

University Committee on Academic Policy

August 31, 2000

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jeanne Wald

FROM: Joe Chartkoff

RE: Reading Days Policy Proposal

Hi, Jeanne,

I dredged out the draft I had of the Reading Days policy proposal from last Spring. I figured we could start with that text and then edit it to a form we feel is more appropriate to bring to the committee for forwarding to the Provost.

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This is a request to include the topic of creating reading days for students in between the last day of classes and the start of final examinations for each fall and spring semester.

The proposal I suggest we bring before the full University Committee on Academic Policy would be to create a week of review and study time before the start of final exams without increasing the length of the total semester.

As someone who experienced this practice when an undergraduate student at another university, in my view the existence of such a period provides an extremely valuable opportunity for students to review and integrate their course experiences and to complete any remaining previous assignments without the pressure and tension involved in also attending classes, digesting additional course content and completing further assignments. It also serves to help most students regain their energy and focus in order to complete their semesters as productively as possible.

In such a program, it must be mandatory that no course class sessions be held during the reading days period, and that no assignments be given to be done during that period. The period must be one in which students are able to devote their entire energies to study, review and integration of course content. It should be allowable for optional pre-finals review sessions to be offered during the reading days period,

but it must be mandated that attendance must be non-mandatory and that no new course materials can be presented or required.

It is proposed that such reading days be created by converting the current last week of classes into the week of reading days and ending formal class meetings a week earlier than at present, so that nine calendar days will exist between the last day of formal classes and the first day of the start of final exams. Having fewer reading days would mean ending classes in the middle of the week prior to the start of final exams, which would have a serious impact on the scheduling of laboratories, discussion sections and all other scheduled amendments to full classes.

Such a policy would shorten the number of weeks devoted to the class meetings part of the semester by a full week. It should be appreciated, however, that it is not enormously difficult to design effective courses to be delivered in 14 weeks rather than 15, without a serious loss of class content. We already have some semesters with 14 ½ weeks of classes. The University of Michigan, one of the world's premier universities, has semesters of 13 and 14 weeks and does an outstanding job of education using that time frame. In my judgment, the advantages to students to be gained from having a week of reading days significantly outweighs any disadvantage arising from a minor decrease in the total number of class meetings per semester.

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[back to my current comments}. Aside from cleaning up the language of the text, we still might think about proposing a shorter reading days period, such as Wednesday, Thursday and Friday prior to Finals Week. We already have a shorter Fall semester, with days off for Labor Day (Monday) and Thanksgiving (Thursday and Friday) during the term. Spring Break is different since it doesn't reduce the number of class weeks. What do you think?