

FAQs on Term Swap Winter 2020-2021
re: Covid-19 Precautions at Deep Springs

1. What are the reasons for swapping term 4 for term 6?

Heading into winter, this means students can go home over winter break, make the break longer, and then be more present on campus in the summer, when returning students would typically choose a term off (returning second years usually take off either term 6 or term 1).

This decision addresses the concern that although Deep Springs is remote, and therefore relatively safe from the virus, having students coming and going over the holidays and then living in close quarters with a shared heating system qualifies as a risk. This decision was made in consultation with medical health professionals and received unanimous Board approval.

2. Why did the Board change its earlier plan to keep the College open over the winter?

Despite Board approval in March of the plan for the academic year, we knew winter would bring new uncertainties, and we planned for flexibility to respond to new circumstances. We see cases have surged in the U.S. to more than 100,000 a day and our hope to stay free of Covid-19 may not be long-lived.

We also know more about the risk of spending long periods of time in enclosed spaces. Although the Valley itself is vast and airy, the Main Building and the Student Dorm in the dead of winter are cozy and intimate. The College is famously self-reliant in many respects, but we are not equipped to triage or airvac sick community members over a snowed-in mountain pass.

3. What about everyone staying in isolation, turning on the heat, and weathering the pandemic in situ?

The decision to stay open through term 3 has been a success and testament to student leadership and responsibility. It has also been a test-case for what life would look like for the rest of the winter. The idea of sustaining the current distancing protocols for several more months without break is exhausting for many in the community and unsustainable for the community as a whole. It is worth remembering that most of our students have not left the College since they arrived at the start of Summer Seminar.

All indications are that we will be living with the pandemic for some time to come; we need to ensure the community is not overtaxed. Although we enjoy the fantasy of perfect isolation, we are a permeable community. If students come back from break once the coldest month is behind us, we can integrate people more safely back into life on the Main Circle.

4. How will the ranch work be handled over the winter?

Winter ranch work often survives with just a few students who give up their break, and our Ranch Manager and Director of Operations are confident they can span the gap. We've recently shifted calving from winter to spring, so this dovetails well with a spring labor shift for feed and cowboy.

5. What will students do during their unexpected break?

We have made extraordinary arrangements available for our extraordinary students, so that time off-campus is well-spent and on-mission. This includes a course and directed study via zoom and research and teaching assistantships with alums. This effort has prompted us to start an in-house database to keep track of such opportunities as they arise. Anyone with an opportunity for Deep Springs students "Beyond the Valley" is invited to fill out a prospectus [here](#).

We think responsibility lies in helping students make plans to maximize their safety and well-being by staying outside the Valley for longer than normal over winter. All students at Deep Springs receive two full semesters of in-person instruction each year, and the term-swap solution allows students not to lose any actual time living and working in the Valley.

6. What about international students who can't easily get home?

Over the winter terms, international students who aren't returning home will live with classmates and classmates' families.

7. How do we know term 5 will be a good time to return?

There is no guarantee that it will be, but our experience with term 3 gives us confidence that we have the protocols to open safely for term 5 when the weather is warmer. We are arranging for students to start coming back in small groups mid-February, prioritizing committees that benefit from timely in-person deliberations, particularly ApCom.

8. How will ApCom conduct interviews?

ApCom was already planning to conduct interviews remotely due to the pandemic. In the current plan, they will be the first group returning to campus so that the interviews they conduct remotely can be as consistent and considerate as possible. ApCom is working with ComCom to design and implement creative approaches to introducing applicants to the community and campus, including informal opportunities to ask questions and discuss life at Deep Springs beyond the zoom interview.

9. What is the plan for fixing the heating systems so we are not reliant on recycled air?

Since the dorm is densely populated for many hours of the day, we are prioritizing an update to the heating system that will not use recirculated air. This may take the form of individual hydronic (water-filled) radiators in rooms with individual temperature controls. We are in the process of soliciting bids for this overhaul and expect it to cost between \$50,000 and \$75,000. The College hopes to complete this work by September of 2021. If you or anyone you know would consider helping fund this upgrade, please contact Development Director John Dewis at johndewis@deepsprings.edu.