

University of Windsor
Senate

5.6.2: **Report on Semester Lengths and Fall Reading Week**

Item for: **Approval**

Forwarded by: **Academic Policy Committee**

MOTION: That the Fall, Winter, and Combined Inter/Summer[^] academic sessions be 13 weeks in length with 12 weeks of instruction and a one week break to be called “Reading Week”.*,**

**Final exams may be scheduled on Sundays, and there may be years where there can be no two-day break between the end of classes and the beginning of exams.*

***For Law and Education, the Reading Weeks may occur at a different time to allow for professionally-related, external activities.*

[^]This applies to courses that run from May to August. The proposal will not impact six-week courses, which will continue to be offered during both Intersession (May-June) and/or Summer session (July-August).

Rationale:

- Following an extensive review of the question of semester lengths and a Fall Reading week, including the history of the issue, feedback from all Faculties and the three student body governments, survey results, and movement at other universities, the Academic Policy Committee (APC) is recommending that semesters consist of 12 instructional weeks. The APC is also recommending that a Fall Reading week be implemented for all students, during the Thanksgiving week. Students should be able to choose how they wish to use their break and the structure should be similar to the Winter and Inter/Summer breaks.
- While there was some interest in re-introducing 13-week semesters from faculty members and a few students, many supported continuing with 12-week semesters. The overwhelming support for a Fall Reading Week also precludes having a 13 instructional weeks in the semester because of the constraints placed on the Fall term with Labour Day and the holidays.
- The adoption of Fall Reading Weeks by universities is a recent phenomenon, often linked to mental health and wellness initiatives as follows: It is understood that students (from year 1 to year 4, Masters or Doctoral) have different learning styles and learning needs, as well as different personal and academic stressors, which can impact their academic success. Recent decisions to adopt Fall Reading Weeks have been based on arguments of the various stressors that impact today's students and that a Fall Reading Week is a very important component of a University's overall student mental health and wellness strategy. It has been argued that the introduction of Fall Reading Weeks at other institutions has resulted in increased student success and retention.

Logistical Issues to be worked out by Administration, if the motion is approved:

- APC stresses that logistical/calendaring issues need to be known so that they can be appropriately addressed if a Fall reading week is adopted. However, they should not be a determining factor in the decision to implement a Fall Reading Week.
- **APC recommends** that classes start on the Tuesday following Labour Day. Welcome Week activities should begin the weekend before the start of classes and continue throughout the week to optimize attendance. Students can attend these activities between classes. This would allow the semester to end on a Monday, and therefore, all but those with Monday classes will have the two-day weekend to use as the study break. It should also be noted that bylaw 51 requires that there be no evaluative procedure held or made due during the last week of classes, in order to provide students time to catch-up and study for the upcoming exams.
- The policy requiring that there be a minimum of two days between the last day of classes and the beginning of the examination period that are free of evaluative procedures, extends the examination period later into the month, which may be problematic in the Fall term when Labour day is late. Consistent with the policy, there may be semesters where this period must be shortened to 1 day or cancelled.
- Addressing the Variance in Number of Instructional Hours Scheduled Due to Statutory Holidays: Due to the timing of statutory holidays in Winter 2013 some courses were scheduled for 36 contact hours (12 weeks) and others are scheduled for 39 contact hours (13 weeks) in Winter 2013. To ensure that this variance does not occur in the future, **APC recommends** that the University adopt the practice used at most other Ontario universities of scheduling the make-up day for class time missed due to statutory holidays at the end of the

semester. This will impact mostly the Winter and Inter/Summer semesters.

Additional Information:

Current Practice

Currently, the University of Windsor has semester lengths of 12 weeks of instruction (excluding examinations) in each of the Fall, Winter and Combined Inter/Summer semesters. Further, both the Winter and Inter/Summer semesters historically have had, and continue to include, reading weeks.

History of APC Mandate to Review the Question of Semester Lengths and a Fall Reading Week

Due to the timing of statutory holidays in Winter 2013 some courses were scheduled for 36 contact hours (12 weeks) and others are scheduled for 39 contact hours (13 weeks) in Winter 2013. This raised the question as to whether the University of Windsor should have 12 or 13-week semesters. Academic Policy Committee was tasked by the Provost, following a report at Senate, to research the question of 12-week versus 13-week semesters through a review of the length of semesters at other Ontario universities and any other relevant research. It was noted that semester lengths should be consistent over all three terms, and that course lengths should be consistent within a given semester.

