

Final Exam Policy -- Clarification, Guidance, and Operationalization
Issue: Exams during Last Week of Class

Students-athletes, among others, have raised concerns about faculty/instructors giving exams during their courses' last week of classes especially when those faculty/instructors do not use the university-scheduled final exam period for those courses.

The MSU academic calendar indicates when "classes end" and when "final exams" are scheduled each semester. MSU's academic calendar does not specify a "reading period," or other preparatory period at the end of each semester before the start of final exams. The calendar of MSU College of Law does designate the weekend between end of classes and their final exam period as a "reading period."

The weekend between the end of classes and the start of final exams traditionally provides MSU students with time to study, review, and prepare to their final exams, papers, and projects. Final exam date/times are designated in the MSU course schedule. Finals week itself provides added days/times for students to study, review, and prepare for their scheduled final exams (days/times previously occupied by classes). Students, especially those engaged in employment and university-approved activities, benefit from having the weekend before "final exams" as well as time during "finals week" to study, review, and complete projects/take exams that are due on the university-scheduled final exam day/time.

Instructors/faculty giving exams during the last week of their course in lieu of giving exams on the published final exam date/time may not be aware that doing so adversely impacts their students' ability to study/prepare for such exams as well as adversely impact other instructors/faculty courses, exams, etc. Students do not necessarily benefit from having a courses' last exam 'early,' even when such exams "may be dropped" in grade calculations.

MSU Code of Teaching Responsibility specifically addresses Final Exam Policy (see below). That policy makes clear that faculty are expected to, among other things:

- Use final exam period for examination, discussion, summarizing the course, obtaining student evaluation of the course instruction, or any other appropriate activity designed to advance the student's education.
- Make required written report or take-home examinations in place of a final examination not due before the final examination period scheduled for that course.
- Not schedule final examinations at any time other than the date and hour listed in the Schedule of Courses.
- Any deviations from the final examination schedule must be approved by the Undergraduate Committee of the Assistant Deans Group.

The terms of Academic Year employment for MSU faculty and instructors include a fall duty period (August 16 - Dec. 31) and a spring duty period (Jan. 1 to May 15). Faculty members on an annual year appointment are supposed to work eleven months with one-month (22 days) vacation. It seems is reasonable for faculty/instructors to engage with their course responsibilities through the end of MSU finals weeks.

Student-athletes, student performers (musicians, actors, cheer, dance, etc.), and other students at MSU are often subject to practice/rehearsal, game/performance, travel, work, and other schedules over which they have little to no control. There are policies, such as “Participation in University-Approved Athletic Competitions,” that support faculty flexibility and promote accommodating scheduling conflicts of some students. But students engaged in university-approved events that may conflict with the last week of classes is larger than MSU student-athletes. It is true that some students' schedules are dictated by third parties such as the NCAA. For example, MSU student-athletes are prohibited from practicing or competitions during 'finals week.' This restriction is based on the assumption that the student-athletes need this time to study for and complete final exams during each institution's finals week. The last week of classes is typically treated by employers and others scheduling work and obligations for students as a typical 'work week.'

The current MSU’s Code of Teaching Responsibility Final Examination Policy:

FINAL EXAMINATION POLICY

During the final week of each academic semester all courses shall meet for one 2-hour period at the date and time listed in the Schedule of Courses. During summer sessions, final examinations are scheduled in the last class sessions. This period should be used for examination, discussion, summarizing the course, obtaining student evaluation of the course instruction, or any other appropriate activity designed to advance the student's education. **If an instructor requires a written report or take-home examination in place of a final examination, it shall not be due before the final examination period scheduled for that course.** Exceptions to this paragraph may be approved by the department or school chairperson, or in a college without departments, by the dean.

In the event that a final examination is deemed appropriate by the instructor, it may not be scheduled at any time other than the date and hour listed in the Schedule of Courses. Any deviations from the final examination schedule must be approved by the Undergraduate Committee of the Assistant Deans Group.

It seems that MSU policy suggests some guiding principles and directions for consideration of the appropriate next steps vis-à-vis the Steering Committee and Academic Governance.

Therefore, it is respectfully requested that the appropriate academic governance committees and administrators at MSU clarify MSU policy on exams given during a course’s last week of classes when no other final exam is given on that course’s university-designated final exam period. Furthermore, it would be helpful to have examples of proper and improper exam practice and mechanisms for addressing "problematic circumstances" when an instructor/faculty gives an exam during a course's last week of classes.

Possible points for discussion:

- Exams/Quizzes (“final” and/or otherwise) made available for students during the last week of term (i.e., week before ‘exam period’) might be ok if there was an option for submission on the course’s scheduled final exam period?
- Doesn't current definition of “final exam” cover exams during the course’s last week?
- When no ‘final exam’ is being given in a course, exams for that course during the week of classes should be treated as “final exams.”