

October 29, 2008

**MEMORANDUM**

To: E. James Potchen, ECAC Chair

Cc: Jackie Wright, AGO

From: R. Sekhar Chivukula and Merry Morash

**RE: Draft Charge to Academic Year Review Task Force**

A draft of the charge to the Academic Year Review Task Force is attached.

In addition to considering the charge itself, we believe that ECAC will need to address several related issues when forming the Task Force:

1. The proposed Task Force is rather large, and includes a large number of non-faculty members. How should the Task Force best be structured to capture “faculty voice” AND to properly consider the input of all stakeholders? Is it realistic to have such a large group as is now in the Task Force work quickly? Should some members of the Task Force be consulted with rather than be members? Should some members be ex officio? Should some tasks or recommendations be reserved for faculty on the Task Force?
2. To be most effective, the Task Force will require resources and support (presumably from either the Secretary of Academic Governance or the Office of the Provost) of various forms:
  - a. Administrative support, for example, for arranging meetings and meeting places, and distributing information and communicating with stakeholders (e.g. web support).
  - b. Funding for consultation and implementation of any survey(s) done.
  - c. Graduate assistant support to assemble and present comparative information on other institutions, and to prepare presentation material (e.g., from surveys) for the Task Force, FC, AC, other committees.

Attachments:

Draft Charge to Academic Year Review Task Force

## Draft Charge to Academic Year Review Task Force

The Task Force should review the MSU academic year calendar as a whole and recommend any necessary changes. In particular, Faculty Council requests that the Task Force

1. identify the *key criteria* that should be considered in assessing the appropriate schedule for the fall and spring semesters at Michigan State University;
2. gather needed information through a survey of faculty and/or unit heads and students, benchmarking with other universities (comparison with their calendars), input from relevant individuals and groups at MSU;
3. formulate policy options, and make recommendations based on an assessment of how well different proposals meet the criteria identified.

Possible *key criteria* include:

- Adequacy of instructional time to cover material, and to incorporate laboratories, internships, and experiential or service-learning opportunities
- Provision of reading/study breaks to promote learning
- Appropriate timing of final examinations and adequate breaks between semesters
- Costs in terms of student/family/faculty travel, building energy utilization, etc.
- Provision of adequate orientation for new students, graduate teaching and undergraduate learning assistants, and faculty
- Other costs and benefits to student/faculty/staff and their families
- Coordination of courses at MSU with research, internship, and study-abroad opportunities, and with courses at other CIC institutions

Faculty Council also recommends that the Task Force consider the use of a survey to do one or more of the following: assess MSU faculty, staff, and student needs and concerns about the academic calendar, get Likert-scale ratings of the importance of alternative criteria to assess options, get initial response to benefits and costs of tentative options, and estimate implementation problems and the feasibility of overcoming them.

Using the criteria identified, the Task Force should select one or two highly promising calendar options, compare them to the existing calendar, identify positive and negative implications for stakeholder groups, and make a recommendation.

In choosing the options to be presented, it would be useful for the Task Force to answer the following questions:

1. Should MSU continue current policy of beginning the fall semester prior to Labor Day?
2. If the beginning of fall semester is to change from the proposed 2009-10 configuration, what are the implications for the timing of the fall welcome period?
3. Should MSU continue the current policy of ending fall semester finals week at least one week prior to Christmas day?
4. How many instructional days should there be in the fall and spring semesters? If fall and

spring differ, by how much can they differ?

5. How can we accommodate all of the various types of classes held at MSU, such as those on that meet off-cycle or only once per week? In particular, concern has been raised about laboratory classes that have several independent sections meeting throughout the week that require scheduled laboratory set-up time -- in these cases, a reduced week (one without all five daily schedules) can amount to a week lost.

6. Are there changes to the daily schedule of classes -- e.g. class starting and ending times and class duration -- that should be made in light of the changes to the calendar?

7. Should and can the calendar accommodate a "Fall Break" in October?

8. Is it possible or desirable to align MSU's spring break with the spring break of local school districts?

9. Should MSU establish a "study period" prior to the beginning of finals week, either in the fall or the spring or both?

10. Should MSU establish an official "activities period" designed to encourage research, study-abroad, internship, service-learning, or co-curricular activities? What would be required of students and faculty during such a period? When should it be held?

11. What are the pluses and minuses of different lengths of the finals exam period, and the use of different days (e.g., weekdays, Saturdays) for final examination. Is it appropriate to consider delaying fall semester final exams until after the beginning of the New Year?

12. In light of the changes made to the Fall 2009 calendar, are there changes that should be implemented for Spring 2010?

13. Is there a need for all programs to have the same start and end dates?

Faculty Council requests regular reports from the Task Force and opportunity to provide feedback on each report, and requests that the final recommendation be returned for consideration by March 1, 2009. This will allow for ECAC to place the recommendations on Faculty Council and Academic Council agendas before the end of the Spring, 2009 semester.