

November 5, 2008

MEMORANDUM

To: Faculty Council

Cc: Provost Wilcox, Senior Associate Provost Youatt

From: Executive Committee of Academic Council

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, ECAC believes that the resolution passed last month establishing the Academic Year Task Force should be modified to read

“Membership of the Academic Year Task Force should include representatives (one each) of UCFA, UCAP, UGC, UCSA, ASMSU, COGS, and the Women’s Advisory Committee to the Provost. The Task Force should include representatives of following groups as ex officio members (without vote) who can elect to attend meetings or to serve on an as-needed basis: Housing and Food Service, the Registrar’s Office, the Office of Residence Life, the Office of Cultural and Academic Transition, the International Studies Program, the Office of Planning and Budget, and the Office of Community Liaison.”

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, co-ops, and experiential or service-learning opportunities
- Impact of any schedule changes on those programs requiring accreditation
- 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. Is it desirable to begin spring semester later, to allow for study-abroad or other learning opportunities in January?
11. Should MSU establish an official "activities period" designed to encourage research, study-abroad, internship, service-learning, or co-curricular activities? Could such a period allow for more flexible scheduling of classes -- e.g. some short-term classes or some classes which meet only occasionally in the fall or spring, but intensively during the activities period? What would be required of students and faculty during such a period? When should it be held?
12. 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?
13. In light of the changes made to the Fall 2009 calendar, are there changes that should be implemented for Spring 2010?
14. Is there a need for all graduate, undergraduate, and professional 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.