

Principia College kicked off the semester with an extended weekend, as Labor Day was officially added to this year's academic calendar, resulting in adjustments to the final week of the semester.

The traditional three day format of finals week taking place on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays no longer exists. Week 16 will now hold regular classes on Monday, followed by a newly added Reading day on Tuesday and then the usual three days of final exams to bring the semester to a closure.

"I drafted several options of what the semester could look like if we started after Labor Day, if it started before Labor Day, but took it as a holiday. So we needed to add a Monday back into the calendar," Ashely Grindstaff, executive assistant of the academic dean, said. The remodeled version of finals week was introduced to compensate for the Monday lost to labor day.

Grindstaff then added "Mondays are particularly important in that because we have classes that only meet Mondays. So if we just took a Monday out of the calendar without replacing it somewhere else, that class has a full week fewer than any other." According to the academic dean each course is measured by what they call contact hours and they should be roughly balanced.

The schedule change was not related to federal funding requirements. The change was implemented as a Human Resources Office initiative, before Principia officials were aware of federal funding approval, and to maintain balanced contact hours for all courses.

The decision of adding Labor day to the Academic calendar was made a year and a half ago by the HR, the College Executive Committee, and the Board of Trustees, after the collection of feedback through an annual employee satisfaction survey. Before Principia was officially approved for federal funding.

"We knew we had to make a decision far in advance so the calendar could be edited in time," Jen Silver, chief human resources officer, explained, recalling the executive team's vote in spring 2024.

Silver then explained that the decision was part of HR's effort to improve employee benefits based on feedback and make the college a more supportive workplace, both by integrating different programs into one that serves all employees equally and by adding more paid time off.

This is not the first time that the Principia community has observed Labor Day. Karen Eisenauer, a 37-years Principia employee and executive assistant to the president's office recalled "when I was a new employee at the college in 1988, Labor day was a paid holiday for employees and students had the day off."

Eisenauer recalled further “Employees unable to take the day off because of work responsibilities were encouraged to find another day during the academic year to trade for Labor Day.” And elaborated “There were so many employees trading days that it became complicated to keep track of, and the number of employees who could actually take the day off got smaller each year.”

Even so, many students and faculty said they appreciated the extended weekend and discussed it.

“Personally, I like Labor Day, having that day off. I mean it does feel a little weird to start school and then immediately have the day off but overall I think it is nice, especially for employees,” Mail Services Coordinator, Ben Geis said.