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MEMORANDUM

To: Donna E. Shalala, President

From: Richard L. Williamson
Chair, Faculty Senate

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Richard L. Williamson'.

Date: November 30, 2012

Subject: Faculty Senate Legislation #2012-17(B) – Amend the Undergraduate Fall Schedule

At its November 28, 2012 meeting, the Faculty Senate approved by majority with six negative votes the attached changes as proposed by the administration-faculty ad hoc Scheduling Committee to the undergraduate schedule.

The Senate anticipates that there will be students who will not return home for the Thanksgiving break. Due to the newly expanded length of time of that break, the Senate urges the Vice President for Student Affairs to work with others in the administration to assure adequate dining, library services, shuttle service, security and other programs for students who remain on campus.

The Senate also expresses the hope that those graduate and professional programs that currently use the same schedule as the undergraduate schedule will continue to do so.

This legislation is now forwarded to you for your action.


RW/rh

cc: Thomas LeBlanc, Executive Vice President and Provost
Patricia Whitely, Vice President, Student Affairs
William Green, Senior Vice Provost, Dean, Undergraduate Education
Jane Connolly, Professor, Member of ad hoc committee
Karen Beckett, Associate Registrar

cc: Student Govtapes

CAPSULE: #2012-17(B) – Amend the Undergraduate Fall Schedule

PRESIDENT'S RESPONSE

APPROVED: 
(President's Signature)

DATE: 12/20/12

OFFICE OR INDIVIDUAL TO IMPLEMENT: PROUST LEBLANC

EFFECTIVE DATE OF LEGISLATION: Immediately
(if other than June 1 next following)

NOT APPROVED AND REFERRED TO: _____

REMARKS (IF NOT APPROVED): _____

Academic Calendar Proposal

Presented by:

Ad-Hoc Faculty-Administration Committee on Matters Dealing with Undergraduate Scheduling
November 2012

BACKGROUND

The Ad-Hoc Faculty-Administration Committee on Matters Dealing with Undergraduate Scheduling was appointed by the Provost and by the Chair of the Faculty Senate to review undergraduate scheduling issues.

During the Spring 2011 semester, the Committee conducted a survey relating to two issues: the Fall schedule, the Final Examination Schedule. All full-time faculty teaching undergraduate courses were given the opportunity to respond. The survey listed the current status of each issue, the proposed changes, and the rationale for each proposed change. 61% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed shortening of the final exam schedule, and 71% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed changes to the Fall schedule. During the fall semester, the Committee elicited additional input from the faculty through their deans. While the response was again favorable for all proposals, there was sufficient concern expressed by faculty in some disciplines regarding the proposed changes to the final exam schedule that the Committee decided not to recommend any changes at this time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the strongly positive response of the faculty to the proposed changes to the Fall schedule, we recommend the following:

1. Fall classes will begin on a Monday, two days earlier than currently scheduled.
2. There will be a two-day Fall Break (Thursday and Friday) in October.
3. The Thanksgiving Break will begin on the Monday preceding the holiday and end on the Sunday following the holiday.
4. Classes will end two days later than we currently do, on a Tuesday, retaining the current number of class days.
5. The Reading Days will now be one day prior to the first exam day followed by a weekend of no exams.

RATIONALE

Fall Break

The current one-day Fall Break is without substance for students and faculty who have no classes on Fridays. A two-day Fall Break is common practice at many institutions. Stress among college students, particularly among Freshmen, has increased in recent years, especially owing to financial pressures.¹ According to “The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2010,” a report by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, a survey of over 200,000 Freshmen shows

¹ See “Record Level Of Stress Found in College Freshmen.” *New York Times*, January 26, 2011. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/27/education/27colleges.html>)

that their emotional health has been declining while the sense of feeling overwhelmed has been increasing. We therefore feel that providing a meaningful Fall Break is crucial for it provides some stress relief in the middle of the semester. Our own Counseling Center has seen a marked increase in utilization rates over the last five years. From Fall 2009 to Fall 2011, there was a 43% increase in student visits. As of 1 October 2012, the utilization increase over the previous fall at the same time was 17%.² We therefore feel that providing a meaningful Fall Break is crucial for it provides some stress relief in the middle of the semester, a view that is endorsed by the Counseling Center.

Thanksgiving Break

Faculty teaching undergraduates are fully aware that classes during the week of Thanksgiving are poorly attended. The reason for this is quite simple: students want to spend this important national holiday with their family. Beginning the Thanksgiving Break on Thanksgiving itself requires students who do not live in Miami to face one of three choices: 1) If they don't leave until after their classes are over on Wednesday, they must purchase the highest priced tickets to return home for a 4-day holiday; 2) If they leave prior to their last day of classes (Tuesday or Wednesday), they may purchase less expensive tickets and spend more time with their family, but they will miss classes and any in-class activities required on those days; 3) They may stay in Miami and miss celebrating Thanksgiving with their families. For students and parents, the best option is to extend the Thanksgiving Break so that they can spend this family holiday together, at a lower financial cost and without missing class. From a faculty perspective, this means that no class time is missed by large numbers of students. While faculty are hesitant to penalize students if they miss classes during the week of Thanksgiving because we all recognize the importance of this holiday, with an extended Thanksgiving Break, few will feel obliged to extend special consideration for students missing class before or after the break.

