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HCC to add later starting 12-week classes for fall

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NORMAL — Heartland Community College students who enroll after the Aug. 20 registration deadline won't pay a late fee this fall, but they'll be asked instead to enroll in a condensed semester with a later start date.

While students who register prior to Aug. 20 will take courses in the traditional 16-week semester, the late arrivals will be redirected to a 12-week semester that will begin after Labor Day. Both semesters end on the same date.

Early registrants may opt to enroll in the late-start courses.

Padriac Shinville, Heartland enrollment services dean, said this pilot project is part of the campus's Guided Path to Success, an umbrella initiative launched by President Allen Goben to improve student success and retention rates.

"It's known that students who come at the last minute often are the first to drop out. At the very least, they go through the course ill-prepared," he said.

This new format also has the potential to benefit traditional classes, said the dean.

"Instructors had a tendency to not really dig into the subject for the first classes, waiting until all the students who eventually would enroll had been seated," he said.

These 12-week classes will meet more hours per week than standard fall courses, so students cover the same material but in a shorter time, said Elaine Johnson, vice president for academic affairs of the Illinois Community College Board, based in Springfield.

The two-tiered semester is a growing option not only at Illinois community colleges, but also across the nation, she said.

The new option also helps freshmen who headed to a four-year university only to find a bad fit. "This way, they can come home and still have a chance to earn credit at a community college — without waiting a semester," she said.

For the first go-round, Heartland will offer about a dozen of its 700-plus sections in the condensed format. Examples of general education courses offered this fall are English 101, Communications 101 and Sociology 101. The reasoning is that most late registrants are newcomers.

While students who miss the Aug. 20 deadline will be out of luck this fall if they've completed general education classes, Shinville said Heartland hopes to expand offerings in upcoming semesters.