Queen's University Senate Committee on Academic Procedures

SESSIONAL DATES (13 week term) MOTION REFERAL

March 2014

Background

In September 2013, the Senate Committee on Academic Procedures (SCAP) received the following motion, as referred from Senate at its April 2013 meeting:

That SCAP study the implications of expanding the academic year to include two 13 week academic terms (excluding Reading Week) instead of the current two 12 week terms beginning in the 2016-2017 academic year, including considering what plans would need to be enacted to make such a transition, for the consideration of Senate. In carrying out this task SCAP should identify the pros and cons of the proposed plan or plans, and also the pros and cons of maintaining the status quo. SCAP should be prepared to present options in this regard to Senate no later than January 2014.

(Morelli/Jones) Carried 13-63

Analysis and Discussion

The motion was reviewed and discussed during SCAP's November 2013, December 2013, January 2014 and February 2014 meetings and the major points from that discussion are outlined below.

The goal of the motion was to have SCAP consider the merits and demerits of adding a fall term break and to add teaching days to both the fall and winter terms in order to elevate Queen's above the bare minimum of all our peer institutions of 59 instructional days. It should be noted that an academic term includes its examination period. Queen's therefore currently has 13 and 14 week terms. The motion has been interpreted as asking for investigation of 13 teaching weeks in each academic term.

The committee discussed various options at length, with evaluative comments as follows:

Consideration	Committee Evaluation
The University Secretariat	The research was not conclusive regarding the number of
provided research regarding	instruction days per term. It does appear, however, terms of 59
practices of the other U15	teaching days are at the low end of the spectrum for other
universities.	Universities.
Abbreviated Orientation week	Orientation Week is the largest student-run event on campus,
	with over 1000 volunteers. Committee members expressed
	concern that modifications to this Queen's University tradition
	would meet considerable resistance.

Consideration	Committee Evaluation
Earlier fall-term start date / lengthened Fall term end date	Committee members discussed the downstream impacts at length.
Lengthened winter-term end date	Possible concerns: - Student income earning would be reduced; - First year residence move-in dates and scheduling affected; - Off campus student lease agreements, depending on fall-term start date; - Faith dates (each Orientation Committee reworks their programming so that no academic events fall on the morning of Rosh Hashanah – in 2013, morning of Thursday, September 5 th) - Faculty and Office of the University Registrar business processes
	Possible opportunities: -Makes up for missed instruction dates through semester; - Instructor has more time to deliver material; and -Flexibility in student engagement (e.g., discussion/debate sessions near end of semester)
Reduced break period prior to final fall and spring exam periods	The Chair of the Exams Subcommittee advised that pre-exam study periods are based on Senate policy.
	Pre-Exam Study Periods Policy Approved by Senate October 24, 2002
	Beginning with the December 2002 examination session, for all relevant Faculties and Schools there will be a pre-exam study period following the end of classes during which no exams will be scheduled. The maximum length of the pre-exam period will be four days in December and five days in April . This period may include statutory holidays and other designated non-examination days. Each year, Faculty and School sessional dates are to include these pre-exam study periods.
	We would like to highlight the fact that it is a 'maximum' duration of a break that is specified, and not a minimum, thus it is quite possible to shorten these periods.
Shortening or lengthening examination periods (e.g., exams on Sundays)	There is a risk that more students may experience exam conflicts defined as:
	 two exams at the same time an exam at the same time as a religious observance; or an exam in three consecutive exam slots

Consideration	Committee Evaluation
	Accommodated exams, which have increased in recent years, may be more challenging to schedule in a reduced time frame.
	Resource staffing and Faculty availability on Sundays may be an issue but at this stage we <u>do not</u> see this consideration in a negative light. It may even be associated with fewer conflicts for students.
Instructional hours based on professional accreditation and /or regulatory requirements	The committee reviewed how the Faculty of Law sessional dates changed for 2014/2015 to include a Fall term recess from November 3 to November 7, and that the change was met with resounding support at the Faculty Board level.
	Accordingly, the committee felt that changes to sessional dates should be prompted at the Faculty/Department level based on the requirements for the area of study.

SCAP Meeting:

We met with Dan Bradshaw, Associate Vice-Principal (Faculty Relations), who was invited to speak to the Sessional Dates motion referral in light of the Queen's QUFA Collective Agreement and the Queen's-PSAC Local 901 Unit 1 Collective Agreement.

In both Collective Agreements, the number of weeks, nor by beginning date and end date does not define the definition of academic term. Direct reference was made to QUFA Article 37.2.6(b) which states "..."in assigning teaching and service activities, the Unit Head shall only assign teaching duties to members for two (2) four (4) month periods during each academic year...". He also referenced PSAC Article 16.04 which states "TA activities as per the TAF and within the allotted hours may, on occasion, extend one (1) month beyond what would otherwise be the appointment end date."

