March 28, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: E. James Potchen  
   Chair, Executive Committee of Academic Council (ECAC)

FROM: Ralph Putnam  
   Chair, University Committee on Academic Policy (UCAP)

RE: Proposal to Establish a Fall Semester Study Break

In response to Associated Students of Michigan State University Academic Assembly Bill No. 14-32 (Support the Creation of a Fall Break), UCAP has considered at length the possibility of creating a Fall Semester Study Break. The committee asks that this proposal be reviewed by University Graduate Council, University Committee on Student Affairs, and University Committee on Faculty Affairs, and then be forwarded to Faculty Council and Academic Council for consideration.

Background

In 2000, the University Committee on Academic Policy (UCAP) approved a mid-semester Fall Break (Attachment 1, UCAP minutes, January 27, 2000). No further action was taken, however, through the governance system. In January 2006, ASMSU Academic Assembly raised the issue again with the passing of Bill 14-32, to “Support the Creation of a Fall Break” (Attachment 2). ASMSU’s proposal was reviewed and supported by University Committee on Student Affairs. It was also reviewed by University Graduate Council, which was not opposed to the idea of a Fall Break, but requested that details be worked out before proceeding. The proposal was forwarded by ECAC to UCAP for further consideration.

UCAP discussed, in whole-committee and subcommittee meetings, the possibility of a fall break. Student members of ASMSU and UCAP gathered information about breaks at other universities and various arguments supporting putting a mid-semester break into place. Because changing the semester calendar affects so many different aspects of the University, we also solicited input from a variety of administrators and offices across campus. (Attachment 3)
Proposal

UCAP recommends:

1. that a Fall Study Break be established;
2. that the Fall Study Break be implemented on a 5-year (from date of first implementation) trial basis to allow for subsequent evaluation of its impact. Continuation of the Fall Study Break beyond the 5-year period will require approval as a permanent change in the University calendar after an evaluation and review by UCAP during the fall semester of the fourth year of its enactment.
3. that this proposal be reviewed by University Graduate Council, University Committee on Student Affairs, and University Committee on Faculty Affairs, and then be forwarded to Faculty Council and Academic Council for consideration.

UCAP recommends that the following practices be adopted for implementing a Fall Study Break:

1. The Fall Study Break would occur Monday and Tuesday of the third week in October;
2. Fall Semester classes would begin on the Wednesday prior to the current first day of class (this shift will adjust for instructional days lost in accommodating for the Fall Study Break).

Additional Information

- As an example, if the proposed change were put into effect for the Fall 2007 Semester, classes would begin Wednesday, August 22, and the Fall Study Break would take place on October 15-16 (Monday-Tuesday).

- Suggested move-in days:
  - Freshmen, Transfers, and International students: Sunday prior to start of classes.
  - Other students: Monday prior to start of classes.

- Effect on instructional days: Under the current calendar, there are 72 instructional days in Fall Semester, 74 instructional days in Spring Semester. The proposed changes would result in 73 instructional days in Fall Semester.

Rationale

The primary rationale for a Fall Study Break offered in Academic Assembly of ASMSU is that it “would provide a brief period of time for students to rest and recuperate from midterms, give students time to finish backlogged work and studying, allow students who do not live locally a chance to return home to see family and help ease stress and mental strain of the student body.”
Known issues and concerns

- Some science labs are set up and scheduled on a weekly basis; any week with one or more days without classes meeting disrupts these schedules.
- Courses that meet only once a week, especially those that meet on Monday, may be disadvantaged. (Under this proposal, Fall Semester would have class on 13 Mondays, 14 Tuesdays, 16 Wednesdays, 15 Thursdays, and 15 Fridays.)

Input from Campus Groups

See Attachment 3 for comments on the proposed Fall Break policy from members of a number of groups in the MSU and surrounding community.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The following questions and answers represent a summary of frequent issues raised in deliberations on establishing a Fall Study Break:

Q: How has this impacted other schools that have recently adopted a Fall Study Break?
A: Since the University of Michigan has adopted the Fall Study Break, they’ve had no problems. It has been seen as a resounding success within their student body.

Q: Why do the students want it?
A: A break will allow students to travel home and will provide an opportunity for them to catch up on their schoolwork as well as a variety of other benefits. As a result, the subcommittee attests that student stress levels will decrease.

Q: Who is affected and how?
A: Although undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and others will be affected by the break and must make some adjustments, these adjustments will not be equally weighted among those affected. It is assumed that these adjustments will eventually become part of the University culture.

Q: What if students just use this break to party?
A: This concern is outweighed by the potential benefit of consolidating Welcome “Week” to a Monday and Tuesday with classes beginning on Wednesday. By positioning the Fall Study Break on a Monday and Tuesday, students will be more inclined to go home to study and rest. This change will require modification of the current Welcome Week schedule. The Fall Study Break could be used for community service projects much like Martin Luther King Jr. Day is used for such endeavors at MSU or service-oriented Alternative Fall Study Break opportunities such as those at Duke, University of North Carolina, and North Carolina State University.

