best from other faculty. Dr. Shea looked to Colorado College, in Colorado Springs, for a model on intensive teaching.

Colorado College is on a three-week course format throughout the year. Its faculty in the arts, sciences, and humanities, as well as several CC students, participated in the workshop. The CC faculty shared ideas about syllabi and class organization and management, and provided practical tips on surviving the cycle of constant preparation, grading and classroom delivery. CC students offered a slightly different perspective and provided useful comments on assignments and class organization. In addition, all CU-Boulder Maymester faculty were provided the name, e-mail address and address of a counterpart at Colorado College. The CU faculty were encouraged to ask questions or exchange ideas with their CC counterparts.

Deans, departments, and faculty were also introduced to Maymester at other meetings. Anne Heinz, Associate Vice Chancellor for Summer Session, discussed Maymester at Dean's Council and at the quarterly

Department Chairs breakfasts. Summer Session staff attended advisor briefings and Assistant Department Head meetings in the College of Arts and Sciences. Informal discussions with faculty were frequently held. The pilot nature of the program and the evaluation element were emphasized in all discussions.

CU-Boulder students generally were not familiar with the culture of intensive sessions. Catalogs and promotional materials stressed the intensive nature of the session and the heavy workload involved. Traditionally, students who withdraw from Summer Session are assessed a financial penalty. To prevent a disincentive from keeping students from Maymester courses, that penalty was not applied for the new term. Student fees were not charged for the three-week period, and spring parking passes extended through Maymester at no additional charge. The drop/add deadline of three days is determined by state regulation. Students on wait lists or those wishing to add a course after the first class session were encouraged to attend the first class meeting.

New degree students were not allowed to begin their matriculation through Maymester because there was no opportunity for advising and orientation prior to the start date. Readmitted students and nondegree students, however, were allowed to participate in the program. Advising assistance was offered to readmitted and nondegree students.

Summer Session staff worked with campus units to provide services not usually available during this three-week period. The Classroom Scheduling Office attempted to consolidate most Maymester classes in a core of buildings so that not all buildings on campus would require janitorial services. The main library was open longer hours and Sundays. The Reserve Section of the library worked with faculty to place materials on reserve for Maymester during late April, before spring final exams. However, some departments within the library, notably the media center, maintained reduced hours. The Bookstore was open longer hours the first two days of class. In order to assure that textbooks arrived on time, the bookstore e-mailed Maymester faculty in mid-February reminding them of the need to submit their book orders on a timely basis.

Housing provided interim services for those students who wanted to live in the residence halls. The financial aid office manually packaged Maymester students who qualified for aid based upon enrollment in Maymester and another Summer Session term. These students received their eligible funds during Maymester. The recreation center was closed for yearly maintenance one week during Maymester. Other campus units were on abbreviated hours including other libraries, the student union, and the computer labs. Several computer labs were closed for previously scheduled maintenance.

## Marketing

Marketing efforts for the pilot program focused on recruiting current CU-Boulder students. Because Maymester 2000 was a new program, advertising began when the Summer Session web site was available in mid-December. Matriculated students received e-memo messages about Maymester and Summer Session in December, February, March, and April. Information about Maymester was prominently featured in the Summer Session catalog and on the web site. Individual course descriptions and faculty names were highlighted on the first pages of the Summer Session catalog. Several advertisements were run in the student newspaper. Academic departments e-mailed students on their listservs, and faculty actively recruited students for their classes. The housing department included information on Maymester in their spring semester publication to parents.

The promotional campaign emphasized completing one class in three weeks and having most of the summer free to work, study, travel, relax, or participate in an internship.

