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School is in sessions

The Office of Academic Affairs is shining light on an often-overlooked option that has a lot to offer students looking to earn course credit outside the 15-week semester.

UH has six academic sessions each semester; in addition to the 15-week session, there are two half-semester sessions and three five-week sessions. But before last week, when Provost Paula Short sent out an email about the sessions, most students didn't know they existed, and colleges and departments weren't offering many courses.

This semester, it's on Short's agenda to make students and faculty aware of the benefits of these scheduling options, and she's tasked Associate Provost for Education Innovation and Technology Jeff Morgan with this challenge.

"We wanted to just sort of run it and see if it worked or if it didn't work, which is very unusual for higher education to do things like that," Short said in her inaugural **Pizza with the Provost** event. "Usually, we have to sort of test it for five years before we decide if we want to implement it. And so we said, 'Well, let's just try the idea out.'"

Short and Morgan both said they think the announcement and development of the sessions will benefit the student body, but are excited to see throughout this semester how interested students are in taking classes in shorter sessions.

"I can see instances where this would be helpful for students," Morgan said. "We've already been contacted by a couple of different departments where students are just a course away from graduating, and they're thinking, 'Oh, if we can get a course on for this little session and the last five weeks in the spring, they can take that and they can graduate.'"

Students who are required to take a certain amount of hours each semester — to be eligible for a scholarship, for instance — and find themselves in a more difficult class than they expected can drop it and opt into a less-challenging class in a session later in the semester without dropping below their required hours, Morgan said.

"So, I think that there are a handful of reasons for doing this for students, on top of the fact that there are students who would just like to pick up an extra course for whatever reason," Morgan said.

While the shorter summer sessions and the spring mini-session, which offers classes during winter break, have plenty of classes each time, Morgan said he hasn't seen as many departments taking advantage of the fall and spring semester sessions and hopes to encourage them.

In addition to the pre-existing classes during the sessions — the C.T. Bauer College of Business has been one of the few departments to offer classes during the shorter sessions, for instance — more than 20 courses have been added to sessions five and six, which begin March 17 and 31, respectively. Students wanting to enroll in these sessions can do so using their MyUH account. You can find the courses online at uh.edu/sessions.

Morgan said he wants to encourage students to look into these sessions, but warns they might not be for everyone — especially students who are struggling in their course load. He said he also would like to see the faculty and department chairs grow the class options in the near future.

"I just hope that departments will take advantage of this, and I hope that there will be students who are interested in these courses. I believe there will be," Morgan said. "I think it's a good opportunity to get another course under your belt if you've got the time to do it."

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Provost Paula Short announced the University's efforts to spread awareness about the academic sessions offered throughout the semester at her inaugural **Pizza with the Provost**, hosted by the Student Government Association earlier this month. | Courtesy of SGA

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