Q: When would a Fall Study Break be implemented?
A: UCAP urges the University to implement the Fall Study Break, if approved, as soon as possible given the practicalities of adjusting calendars and responsibilities of various individuals and groups on campus.
Attachments: 1. UCAP minutes, January 27, 2000
2. ASMSU Academic Assembly Bill No. 14-32: Support the Creation of a Fall Break
3. Fall Break Comments

cc: Matt Caramagno
    Julie Harrison
    Glenda Lappan
    John Powell
Memorandum: Proposal to Establish a Fall Semester Study Break
Attachment 1

UCAP Minutes 1/27/2000
Excerpt

6. Other Subcommittee Reports
   a) Mid-Semester Break - A report was distributed. The subcommittee recommended: I) a one-day break in mid-October, and a break date on Good Friday. Discussion followed. A motion was made to reject the sub-committees recommendation. A second motion was made to split the original motion into two parts reflecting the sub-committee recommendation. The original motion was restated as a positive motion. The first part of the sub-committee recommendation passed (7 yes, 6 no), and the second part of the recommendation was rejected (11 no, 2 yes). An alternative to the second motion, setting a fixed Friday in spring semester as a break, was rejected (10 no, 3 yes).
ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY

FOURTEENTH SESSION

BILL NO. 14-32

INTRODUCED BY: Prasad SECONDED BY: Hinojosa

A BILL TO: Support the Creation of a Fall Break

THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY ENACT:

WHEREAS, The Academic Assembly has in past sessions supported the idea of a Fall Break for multiple reasons; and

WHEREAS, A Fall Break would provide a brief period of time for students to rest and recuperate from midterms, give students time to finish backlogged work and studying, allow students who do not live locally a chance to return home to see family, and help ease stress and mental strain of the student body; and

WHEREAS, There exists currently a proposal approved by the University Committee on Academic Policy on January 27, 2000 calling for the creation of a one day Fall Break; and

WHEREAS, The UCAP proposal mysteriously disappeared from the Academic Governance system and has been lying dormant since then.

WHEREAS, The Academic Assembly feels that a two day break to be observed on a Thursday and Friday, a Friday and Monday, or a Monday and Tuesday is of more use to students than the one day break supported by UCAP, not least because of the increase in fuel costs associated with traveling since 2000; therefore be it

RESOLVED, The Academic Assembly requests that the Fall Break proposal be returned to UCAP with the request that the proposal now call for a two day break attached to a weekend; and be it further

RESOLVED, While the Academic Assembly prefers a break of two days, it supports a Fall Break of either length.

INTRODUCED ON January 17, 2006

SPECIAL ACTION TAKEN DATE

FINAL ACTION TAKEN X 19-0-0 January 17, 2006

PASSED FAILED VOTE DATE

CHAIRPERSON SECRETARY
Fall Break
Summary of Comments to Date
2/22/07

Celebratory Committee (Note that these comments reflect students, city managers, AOP, community residents, faculty, and staff)

Academic Issues
- Good to shorten Fall Welcome Week and gain a more academic focus (several comments like this).
- Will help students “recharge” and catch up
- Will provide some extra time to spend with families which, especially for many freshmen, is important.
- Gaining a class day.
- Need to explicit that the break is an “academically oriented pause.”
- Would need to have time to rethink, readjust, and restructure necessary welcome week activities (AOP, college welcomes, etc.)
- Fall break is “not a big deal for off campus students.”
- Changing welcome week good way to shift culture.
- If first week of classes are not academically rigorous then weekend could remain problematic.

Community Issues
- What are students saying they would do with the break time?
- May create another slow weekend for East Lansing business.
- Business might like the “extra week”
- ELPD – looks like a good proposal – would be good idea to see what would happen.
- Like idea of Sunday move in.
- Risk the Fall break becoming a long weekend that moves in the direction of a fall “celebration”
- Unsupervised time is “narrowed in this proposal.”
- Don’t think partying will be as bad if classes start right away.
- Support general concept.
- Would shifting move in to a Sunday simple provide two party weekends instead of one?

Landlord
- Mid October and end of August are important dates – 3rd Monday or so leasing begins for the next year, end of August is change over.
- Could adjust if change does not occur this year.
- One big issue would be shortening the change over period – could consider changing lease periods.
Alternatives

• Move in on a Friday and Saturday and begin classes on Monday (August 27 if this years dates).
• Maybe other ways to find the days. For example some said add at end. Students wouldn’t mind going longer and shortening the break and more and more faculty not using finals week for comprehensive finals.

Miscellaneous

• Some student employers already upset that students have to leave before Labor Day. Could be a severe negative effect on students who have summer work and internships. Might be far more desirable to hold students here for a little longer into Christmas break.

Admissions and Registrar

• What is graduate student response?
• Could/should this request be to suspend classes without closing the University (MLK Day model)?
• Would this become a 5 day break because of Friday enrollment issues?
• Would tying it to Thanksgiving be better from the perspective of students going home? Particularly those that live long distances away.
• Would this require shortening summer because of the short turn-around?
• Need time to enroll over 700 students immediately before classes begin.
• Absentee issues on the Wed – Fri first short week.
• In 1992 we had a finals period that crossed a weekend ending on 12/23. Calendar had to be rebuilt because of all the complaints.
• For how large a population of students is this a critical issue?
• No direct impact on admissions.

Employment/Union

• No specific contractual bar to scheduling a fall break in the future.
• Could be some issues with support units that rely heavily on student employees (HF&S, veterinary areas, etc.)
• Do not lay off employees during short break periods.

Housing

No comments yet.