## Enrollment Patterns

A total of 1,089 students enrolled in 50 Maymester courses, 75% of the students were juniors or seniors and 73% were Colorado residents:

<i>Class</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of Total</i>	<i>Resident</i>	<i>Non-Resident</i>
Freshman	46	4.2	24	22
Sophomore	115	10.5	59	56
Junior	262	24.1	189	73
Senior	426	39.1	313	113
5th Yr. Senior	134	12.3	117	17
Educ. Cert.	6	0.6	6	0
MA/PhD	28	2.6	21	7
Law	32	2.9	29	3
Nondegree Undg	24	2.2	18	6
Nondegree Grad	16	1.5	14	2
Total	1,089	100%	790	299

Maymester enrollments surpassed initial predictions, accommodating over 1,000 degree-seeking students. However, corresponding enrollments declined in the other Summer Session terms (Term A and B are five-week terms; Term C is eight weeks; and Term D is ten weeks.) The total number of Summer Session students (Maymester students are

included in Summer Session tallies) declined by 2% from 1999 and credit hours declined by 4%. Maymester may have offset enrollments in the other Summer terms. However, the strong Colorado economy may have lured students to summer jobs and internships.

Approximately 37%, or 403 students, enrolled in only the Maymester term. The remaining 63%, or 686 Maymester students, enrolled in at least one additional Summer term.

Approximately 50 students attempted to enroll in more than one Maymester course. Summer Session staff contacted these students and advised them to take only one course. Of the total Maymester enrollment, 16 students (1.4%) received IW-incomplete withdrawal or IF-incomplete failure grades, a percentage slightly lower than the Summer 1999 IW/IF rate of 1.8%. The drop rate for Maymester was slightly over 5%. This corresponds to the fall and spring semester drop rates.

## **Evaluation**

Various groups evaluated Maymester, including students, faculty, and staff. Students evaluated Maymester on the faculty course questionnaire (FCQ) form and responded to three questions: "How would you rate your Maymester experience overall?" (A to F); "What did you like about Maymester?"; and "What suggestions do you have for improving Maymester?" A total of 877 students (81%) completed an FCQ and the overall student rating for Maymester was B+. Student rating of Maymester faculty (from the FCQs) was A. In general, students liked the intensive, short-class format that allowed time for other summer activities; the fact that the class material remained fresh over the period; the concentration on one class that allowed for greater effort; and the sense of community that developed in the classroom. Students' suggestions for improvement included offering more courses, having more campus facilities available during Maymester, and for faculty to be clearer on workload and expectations. Student comments included:

"The long classes facilitated excellent discussions. All the information was very fresh in my mind because of the intensity of the course."

"Maymester is one of my best experiences at CU. The course was very relevant... great instructor."

"I really appreciate the opportunity to earn three credits in a short amount of time. It's very convenient and a good use of time."

"To improve it, students and professors need to be mindful of time management from the outset."

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“The workload is heavier than I expected and I personally would suggest to other students to try not to work or have other obligations at this time.”

All Maymester faculty were mailed an evaluation form. Faculty were asked to: “Provide a quick characterization of your overall experience teaching in Maymester,” (Poor=1, Outstanding=5); “What did you like about the Maymester experience?”; and “Suggestions for improving Maymester.” Thirty-three faculty members (66%) completed and returned the evaluation. Maymester faculty respondents rated their overall experience as very good (the average rating was 4.3). Nine faculty members rated their Maymester experience as outstanding. The lowest rating that faculty gave Maymester was a 3 (n=2).

Similar to student comments, faculty noted their appreciation of the intensive format. They liked the fact that students were focused on only one class, that class size and time length facilitated extended discussion, and that the students were of good caliber. Faculty recommended having more facilities available during Maymester, a clearer drop/add policy, and the importance of communicating the amount of work necessary for success. Faculty comments included:

“The focused nature of the semester appealed to my students. This enabled us to cover topics at a depth that differs from traditional semesters.”

“Longer teaching blocks made it possible to experiment with new teaching techniques, extended discussions.”

“I was surprised by the students’ brightness. I have avoided teaching summer courses until now because I’ve always thought of summer school as a kind of remedial education site. In fact, the students were some of the most intelligent, hard-working and ambitious kids I’ve taught in a while. Also, I liked retooling the lecture format, an absolute necessity for me in order to relay a semester’s worth of information. Finally, I like the relaxed quality of a summer course.”

“Covering a wide range of issues within a limited span of time was a challenge. I enjoyed the intensity and energy, but sometimes wondered how much the students were able to retain. We all felt the strain from the second week onwards but handled it well. The question I am left with is: ‘How much do students really learn from such a high-intensive semester?’”

