

Curriculum Renewal Newsletter

From the Curriculum Renewal Steering Committee

Integration, Collaboration, and Relevance: Downstate's Curriculum — Downstate's Future

Number 2 — March 2010

Timeline For The New Curriculum

We have now reached another important milestone on the road to the new curriculum — the Timeline Committee recently completed its report and recommendations to the Curriculum Renewal Steering Committee and to Dean Taylor. The full report is available on the Curriculum Renewal website:

<http://www.downstate.edu/curriculum-renewal/index.html>

In this newsletter, we'll discuss the background to the Timeline Committee's report; highlight some of the recommendations from the report; and talk about the implications of those recommendations for the new curriculum and for our students, faculty, and staff.

It is worth noting that the Timeline Committee report does not represent the "final" or "definitive" calendar for the new curriculum, but it does, nonetheless, present some important recommendations and options regarding crucial timeline elements. For example, it is recommended that Year 1 will start two weeks earlier than it does now; the vacation between Years 1 and 2 will be eight weeks rather than ten weeks; the first clerkship year (Year 3) will start at least 6 weeks earlier than it does now.

Also, please remember that this 'broad' timeline is just one of many elements that will need to come together for the new curriculum. Decisions have yet to be made about the duration and content of individual blocks in Years 1 and 2, the types of teaching and assessment modalities used throughout the

curriculum, the composition of clerkship blocks, and many other key features. There are workgroups comprised of faculty, students, and staff actively discussing these issues.

Background to the report

Beginning with the foundations and key features outlined in Document 1 ('A Proposal for Curriculum Renewal', August, 2009), the Timeline Committee was charged with developing two timeline proposals with different start dates for Year 3, and with evaluating the pros and cons of each timeline. The committee was also charged with looking at timelines and related information from other medical schools to deepen its understanding of the pertinent issues. The foundations outlined in Document 1 included:

- ❑ Orientation and Early Immersion Week
- ❑ Longer and more uniform blocks in Years 1 and 2 — three Fundamental blocks and three Body System blocks
- ❑ Integrated Exercises and Summative Assessments in Years 1 & 2
- ❑ Development of Clinical Skills to begin in Year 1
- ❑ Possible Scholarly Project/Tracks to begin in Year 1
- ❑ Possible Integrated Block and Summative Assessment at the end of Year 2
- ❑ Earlier Start of the Clerkship Blocks
- ❑ Core clerkships complete by the end of Year 3 if possible
- ❑ 12-week related clerkship blocks with basic science/core content sections

An iterative process...

In its report, the committee noted that the task was a considerable challenge because key information relating to content was not yet available. Indeed, this highlights the iterative nature of developing the new curriculum — we cannot finalize the timeline without knowing content, and we cannot finalize content without knowing the timeline! Thus, the key features of the Timeline Committee's proposal will help drive discussions regarding content, which, in turn, will drive further refinement and consolidation of the timeline that will then drive further discussions relating to content, teaching methods, assessments, and so forth.

Key features

Diagrams that summarize the two proposed timelines are included at the end of this newsletter. Both proposals have the following features in common:

- ❑ The total duration of medical school over four years is increased by four weeks. This is achieved by starting Year 1 two weeks earlier than we do now (early August rather than mid-August) and by reducing the duration of the vacation between Years 1 and 2 to eight weeks rather than ten weeks.
- ❑ One week is assigned to each of Orientation and Early Immersion at the beginning of Year 1.
- ❑ Three Fundamental and three or four Body System blocks spread over Years 1 and 2.
- ❑ Four Related Clerkship blocks in Year 3, each of 12-weeks duration and each with Basic Science/Core Content components.
- ❑ Integrated Exercises and Summative Assessments in Years 1 & 2. Tentatively one-week long, but the duration will depend, *inter alia*, on whether these exercises are cumulative.
- ❑ Scholarly Project/Tracks beginning in Year 1, but without specific recommendations at this stage.
- ❑ Integrated Block and Summative Assessment at the end of Year 2; with the caveat that such a component may not be necessary and may have little added value. The Integrated Exercise and Summative Assessment at the end of the final block in Year 2 could well serve the purpose, without the need for a stand-alone Integrated Block and Summative Assessment.