Fall Start and Stop Dates

Extending the Fall Break and the Thanksgiving Break obviously requires some accommodation within the calendar. Beginning classes on a Monday in August instead of on Wednesday not only accounts for two of the four days required to accommodate the extension of the breaks but serves a very practical academic purpose: the first week of classes will now actually be a week of classes. In the current calendar, a number of returning students do not actually show up for classes until the week following the beginning of classes. Starting the semester with a full week of classes will have the benefit of curtailing much of this practice.

Classes will end two days later than is currently the case, adding the other two days for the breaks. This will also have the benefit of having a bit more time after Thanksgiving to make a more meaningful conclusion in each class.

We note that the number of class days in the semester remains the same as at present.

² See Appendix A for Counseling Center report.

Reading Days

Under the proposed fall calendar, we would reduce the reading days by one day.

Conclusion

As mentioned previously, 71% of the faculty responding to a survey favor the proposed changes to the fall schedule (i.e., a two-day fall break, a week break at Thanksgiving, adding four days to the semester to accommodate these changes). In addition, the academic deans of the schools involved with undergraduate education support the proposed changes. Student Government endorses the proposed changes. Finally, our Counseling Center sees the extension of the Fall Break as an important student mental health issue.

Appendix A

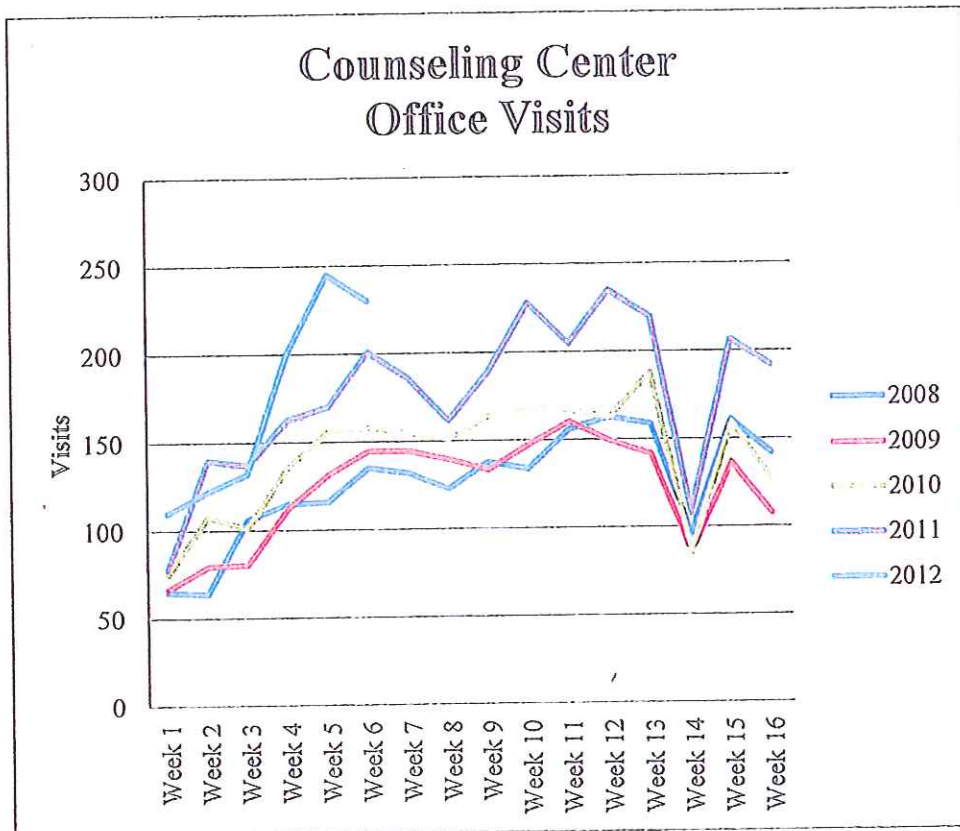
University of Miami Counseling Center Report 2012

