September 4, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: Steering Committee of Academic Governance

FROM: Provost Kim Wiles

RE: Follow up on Academic Calendar Issues

Last spring I provided a summary of feedback I had received on the academic calendar issues. As I indicated then, one of the recommendations has been implemented (change in fall semester commencement). The feedback provided to me on three of the other four lead me to the decision NOT to endorse the related changes. Specifically:

- I do not endorse a change in the start of the academic year until after Labor Day. As we have discussed, assuming the semester remains the same length, this moves the end of the semester as late as December 23, (2016). Now that commencement is scheduled at the end of exam week, that ceremony could be scheduled as late as December 24.

- I do not endorse moving MSU’s spring break to align with those of local public schools. While this would be desirable for some of our faculty and staff, I believe there are negative consequences for students and problems for instruction. Most schools in the area break in the spring during the first week of April, which comes too late in the semester to serve as what we have come to believe is a restorative, mid-semester break. In 2013, for example, “spring break” would fall in week 13 of the spring semester. I suspect, in the course of instruction, many faculty members would find this problematic in terms of shortening the time for final presentations and performances, as well as the implications of pausing instruction at that point in the semester.

- I cannot, at this time, endorse the creation of a spring sub-term, or the “J-term.” While there could be important benefits to this arrangement, the current complications involving the delay of financial aid disbursements as a result of moving the start date of spring semester to allow for an intersession term appear too significant to overcome.

The remaining issue, unresolved, is whether or not there is interest in creating semesters of equal length, with the same number of class days in both fall and spring. The spring semester is currently slightly longer than the fall semester. If Academic Governance wishes to make a specific proposal on that element of the Academic Calendar, I am willing to review.

I hope this memorandum serves as a formal confirmation of my earlier remarks.