While the question originally focused on semester lengths, the question of introducing a Fall Reading Week could not be separate from this discussion or decision. Because of the calendaring constraints imposed on the Fall semester (the beginning and end of the semester are restricted by the timing of Labour Day and the December holidays), it is not possible to have both a 13 week semester and a reading week in the Fall. As such, any decision by Senate to adopt 13-week semesters effectively closes the discussion on the possibility of introducing a Fall Reading Week. The two issues are inextricably linked. One matter cannot be discussed and decided without consideration of the other. The mandate was therefore expanded to include the question of whether a reading week should be introduced in the Fall, if the recommendation is to move to 12-week semesters.

Survey of Ontario Universities - Summary

In Ontario, 18 of 19 universities have 12 instructional weeks in the Fall and Winter semesters; 12 have some form of a study break in the Fall (with 8 having Fall Reading Weeks generally during the week of Thanksgiving and 5 having Fall Reading/Study Days at different times in the term).

Possible of dates for Fall 2014 and Fall 2015

Fall Semester	Classes Begin	Reading Week	Classes End	Exams Begin	Exams End	Alternate Exam day
Fall 2014	Thurs, Sept 4	Oct 11 – Oct 19	Dec 3	Dec 6	Dec 17	Dec 18
Fall 2015	Tues, Sept 8	Oct 10 – Oct 18	Dec 7	Dec 9	Dec 18	Dec 19

Winter Semester	Classes Begin	Reading Week	Classes End	Make-up Day for Good Friday	Exams Begin	Exams End	Alternate Exam day
Winter 2015	Mon, Jan 5	Feb 14 – Feb 22	Apr 2	Apr 6	Apr 9	Apr 20	Apr 21
Winter 2016	Mon, Jan 4	Feb 13 – Feb 21	Apr 1	Apr 4	Apr 7	Apr 18	Apr 19

Inter/Summer Semester	Classes Begin	Reading Week	Classes End	Make-up Days for Holidays	Exams Begin	Exams End	Alternate Exam day
Inter/Summer 2015	Mon, May 4	June 13 – June 21	July 31	Victoria – Aug 4 Cda Day – Aug 5	Aug 8	Aug 19	Aug 20
Inter/Summer 2016	Mon, May 2	June 11 – June 19	July 29	Victoria – Aug 2 Cda Day – Aug 3	Aug 6	Aug 17	Aug 18

Ten-day final examination period.

Consultation and Information Gathering

In reviewing and formulating its report and recommendations, the Academic Policy Committee considered the following:

To view Appendices, click [here](#)

1.	Background rationale as to why UWin Week was introduced and then discontinued	Appendix 1
2.	Survey of Ontario universities including: 1. number of instructional weeks (excluding examinations) 2. whether they have a reading week or days in the Fall 3. the timing of the Fall reading week or days	Appendix 2
3.	Five year calendar of academic dates to visualize impact of the different semester lengths and a Fall Reading week	Appendix 3
4.	Feedback from key stakeholders, gathered by the Chair of APC, Dr. Rick Caron, who attending the following Council meetings: GSS Council OPUS Council UWSA Council Business Council Education Council Engineering Coordinating Council FAHSS Faculty Coordinating Council Graduate Studies Council Human Kinetics Council Inter-Faculty Programs Council Law Council Nursing Council Science Faculty Coordinating Council WUFA Executive Council Senate Student Caucus Individual written feedback provided via survey and emails	Appendix 4
5.	Results of survey submitted to all faculty, staff and students with the goal of identifying the level of student, faculty and staff support for each of the following options: a) maintaining 12 weeks of classes per semester, excluding final examinations; b) changing to 13 weeks of classes per semester, excluding final examinations; If the respondent selected (a), the goal would also be to identify the level of student, faculty and staff support for: c) introducing a reading week in the Fall (resulting in twelve (12) weeks of classes, excluding final examinations) and obtain feedback on how they thought it should be structured (if at all)	Appendix 5
6.	UWin Week Evaluation Report (Dr. Clayton Smith, January 2010)	Appendix 6