Dan Bradshaw concluded that technically if the term falls within the 4 month window, there should be no issue. However, he noted that beyond the explicit reference of the Collective Agreements, implicitly there may have been a practice that has been in place for the last number of years that the other party to the agreement has relied on. He also indicated that the University would have to assess impacts to timing-sensitive administrative processes.

He advised the committee that the appropriate union groups should be informed through the Faculty Relations office in the month of December to enable the unions to review the changes and prepare for the bargaining.

Recommendations

SCAP proposes two recommendations regarding the referred motion.

<u>Recommendation #1</u>: That one additional day, on which classes are not scheduled, is added to Thanksgiving weekend, as Thanksgiving always falls on a Monday and is normally near the middle of the fall term. SCAP proposes the Friday preceding Thanksgiving Monday.

Rationale

The day is targeted to help relieve student academic-associated stress and to hopefully promote more positive expectations for the end of the semester. As we discussed this goal, the committee felt the day could be named "Queen's Wellness Day". The committee noted that October is Mental Health Awareness month, and recommends that the promotion of such a term is a good alternative to "mental health day" or other potential variants discussed by the committee. The feeling is that it represents the positive psychology perspective of mental health.

Recommendation #2: That Senate urge faculties to utilize the available days in the fall and winter terms to their fullest by setting sessional dates so as to increase to the practical limit the number of teaching days in each term. The number of teaching days in a given term need not be identical each year. In essence, all options are on the table for the faculties and schools to consider, including the options listed in the table (or any combination of these options) as having been considered by SCAP.

The requirements of the faculties will be based on various factors including their teaching goals and pedagogy. As the session dates are established, faculties are encouraged to discuss their proposed changes with dependent faculties/programs, the Office of the University Registrar, their student body, etc. to ensure potential concerns have been addressed. This is a similar process recently followed by the Faculty of Law in the instituting the academic year 2014-2015 dates.

Feedback Received

Based on consultation with faculty designates, there is divergence amongst Queen's faculties and schools regarding the extension of session dates. For example:

The Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science would be in favour of a 13 week option based on discussion within their Faculty Board and their students. The Engineering program has the shortest term for engineering in the country (with the exception of the University of Waterloo which has mandatory co-op) and this places considerable stress on their students who cover the same material as other engineering programs in essentially 8 weeks less time.

The School of Music expressed concern over the cost implications associated with term adjuncts (remuneration, increased travel costs, etc.) and felt that an extended term would do more harm than good.

The School of Business provided that in 1st and 2nd year Commerce, they already hold a midterm week where all Commerce classes are cancelled (not Arts and Science). Their curriculum is effectively delivered based on 54 teaching days in each term.

Rationale

The number of available teaching days in a term varies with each year. For example, Labour day moves between the first and the 7th of September depending on the year. Currently some faculties set their sessional dates so as to allow for only 59 teaching days, regardless of the

available number of days in a given year. For example, in 2014 Nov. 28 is the end of regularly scheduled classes in Arts and Science for the fall term. While there are years in which 59 teaching days may be the practical maximum, in other years more are possible. The number of teaching days in the fall of 2014 could have been increased while preserving study days and without placing the end of the examination period beyond the University's closing for the holiday break.

Conclusion

On March 7, 2014 the Senate Committee on Academic Procedures agreed and voted unanimously, based on its analysis and discussion, that SCAP make the following recommendations.

- 1. That Senate adopts the following motion:
 - "Beginning in the 2016-2017 academic year, Queen's University session dates will include a "Queen's Wellness Day", wherein all classes are cancelled. The "Queen's Wellness Day" will always be on the Friday preceding Thanksgiving Monday."
- 2. That Senate makes the following referral to Faculties and Schools:
- "Faculties and Schools are encouraged to utilize the available days in the fall and winter terms to their fullest by setting sessional dates so as to increase to the practical limit the number of teaching days in each term. The number of teaching days in a given term need not be identical each year. As the session dates are established, faculties are encouraged to discuss their proposed changes with dependent faculties/programs, the Office of the University Registrar, their student body, etc. to ensure potential concerns have been addressed."

Membership

- J. Metcalfe, University Registrar
- A.Alvi, Computing PhD '14
- L. Burlock, Mathematics/Physics B.A. '14
- H. Everson, Faculty of Arts and Science
- J. Morelli, Department of Physics, Engineering Physics, and Astronomy
- D.Tripp, Psychology, (Chair)
- T. Ferguson, Office of the University Registrar (Secretary)