

## Report of 2018 Senate Working Group on the Academic Calendar

At the August 29, 2018 meeting of the Faculty Senate concern was raised that the proposed 2020-2021 academic calendar had an unequal number of days on instruction in the Fall and Spring semesters. This was viewed by some senators as an equity question for faculty and instructors teaching in the two semesters as well a potential concern for the content of classes that are offered both in the Fall and Spring. Additional concern was raised as a result of HISD adopting a calendar that specifies the entire week of Thanksgiving as a holiday and the burden that may place on faculty and staff. Due to these concerns, the senate recommended forming a working group to examine the academic calendar to see if there was a need to equalize the number of days of instruction and if so, to propose a way to do so with minimal additional impact on the academic calendar. Since many faculty and others at the university plan travel, conferences, and other events far into the future, a deadline was given to this working group to report back by the November 14, 2018 Faculty Senate meeting so that a calendar for the 2020-2021 academic year could be adopted at that time. Given the relatively tight schedule, it was decided that only the 2020-2021 calendar would be considered by the working group. At its discretion, the Senate could choose to appoint a working group to consider the calendar more broadly. The working group was formed and the Executive Committee of the Senate approved the charge and membership of the working group. The working group charge was established as follows:

*The working group will examine the difference in the number of days of instruction between the Fall and Spring semesters in the proposed 2020-2021 calendar and consider whether this difference poses a problem, and if so to try to find a way to equalize the number of days of instruction in a way which will minimize the impact to the current proposed calendar. The working group will present a report and any proposed changes to the calendar at the November 14, 2018 meeting of the Rice Faculty Senate.*

The members of the working group were:

- *Gwen Bradford*; Philosophy, Senate
- *John Casbarian*; Architecture
- *Anna Clyburn*; Undergrad rep, Martel Senator
- *Brian Gibson*; Kinesiology, Senior Associate Dean of Undergraduates
- *Julie Griswold*; Academic Advising for Athletics
- *Chris Johns-Krull*; Chair, Physics & Astronomy, Senate
- *Dave Messmer*; NTT, Lecturer and Associate Director FWIS Program, Senate
- *Bart Sinclair*; School of Engineering, Senior Associate Dean of Engineering
- *Kurt Stallmann*; Shepherd School, Senate
- *David Tenney*; Registrar

The working group met twice. The first meeting primarily focused on discussion of what other peer universities do and what many of the factors to consider were. The working group also identified what additional information it might need and assigned individuals to collect that information. The second time the working group met, it identified three possibilities to bring to the full Senate and recommend that the Senate decide among these three possibilities for the 2020-2021 academic year. The working group recognizes that other possibilities exist; however, it believes the three proposed options provide either no change to recent university calendars, or provide for minimal change consistent with the working group charge. As mentioned above, the Senate may wish to consider the calendar issue more fully over a longer period of deliberation for future calendars.

The three choices the working believes the Senate should choose from are:

1. Approve the 2020-2021 academic calendar as originally proposed. This would produce a calendar with 70 days of instruction in the Fall and 67 days of instruction in the Spring. This difference results because Spring Break is 1 week long in the Spring, but Thanksgiving break is only 2 days in the Fall.
2. Approve a calendar that follows the originally proposed 2020-2021 academic calendar but makes the midterm break an entire week instead of just two days. This would produce a calendar with 67 days of instruction in each semester.
3. Approve a calendar that follows the originally proposed 2020-2021 academic calendar but have 3 days of break at Thanksgiving (W-F off). This would produce a calendar that has 69 days of instruction in the Fall and 67 days of instruction in the Spring.

It became apparent in initial discussions that there was not a clear consensus as to whether the calendar needed to be adjusted in order to equalize the number of days of instruction between the two semesters. Many faculty and students consulted on this issue did not realize that there was a difference in number of days of instruction between the two semesters, so some on the working group did not think this was a particularly pressing issue. In addition, many of our peer institutions do not have parity in days of instruction between the two semesters (see Appendix). Of the schools examined, approximately half of the schools do not have parity between semesters. Some members of the working group also believed that reducing the overall number of days of instruction at Rice was not the direction the university should be going; however, it was felt that it was problematic to add days to the Spring as this would require reducing the length of Spring Break, eliminating other breaks during the semester, or adding days at the beginning or the end of the semester. The working group believes reducing the length of Spring Break would be very unpopular among all university constituents and that removing other breaks in the semester would result in quite long periods between breaks which might be a burden to both faculty and students.

The working group spent considerable time discussing the possibility of adding days of instruction to the Spring semester. Adding two or three days at the beginning of the semester would require students to return on a day other than a weekend and would break up the traditional week structure of the calendar, and many deadlines are tied to this week structure. Adding two or three days at the end of the Spring semester (e.g. holding class through T or W of week 16) was seen as a real possibility, but would likely require reducing the number of reading and/or exam days and possibly altering the Registrar's ability to certify all degrees before graduation. The working group was unwilling to make a

recommendation regarding these possibilities at this time given the limited amount of input it was able to get in the short time of its work. Taking all this into account the working group believes adopting the originally proposed 2020-2021 academic calendar with its lack of parity in number of days of instruction between the two semesters would be a reasonable course of action, so this is presented as option 1.