All departments that offered Maymester courses, the Summer Session Deans, and various campus units including financial aid, housing, the registrar, the bursar, parking services, FCQ office, and the bookstore had the opportunity to evaluate Maymester. Respondents replied to

three questions: "Provide a quick characterization of your overall experience working with Maymester" (Poor=1, Outstanding=5); "What went well from your perspective?"; and "Suggestions for improving Maymester." Twenty-six evaluations were completed by departmental and unit staff members. Respondents' overall assessment of Maymester was 3.25. The lowest rating was 1 (n=1) with 5 as the highest (n=2). Departmental and staff comments included:

"Data was in SIS [Student Information System] and easily differentiated from other summer session course sections; timing (schedule) worked fine for us."

"We had solid courses with good attendance. The students adjusted well to the workload and seem very happy with the opportunity to both earn some credits and to have a substantial summer job or externship."

"It would be helpful if each term could have its own due date and if students dropped that term, their due date would change. Students were confused when they dropped the Maymester class, but still had to pay by 5/23."

An overall evaluation of Summer Session occurred in the Spring, 2001. Working with the Office of Planning, Budget and Analysis, a web-based survey was sent to slightly over 2,000 students — all students who enrolled only in Maymester; all students who enrolled in Maymester and another Summer term; a sample of 500 students who enrolled in Summer Session; and a sample of 500 students who did not enroll in Summer Session 2000. The survey was entitled: "5 Questions — Help CU — Get \$5," and encouraged student participation with a \$5 gift certificate to the CU-Boulder bookstore. Students were asked about Maymester, their reasons for attending Summer Session and how Summer Session could be improved. Response rate was low, but confirmed the previous evaluation findings from faculty, students and staff.

## **Lessons Learned**

Maymester 2000 was a successful pilot program from several perspectives. Faculty and students rated the experience favorably. The quality of the participating faculty was high. An indicator of faculty satisfaction is that 21 faculty members returned to teach in Maymester 2001. Over 1,000 students participated in Maymester 2000, and almost 1,500 students in Maymester 2001. Students and faculty rated the program highly and recommended its continuation.

After Summer Session staff reviewed the various evaluation ele-

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ments, a formal evaluation report was written. This report was shared with Academic Affairs administrators, the Summer Session Deans, all faculty who participated in Maymester, all department chairs who offered classes in Maymester 2000 and all the support and academic departments.

The timing for piloting a new term in Summer 2000 was good. Three weeks existed between Commencement and the traditional start of Summer Session without changing the calendar. University-wide calendar discussions were underway to create a two-day fall break and to re-evaluate final examination periods. Adding Maymester to future calendars was facilitated because of the broader calendar changes.

Summer Session staff spent significant time with service and academic departments setting up the logistics of the new term and explaining the importance of offering students another credit-earning option. Traditionally the three weeks after spring Commencement are “down time” for staff. To gear up again for student and faculty interactions on the Monday after Commencement required goodwill throughout the campus. Departments were very successful in meeting student and faculty needs.

The faculty workshop on teaching an intensive term was again offered for Maymester 2001 faculty. Led by Dr. Shea, CU Maymester 2000 faculty shared their experiences with their colleagues.

The need to balance academic services for a relatively small number of students against the costs of keeping support services open remains a challenge. Areas for continued improvement include providing services to faculty and students such as extended library hours. If students registered for Maymester and another summer term, all tuition and fees were due during Maymester. This policy remained true even if the Maymester class was dropped. Therefore, a separate billing cycle for Maymester was instituted for Summer 2001. The drop/add deadline of the third day of class was difficult for faculty and students. Students adding a class on Tuesday had missed the equivalent of a week of work and those adding on Wednesday had missed two weeks of work.

Plans for Summer 2002 include “freezing” the wait lists on Monday while allowing drop/add activity through Wednesday. It is hoped that this strategy will further reduce the number of students at a disadvantage. Increasing awareness of the heavy course workload remains a constant challenge. The course catalog and web site will continue to stress the workload requirements for students. However, as a culture associated with an intensive session develops, faculty and staff have a better sense of the workload requirements. Enrollments for Maymester and Summer Session are also being watched to understand patterns of student enrollment.