

Financial Aid Eligibility Requirements to Consider When Creating an Academic Calendar

Academic Year

To be fully eligible for federal student aid, students must be enrolled in programs of study that have a defined academic year. The academic year must be at least 30-weeks of instructional time.

Scheduled Academic Year

USC has a term-based, scheduled academic year that is defined as the fall and spring semesters. The scheduled academic year is the time when most students enroll in the university.

Required Semester Length

Semesters must include 14-17 weeks of instructional time and no semester within the academic year may be more than 2-weeks longer than the other semester. Summer terms may be shorter; however, many programs will have their summer terms equal in length to the fall and spring to allow them to admit students year round.

Instructional Time

The number of weeks of instructional time is based on the period that begins on the first day of classes in the academic year and ends on the last day of classes or examinations. For all federal student aid programs, a week of instructional time is any period of 7 consecutive days in which at least 1 day of regularly scheduled instruction, examination, or (after the last day of classes) at least 1 scheduled day of study for examinations occurs.

Instructional time does not include periods of orientation, counseling, homework, vacation, grading periods or other activity not related to class preparation or examination. Therefore, the weeks of instructional time may be less than the number of calendar weeks that elapse between the first day of classes and the last day of classes or examinations.

For USC's purposes, instructional time (before study week) includes all of the following: in-person lecture, online synchronous lecture, online asynchronous lecture, faculty-facilitated online discussion board participation. This means that student have faculty interaction each week during the scheduled academic year.

Programs Offered in Modules

Academic programs may be offered in modules or shorter periods that do not meet the definition of the semester on their own. These modular programs must be grouped together to meet the definition of longer semester. For example, a student could be enrolled in one course that spans the 15-week semester or 3 shorter courses of 5-weeks each. When calculating the length of the semester, weeks between modules are excluded.

Scheduled Breaks

If within the academic session there is a period of 5-days or more where no regularly scheduled instruction will occur, this must be reported as a scheduled break. One example would be USC's Thanksgiving Holiday which is 5-days from Wednesday-Sunday. If you have a program offered in a special session that meets one to two days per week, and that during the course of the semester you do not offer class in one week, the scheduled break would be reported from the first day after your last regularly scheduled class to the day before your next regularly schedule class. Therefore, if all classes for your program are only offered on Friday and Saturday during the semester, the Thanksgiving Break would be from the Sunday after your last regularly scheduled class through the Thursday before your next regularly scheduled, or 12-days.

Special Session Scheduling

Special sessions established on SIS must reflect actual dates of instruction time for each session established. As stated above, instructional time cannot include periods of orientation, counseling, homework, vacation, or grading periods. Session dates may not be padded or reduced for any reason. Session dates should not be altered to allow for automated waivers of late registration or settlement fees, nor adjusted to allow for later than normal refunds of tuition.