

Cornell University Student Assembly

Originally Presented on:	04/12/2012
Type of Action:	Recommendation
Status/Result:	Adopted

S.A. Resolution #43 (Spring 2012)

Non-Negotiable Aspects of the New University Calendar

Sponsored by: Geoffrey Block '14, Natalie Raps '12

Whereas, the University Calendar Committee is proposing changes to the University Calendar

Whereas, these changes will affect all students in a variety of ways

Whereas, the Student Assembly must ensure that every change improves the mental health and well being of all students

Be it therefore resolved, that the Student Assembly labels the following properties of a calendar as those that are imperative for undergraduate student mental health and well-being and ones that should be advocated for in any current or future changes to the academic calendar:

1. A minimum 4 full days of study period
2. A minimum of 8 full days for the exam period
3. An academic break in between the beginning of the Spring Semester and Spring Break
4. A natural break within each exam period (similar to how the weekend currently serves as a natural break for most students)
5. The Wednesday of Thanksgiving as a full day off
6. A minimum of 4 full days for Senior Week Programming in the Spring Semester

Be it further resolved, that upon passage, this list be directly considered and weighted heavily by the Calendar Committee as well as President Skorton and Vice-President Murphy

Respectfully Submitted,

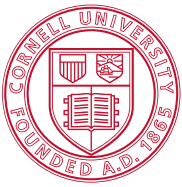
Natalie Raps '12
President, Student Assembly

Geoffrey Block '14
At-Large Representative, Student Assembly

34 And, in case anyone is interested, the roll-call vote:
35 Passed 21-0-1

S. Balik	<i>Yes</i>
G. Block	<i>Yes</i>
S. Breedon	<i>Yes</i>
D. Brown	<i>Yes</i>
A. Chopra	<i>Yes</i>
R. Desai	<i>Not present</i>
B. Francisco	<i>Yes</i>
R. Gitlin	<i>Yes</i>
D. Golberg	<i>Absent</i>
M. Gulrajani	<i>Abstain</i>
G. Hoffman	<i>Yes</i>
J. Kay	<i>Yes</i>
J. Lee	<i>Not present</i>
A. Meller	<i>Yes</i>
J. Mueller	<i>Yes</i>
D. Muir	<i>Absent</i>
A. Nicoletti	<i>Yes</i>
A. Pinkney	<i>Yes</i>
H. Pittell	<i>Yes</i>
N. Raps	<i>Yes</i>
J. Rau	<i>Yes</i>
P. Scelfo	<i>Yes</i>
E. Szulman	<i>Not present</i>
N. Treffeisen	<i>Yes</i>
A. Wolford	<i>Yes</i>
E. Yeterian	<i>Yes</i>

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Cornell University Student Assembly

Originally Presented on:	04/26/2012
Type of Action:	Recommendation
Status/Result:	Adopted and Acknowledged

S.A. Resolution #47 (**Spring 2012**)

Undergraduate Student Body Denouncement of the Calendar Committee's Proposal

ABSTRACT: Undergraduate student body denouncement of the Calendar Committee's proposal.

Sponsored by: Geoffrey Block '14, Natalie Raps '12, Adam Gitlin '13, John Mueller '13, Jae Lee '14, Daniel Kuhr '13, Ross Gitlin '15, Peter Scelfo '15, Don Muir '15, Cornell Minds Matter, Senior Week, Cornell Class of 2014

Whereas, the Calendar Committee has proposed a final recommendation to be passed by the Faculty Senate regarding changes to the academic calendar, which passed by a vote of 8–1–1.

Whereas, both undergraduate students on the committee did not approve of the changes.

Whereas, the undergraduate student body believes the process was too rushed.

Whereas, one of the purposes of the committee "was to explore whether revisions to the calendar could help to alleviate student stress that may have contributed to the cluster of suicides in the spring of 2010."

Whereas, despite this purpose, there has been substantial criticism of the proposed calendar with students concerned that the changes will, in fact, increase stress and harm student mental health.

Whereas, there is still time to explore other options to relieve mental stress.

Be it therefore resolved, that the Student Body calls on the Faculty Senate to incorporate further options to relieve mental stress, such as (i.) starting earlier in the Spring Semester to allow for a longer study period; or (ii.) a longer study and exam period (similar to the current length of the study and exam period), or (iii.) an exam period with a built in break in it in order to help relieve student stress and enhance mental health.

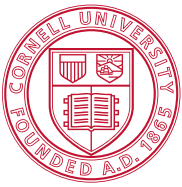
Be it further resolved, that the Student Body calls on the Faculty Senate to delay passing the proposed calendar in order to allow for more streamlined communication to all parties, more effective use of feedback and for more of a student voice to be heard.

Be it further resolved, that the Student Body urges the Faculty Senate, President Skorton and the Board of Trustees to not enact the recommendations of the Calendar Committee until further emphasis is placed on student health and well being.