There are some immediate and obvious implications of these broad recommendations concerning the overall timeline for the new

curriculum. For example, if we begin Year 1 in early August rather than mid-August, we will need to ensure that we have faculty, staff, and related support and curricular materials fired up and ready to go for that time in the inaugural year, and for every year in the future. An early August start is common at some other schools in the country, and should be feasible for Downstate provided we do enough forward planning. Since the new curriculum will start in August 2012, this seems both reasonable and achievable.

The two proposals differ primarily with regard to timing of the start of the first Clerkship year, with a proposed start date of April of Year 2 (twelve weeks earlier than the current start date for required clerkships, which is early July) or mid-May of Year 2 (six weeks earlier than the current start date). Because the overall medical school curriculum is being increased by four weeks, the two proposed outlines would have the net effect of shortening the total duration of Years 1 and 2 by eight weeks (April clerkship start) or two weeks (mid-May clerkship start).

Pros and cons

Regardless of whether clerkships start in April or mid-May, the report noted various advantages of an earlier start to clinical clerkships, including the following:

- ❑ More time in the clinical curriculum to re-integrate basic science content.
- ❑ Additional dedicated time in Ambulatory Care, Critical Care, Imaging, subspecialties, and advanced clinical skills training.
- ❑ If passing USMLE Step 2 becomes required for graduation, or the National Board collapses Step 1 and Step 2 into one exam, an earlier clinical start gives greater flexibility for scheduling protected time for these USMLE examinations.
- ❑ Earlier Clinical Skills Assessment examination can detect students early who need assistance and provide meaningful remediation.
- ❑ Greater opportunity for scholarly work to promote life-long learning.
- ❑ Opportunities to participate in visiting electives during off-peak months providing more availability of electives and a better teacher-student ratio.
- ❑ Increased experience of house staff for the first rotation with an April or Mid-May start, as opposed to July.

- ❑ More clinical students available for peer-to-peer orientation and teaching during Clerkship Orientation.

Some areas of potential concern were also noted, including the following:

- ❑ Potentially less time available for the basic science-focused portion of the curriculum.
- ❑ Contact hours or days in Years 1 and 2 may need to be extended.
- ❑ Careful coordination with the dual degree programs (MD/PhD and MD/MPH) will be required.

Clerkships — April start or mid-May start (or somewhere in between)?

As noted above, and shown on the attached curriculum outline diagrams, the committee’s report proposed two potential start times for the core clerkship years — April or mid-May of Year 2. However, the committee noted that these start times represent the two ends of a possible spectrum, and that the clerkship years could potentially begin anywhere between early April and mid-May, with concomitant changes in the durations or scheduling of various components of Years 1 and 2. Moving toward a final decision on the actual start date for Year 3 will be an iterative process requiring input from committees and workgroups studying content, methods, assessment, and the various competencies that will be the linchpins and driving force for the new curriculum.

With these caveats in mind, the committee did list some important comparisons between the April and mid-May start times, including:

April start:

- ❑ Allows seniors to begin career exploration and senior coursework earlier
- ❑ More dedicated time for scholarly project
- ❑ More time for protected USMLE Step 2 study time or remediation time
- ❑ Opportunity to create a more structured 4th Year

Mid-May start:

- ❑ More time for basic science-focused material in Year 2
- ❑ Potential for more study time for USMLE Step 1
- ❑ Vacation in the third year for Related Clerkship Block C may be variable, as there would be no natural break at the traditional December and January vacation period
- ❑ allows less time for career exploration than the April start

Please be sure to **check out the full Timeline Committee report** for a detailed discussion of all these issues. **To read the full report or to provide feedback on any issues relating to curriculum renewal, go to:**

<http://www.downstate.edu/curriculum-renewal/index.html>

What’s next?