On the other hand, if the Senate believes equalizing, or at least making more equal, the number of days of instruction between the Fall and the Spring, the working group is bringing two options forward. Given the difficulty in adding days to the Spring discussed above, one option would be to remove 3 days of instruction from the Fall. While there is motivation for adding these three holiday days to the week of Thanksgiving, the working group ultimately rejected this idea. Only three schools in the Appendix do this; however, neither of these schools have only one week of instruction after Thanksgiving which is what Rice normally does. The working group believed that relatively few students who do not live in Houston or Texas would travel home for the whole week and then return for only one week of instruction. The working group also worried that such a situation might produce or increase inequities between more and less affluent students regarding their ability to travel during this time. One of the motivations put forward in the Senate meeting and in the working group's discussion is that an entire week off for faculty allows them to focus on research during that time and perhaps even travel for their research, for example to work with collaborators. However, it was felt that this was unlikely to occur during Thanksgiving.

Another "easy" way to remove 3 days of instruction from the Fall semester would be to make the midterm break be an entire week. The working group felt this had many advantages. The issue regarding faculty travel for research described above would be more possible/likely during this time. The midterm break is also the time when first year students are getting their midterm grade reports, and having a longer break could be helpful for those students who find themselves in some academic trouble. A longer break would give these students more time to try to catch up and make a plan to deal with academic difficulties. A full week break in the Fall would also permit students to take part in activities similar to alternative Spring Break which a significant number of Rice undergraduates take part in. The working group realizes that having an entire week off might present difficulties for some students regarding meals, but it was felt that the university could work with housing and dining to keep a limited number of server options open during this time. Therefore, the working group believes extending the Fall midterm break to an entire week would be a reasonable option, and this is presented as option 2.

Finally, since many members of the working group felt that removing 3 full days of instruction from the calendar was not appropriate for Rice, it explored an option where the number of days of instruction between the two semesters could be made more equal, but not strictly so. It was felt that the best option in this case was make the Wednesday before Thanksgiving a holiday, providing a 3 day break at that time. While approximately half of our peer schools in the Appendix have an unequal number of days of instruction between the two semesters, most of these do not have as large a difference as Rice does. In addition, most of these schools take 3 days off at Thanksgiving. It was also felt by many members of the working group that it is hard to expect students to attend class the Wednesday before Thanksgiving given the realities of travel; however, a majority of the working group did not believe it was hard to expect students to be present on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving.

Therefore, the working group believes adding one day to the Thanksgiving holiday and having a difference of only two instructional days between the semesters is a reasonable option. This is presented as option 3.

Fall 2018 Academic Calendar Working Group Appendix

School	How many teaching days does your institution have in each semester?		How many study/reading days does your institution have each semester?		How many final exam days does your institution have each semester?		Days off at Thanksgiving	
	Response	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall		Spring
Rice University		70	67	4	4	8	8	2
Brandeis University		65	65	1-2	1-2	6-7	6-7	3
Brown University		65-69	65	7 (optional runs concurrent with the instructional days)  full RP not recognized by many instructors	12 (optional runs concurrent with the instructional days)  full RP not recognized by many instructors	9	9	2.5
Boston University		66-68, depending on where Labor Day falls	66-68, depending on where the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday falls	3-4	3-4	5	5	3
Carnegie Mellon		70	71	4	5	5	5	3
Case Western Reserve University		70	70	2	2	6	6	2
Cornell University		68	69	5 (including Sat. and Sun.)	5 (including Sat. and Sun.)	8	8	3
Duke University		70	70	4, including two weekend days	4, including two weekend days	6	6	3
Georgia Institute of Technology		75	75	2	2	5	5	3
Harvard University		63	62	7	7	9	9	3
Indiana University		73	74	1	1	5	5	5
Massachusetts Institute of Technology		63-65 days  The number of instructional days in the Fall Term depends upon when Labor Day falls. When Labor Day is September 6 or 7, there are 63 instructional days. Otherwise, there are 65	65 days	3-4  Depending on when Labor Day falls, the number of study days is 3 or 4 (including Saturday and Sunday) in the Fall.	3	5  When Labor Day falls on September 5, there are 4.5 days of Final Exams in the Fall Term.	5	2
McGill University		65	65	1	7	10	10	CA
Michigan State University		70	74	0	0	5	5	2
Ohio State University		70	70	3 (including Sat. and Sun.)	3 (including Sat. and Sun.)	5	5	3

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Pennsylvania State University	74	73	2	2	5	5	5
Stony Brook University	14 weeks of classes plus one week of finals	14 weeks of classes plus one week of finals	3 days	3 days	8 days	8 days	3
Texas A&M University	70	70	2	2	4	4	3
Tulane University	68	68	2	2	9	9	3
University at Buffalo	71	70	2	2	7	6	3
University of Florida	81 Minimum (actual is range of 82-84.5)	81 Minimum (actual is range of 82-84.5)	2	2	6	6	3
University of Michigan	67	69	3	3	6	6	2
University of Minnesota / Twin Cities	70	70	1	1	6	6	2
University of Southern California	72	71	4	4	6	6	3
University of Texas	70	74	2	2	6	6	3
University of Wisconsin	72	74	1	1	6	6	2
Washington University	70	69	3	3	5	5	3
Yale University	64	64	6	6	6	6	5