Respectfully Submitted,

Geoffrey Block '14
Student Assembly At-large Representative

Natalie Raps '12
Student Assembly President



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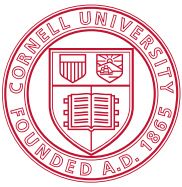
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Student Assembly President



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Geoffrey Block '14
Student Assembly At-large Representative

Natalie Raps '12
Student Assembly President

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49	Adam Gitlin '13
50	<i>Student Assembly Executive Vice President</i>
51	
52	John Mueller '13
53	<i>Student Assembly At-large Representative</i>
54	
55	Daniel Kuhr '13
56	<i>Student Assembly Human Ecology Representative</i>
57	
58	Jay Lee '14
59	<i>Student Assembly At-large Representative</i>
60	
61	Celia Muoser '12
62	<i>Cornell Minds Matter</i>
63	
64	Matt Koren '12
65	<i>Co-chair, Senior Week</i>
66	
67	Rob Callahan '14
68	<i>President, Cornell Class of 2014</i>
69	
70	Ross Gitlin '15
71	<i>Student Assembly Freshman Representative</i>
72	
73	Don Muir '15
74	<i>Student Assembly Freshman Representative</i>
75	
76	Peter Scelfo '15
77	<i>Student Assembly Freshman Representative</i>

President Raps' Message to President Skorton from **April 29, 2012**
(please refer to Resolution 47 section of the letter):

Dear President Skorton, Vice President Murphy, and Dean Hubbell,

I just wanted to call your attention to a few resolutions that passed at the SA meeting on Thursday.

The first is Resolution 42 which encompasses a large amount of changes to how the Student Assembly Finance Commission appropriates out its funds to all undergraduate student organizations that apply. The Student Assembly Finance Commission along with the future Vice President of Finance Roneal Desai have done a fantastic job creating these much needed changes. After three meetings in which any community member could share their insights or concerns about the changes (and to which the SAFC amended its proposal to address these concerns in the Appendix to Res. 42) the SA engaged in a healthy debate which ended with a final vote of 21-0-2. Below is a brief summary that outlines the attached Resolution 42 items.

Beginning in Fall 2012 the SAFC will now be enacting-

- A tier system: In response to decreasing caps, the SAFC will be assigning groups into tiers based on their spending history for the past 4 years. Each tier will have its own tier cap.
- Tier movement: Groups will be able to move tiers based on (1) how much of their allocation they spend and (2) how much of their tier cap is spent.
- Performance tiers: The highest tier (Tier 1) will have additional criteria that groups will have to meet. The SAFC will evaluate eligible groups based on membership, honors and recognition, event attendance, unique contribution to campus, and accessibility. No groups will be placed into Tier 1 until Fall 2013.
- Decreased documentation: Much of the documentation groups have to submit has been removed to make the process easier for presidents and treasurers.
- Goal: The goal of the tiered system is to solve the instability in caps for the foreseeable future by reducing unspent funds and ensuring that groups which demonstrate a higher need for funding can access it.

The second Resolution is **Resolution 47- the Undergraduate Student Body Denouncement of the Calendar Committee's Proposal**. After being contacted by many student organizations- including Cornell Minds Matter- that the changes in the proposal for study days and finals will only add to student mental health and stress, the resolution sponsors felt that there needed to be more of direct focus on the discussion by the Faculty Senate. The Resolution hopes to again urge your senior staff and the Faculty Senate to look into shortening winter break and exploring all other possible options to decrease student stress before any changes are finalized. The sponsors of the Resolution include SA members from all classes (including 2015 when said changes are expected to take effect) as well as the Cornell Class Councils of 2014, Senior Week and Cornell Minds Matter. Attached please find Resolution 47 that passed unanimously by a vote of 22-0-0.

I hope all is well and that you have a great rest of your weekend.

Best,
Natalie

Editorial

Ignoring Student Opinion on the Calendar

LAST WEEK, THE CALENDAR COMMITTEE, comprised of various constituencies across the University, voted to approve their final proposal for an academic calendar that the Faculty Senate will vote on at its next meeting on May 9. Notably absent was the support of the two students on the calendar committee.

While this new calendar purports to reduce stress and improve mental health, the two student representatives on the committee question the underlying justification for pushing forward these changes, and their opposition should give an enormous amount of pause to the Faculty Senate. Any proposal that seeks to make students' lives better but does not have the support of the students is unacceptable. Students, the ones who are actually taking finals and are directly affected by the schedule, must be heard.

The new calendar will condense the exam study period from seven days to four and exam week from eight days to six; shorten Senior Week from seven days to three; change the Wednesday before Thanksgiving from a half day to a full day off; and add two days off during President's Week in February. The student representatives doubted that the mental health benefits that would come from the added vacation days would outweigh the harm that comes from significantly shortening study week, and we agree with this assessment. It should be up to the students to decide what they prefer, and the Faculty Senate must not make such a brazenly paternalistic decision.

The process must be slowed down. Formalized student input must be gathered. If the recommendations of these two students on the committee are to be completely ignored, the Faculty Senate must have other evidence in hand to show that students support the changes, and it is clear that they do not have it. The Faculty Senate or the Calendar Committee could have polled the students and gotten their opinions in a more formalized way. This has not been done.