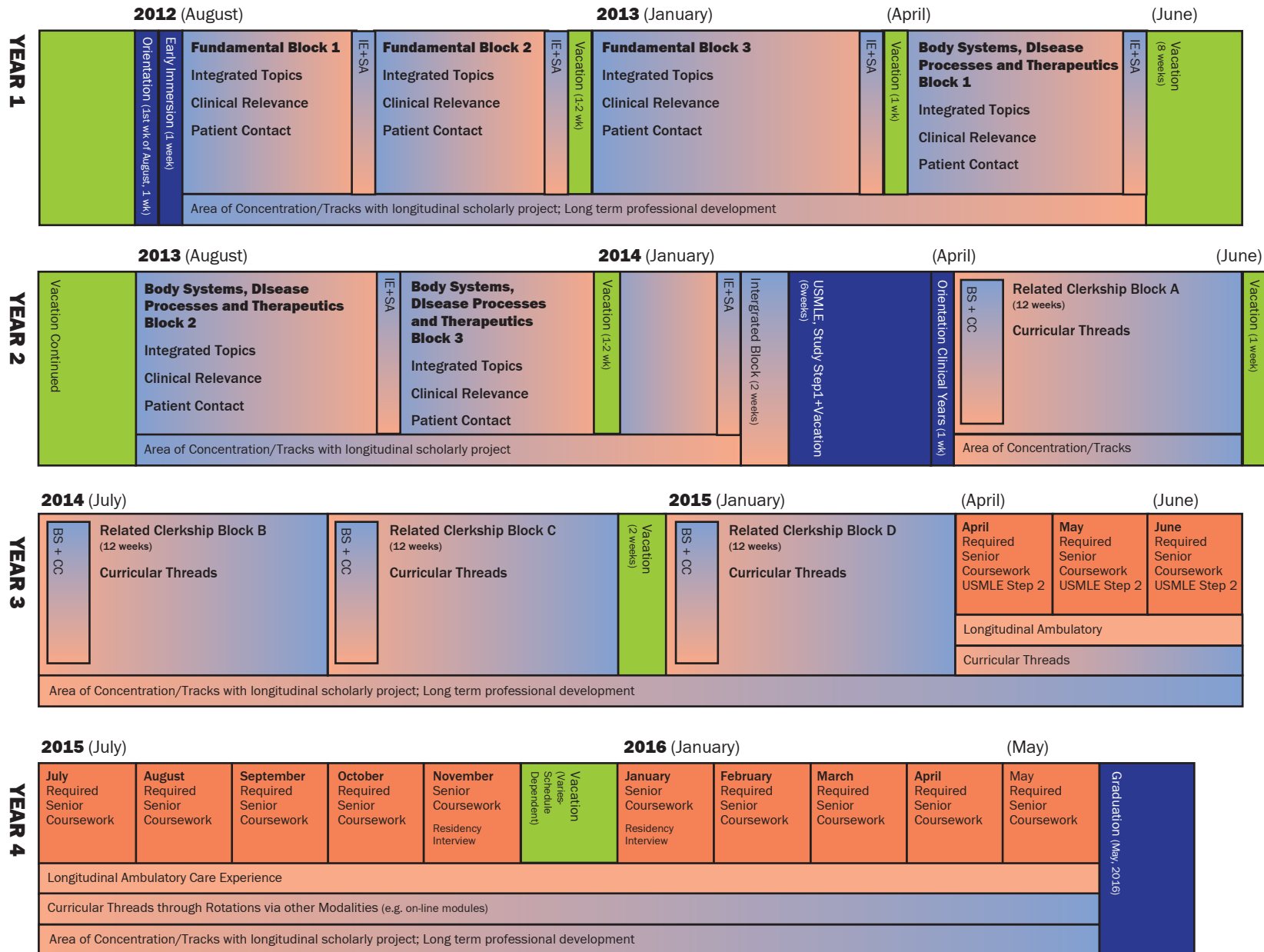
In the coming months, other workgroups will be submitting their reports to the Steering Committee, followed by discussions of how to begin to assemble the curriculum, including a retreat in mid-May to further develop and refine the curricular maps as the many pieces begin to come together. We will continue to keep everyone updated through ‘Town Hall’ meetings, newsletters, the website, and other venues.

