New UF program limits school year to spring, summer

By Erin Jester, Miami Herald

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Imagine going to school through the summer months, when it's too hot to do anything outside — and having the cooler months off to travel and go to football games without worrying about homework.

Sound like a good plan? The University of Florida thought so, although not for all of the same reasons that the plan might appeal to college students.

A pilot program in which students attend classes only during the spring and summer semesters is in its inaugural year at the university.

Three hundred freshmen started college classes in January instead of last August like the rest of their peers.

The program is called Innovation Academy, and it's unique to UF. The idea is to reduce crowding during the fall semester and maximize resources during the less busy spring and summer semesters, all while promoting creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

UF plans to admit 500 students to the program each year, carrying a steady slate of 2,000 students after four years.

This year, Innovation Academy offers 29 majors in seven of the university's colleges, but the list could expand.

While the curriculum for degree programs remains the same, every Innovation Academy student is required to complete a minor in innovation. Classes for the minor focus on creative and entrepreneurial thinking, leadership and ethics, and they culminate in a multidisciplinary project during students' senior year.
Director Jeff Citty said the minor, along with the seminars and workshops in innovation and entrepreneurship that are offered along with the program, will give students the skills they need to be competitive in the 21st century.

Compared to their competitors for jobs, Citty said, "I think they're going to come with a little something special."

While Innovation Academy students are free to do pretty much whatever they want during their fall semesters — as long as it doesn't involve taking classes on campus — administrators encourage them to study abroad, participate in UF research or take an internship.

This August, the program will offer its own internship. Innovation Academy students can apply to solve a problem for a local startup company over the course of the semester.

And yes, the spring-summer students can still apply for the much-coveted lottery for Gator football season tickets.

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