Analysis of Counseling Center Data In Support of Fall Break

- Counseling Center utilization rates since 2008 suggest that, week-by-week, the number of attended sessions increase, from the start of the fall semester through Fall Break. During Fall Recess week, we naturally experience a drop in attended appointments. Upon return from Fall Recess, participation in counseling services quickly goes back up or remains steady when compared to the last week before Fall Break.
- Total office visits for the Fall semester have also continued to increase from 1,969 in 2009 to 2,821 in 2011 -- a 43% increase. We have seen the trend continue to this Fall semester, as the total number of visits thus far this Fall semester (1,040) represents a 17% increase over last year at the same time (889).
- Anxiety is the most commonly reported concern by students, followed by academic concerns (#2), feeling overwhelmed (#4), and sleep (#5). Therapists' diagnoses closely resemble students' report.
- All of these problems create considerable stress to our brains and physical bodies. And chronic stress from any or a combination of these problems could lead to harmful (chronic) high levels of cortisol (stress hormone) in students' brains. It has been well documented that chronic high levels of cortisol is harmful to our brains and bodies, negatively affecting the individual's immune system and general functioning, including brain functioning. Changed patterns of cortisol levels have also been found associated with Major Depressive Disorder (Second highest diagnosis by therapists at the Counseling Center -- this is not a cause-and-effect argument, though).
- Changed patterns of cortisol levels may lead to the disruption of homeostasis, including the body's ultradian and circadian rhythms (ultradian rhythms occur every 70-90 minutes throughout the 24-hour circadian day).
- Rest, along with sleep hygiene and routine, is generally recommended to restore homeostasis. As a result our bodies' immune system restores, energy returns, and ability to think clearly. This is why is so important to take a break from work (e.g., lunch, vacation) and school (e.g., fall break and spring break, winter/summer breaks).

Counseling Center Office Visits

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Week 1	65	67	75	78	110
Week 2	64	80	108	140	122
Week 3	106	81	101	137	132
Week 4	115	113	136	163	201
Week 5	116	132	156	170	245
Week 6	135	145	158	201	230
Week 7	132	145	155	186	
Week 8 (Fall Break)	123	140	151	162	
Week 9	138	134	164	189	
Week 10	134	148	169	228	
Week 11	156	161	167	205	
Week 12	163	150	163	235	
Week 13	159	142	188	220	
Week 14 (Thksgvg)	96	86	85	108	
Week 15	161	137	160	207	
Week 16	142	108	127	192	
Totals	2005	1969	2263	2821	1040



Appendix B

Proposed Academic Calendar

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI ACADEMIC CALENDAR
FALL 2013 (4 DAYS ADDED)--No change to start week
Subject to Change
69 Class Days Per Semester

Aug 12	Mon	Prestigious Awards and Fellowships Due in Honors Program & Office of Academic Enhancement. For specific deadline dates on the various awards see www.miami.edu/oaee .
Aug 12	Mon	Deadline for Readmission
TBA		Housing Available for New Students
TBA		International Student Orientation
TBA		Orientation Begins
TBA		Housing Available for Continuing Students
Aug 26	Mon	CLASSES BEGIN
Aug 26	Mon	Late Registration Fees in Effect
Sept 2	Mon	HOLIDAY (LABOR DAY)
Sept 5	Thurs	Last Day for Registration and to Add a Course
Sept 11	Wed	Last Day to Drop a Course Without a "W"
Sept 11	Wed	Last Day to Make a Change in Credit-Only Designation
Oct. 7	Mon	Academic Alert Grades Due in myUM
TBA		FALL RECESS
TBA		Last Day to Apply for Graduation for Fall
Oct 28	Mon	Registration Appointments Available on myUM
TBA		Last Day to Drop a Course
Nov 11	Mon	Registration for Spring 2014* (Begins)
Nov 22	Fri	Magna/Summa Theses Due in Honors Program Office
Nov 22	Fri	Graduate Students: Last Day to Defend Dissertation/Thesis for Fall 2013 Graduation
Nov 23 - Dec 1	Sat-Sun	THANKSGIVING RECESS
Dec 10	Tues	CLASSES END (11:00 PM)
TBA		Reading Days
TBA		FINAL EXAMS
Dec 20	Fri	Graduate School Deadline for Completion of Dissertation/Thesis
Dec 20	Fri	SEMESTER ENDS (11:00 PM)
TBA		FALL COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES - All Degrees
TBA		Housing Closes at NOON for Non-Commencement Participants
TBA		Housing Closes at NOON for Commencement Participants
TBA		Final Grades Released by Faculty in myUM by Noon
TBA		Final Grades Available to Students in myUM

* As Scheduled By Appointment
 Updated November 5, 2012

Most up-to-date calendars available at: <http://www.miami.edu/registrar>

Appendix C

Committee Membership List

Ad Hoc Faculty-Administration Committee on Matters Dealing with Undergraduate Scheduling

Members

Jane Connolly (Arts & Sciences)

Rita Deutsch (Arts & Sciences)

Murat Erkoç (Engineering)

Thomas Goodmann (Arts & Sciences) – replaced in 2012 by Richard Beckman (Communication)

William Green (Provost Office)

Scott Ingold (Registrar) – replaced in 2011 by Karen Beckett (Registrar)

John Soliday (Communication)

Richard Walker (Student Affairs) – replaced in 2012 by Danielle Howard (Student Affairs)

Student Government President – Christina Farmer 2010; Brandon Mitchell 2011; Nawara Alawa 2012