Members of the Curriculum Renewal Steering Committee

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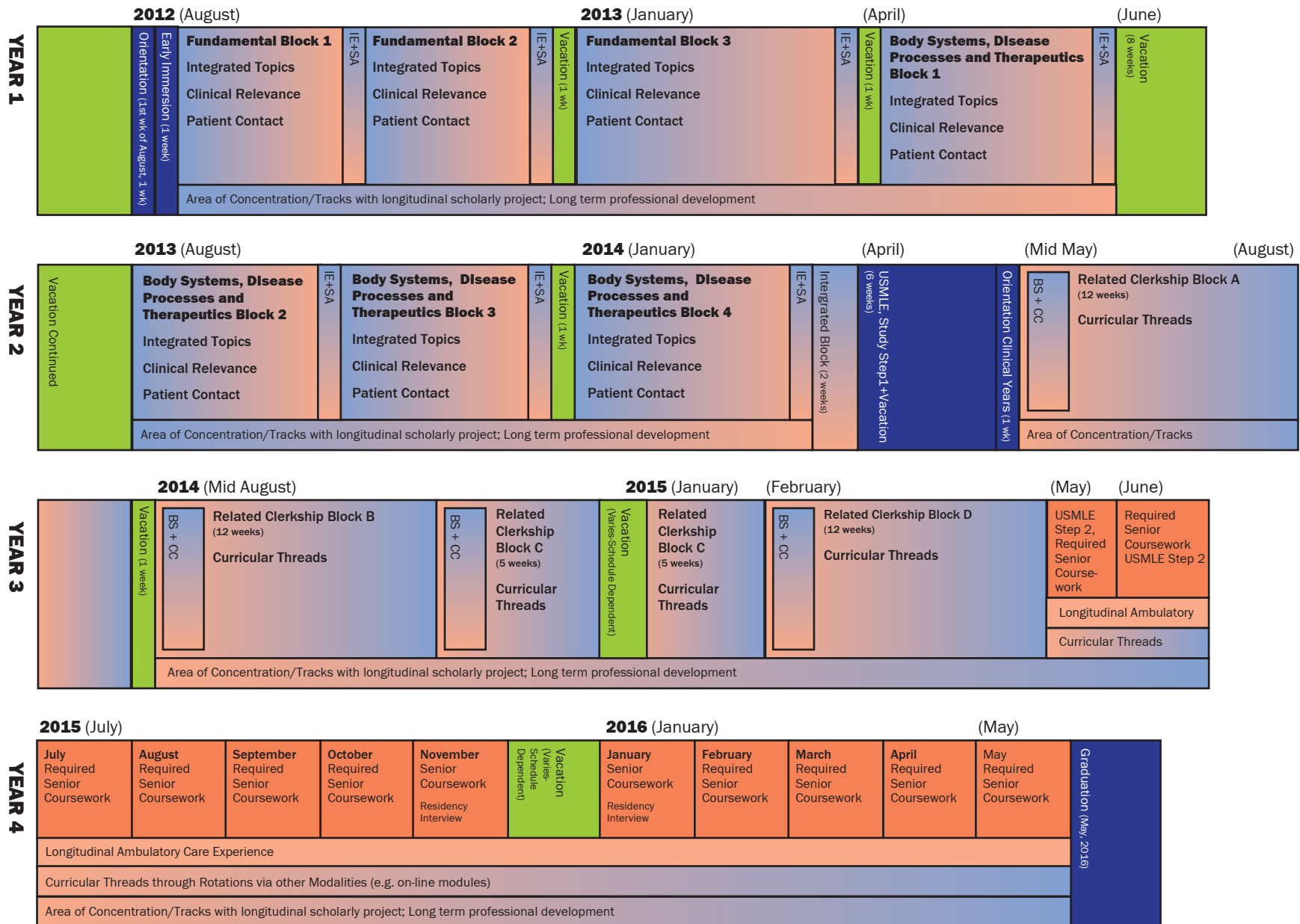
Curriculum Timeline Proposal – Clerkship Start April Year 2



KEY:

- Integrated Basic Science/Clinical
- Integrated Clinical/Basic Science
- Clinical Focus
- Other Curricular Elements
- Vacation
- IE+SA= Intergrated Exercises and Skills Assessment
- BS+CC= Basic Science/Core Content

Curriculum Timeline Proposal – Clerkship Start Mid May Year 2



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