Proponents of the calendar changes argue that an algorithm the University has developed to create natural breaks for students during finals week will allow them to shorten the number of days without increasing stress. To create these natural breaks, this algorithm will schedule exams based on the classes that students are taking and not simply based on the times that classes meet. We are skeptical about the reliance on this algorithm alone to quell stress during finals week.

The effectiveness of this algorithm for reducing stress has not been tested, and the Calendar Committee and the Faculty Senate might find that they achieve more broad reaching student support for the calendar if they test out this algorithm before making other, more drastic changes. If the algorithm is applied to the current calendar and students find it effective, then perhaps the University can move forward with other changes. Pushing all these changes through at the same time seems rushed.

The University cannot forget that its purpose is primarily to benefit students, and the decisions that it makes must keep students' opinions in mind. If it does not have student support, it should not move forward with the changes to the calendar.

Sun Opinion piece from **May 4, 2012**,
(written by two Faculty members of the Calendar Committee,
and referred to in President Skorton's response):

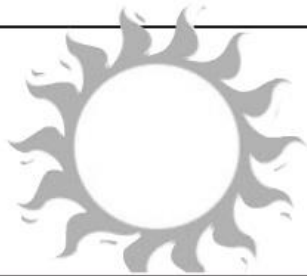
A New Perspective on Calendar Changes

As co-chairs of the Academic Calendar Committee, our goal has been to construct a calendar that might reduce student stress and also improve faculty work-life balance, while complying with NYS Education requirements. The latest version of our recommendations is available online at [http://theuniversityfaculty.cornell.edu/calendarcommittee/calendar_main.html]. We'd like to thank students, faculty and staff for their many thoughtful comments and ideas, communicated through emails, meetings, polls, articles and op-ed

most stressful period of the academic year. The February break also helps families whose children have a Presidents Day recess.

Also, the proposed fall calendar has always included the elimination of the current half-day of instruction on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving break. The S.A. supported this idea with the resolution's fifth item.

What has been more controversial — and misunderstood — are the committee's recommendations to streamline study and exam period. The April 12 resolution listed



Prof. Jeff J. Doyle,
Dr. Kate Walsh

Guest Room

pieces. In particular we would like to acknowledge the Student Assembly, whose resolutions of April 12 and 26 have been instrumental in shaping our recommendations. We discuss those here, with the hope of clearing up some misconceptions that have crept into the discussion.

The April 12 Student Assembly resolution listed six imperative properties of an academic calendar. One of these, item three, was the creation of a new break in the Spring semester that would occur before Spring break. Such a break has been a consistent feature of our recommendations, and has been endorsed by the GPSA, Employee Assembly, Educational Policy Committee, Gannett's Mental Health Director and many individuals. This innovation is not only beneficial in its own right, but also allows Spring Break to be moved so as to divide the semester into thirds, thus breaking up long blocks of instruction during the

two imperatives: 1) "A minimum of 4 full days of study period" and 2) "A minimum of 8 full days for exam period." Both of these requirements were met in the committee's recommendations presented to the Faculty Senate in April. However a recent Sun article erroneously stated that the committee's proposed calendar would "condense the exam study period from seven days to four." In fact, in the current academic calendar, the study period begins on Saturday and ends on Wednesday (with the first exam being held during the 7 p.m. period on Wednesday); this is officially $4 \frac{2}{3}$ days, so our reduction was $\frac{2}{3}$ of a day. In addition, The Sun article stated that exam week would be reduced from "eight days to six." The exam period in the current academic calendar begins with a single exam on Wednesday evening, ending on Friday, for a total of $9 \frac{1}{3}$ days. Exams in the publicly discussed calendar recommendations would

be scheduled over an 8 day period, not 6 as the Sun article states. This is a reduction of 1 1/3 days.

Despite the fact that our recommendations met these two imperatives of the April 12 resolution, the S.A. passed a second resolution on April 26, requesting a longer study and exam period and listing three options for achieving this goal. Upon learning of this latest resolution we met with the Dean of Faculty and the Registrar, discussed the three options and revised our recommendations to meet this new request. The study and exam period has now been lengthened by inserting a break day into the exam period — options (ii) and (iii) in the April 26 resolution. Although, based on modeling conducted by the Registrar's office, this "forced" break is not optimal for reducing the number of student conflicts (e.g., back-to-back exams, three exams in 24 hours), we take seriously what undergraduates are telling us concerning the psychological value of such a break in the middle of the exam period.

The fact that the April 26 S.A. resolution provided three alternative solutions for relieving stress during exams was very constructive, as it provided flexibility and implicitly recognized that there must be tradeoffs in creating a viable calendar. We applaud the S.A. for recognizing the relative benefits of events that compete for a finite number of days available for achieving important mental health goals. However, adding a day to study / exam period does bring our revised proposal in greater conflict with the April 12 S.A. resolution's item six: "A minimum of 4 full days for Senior Week Programming in the Spring Semester." Our previous recommendations had Senior Week beginning on the Tuesday before Commencement; our proposal, as revised to meet the demands of the April 26 resolution, extends the exam period one day further into Senior week. However, as was true in the previous proposal, the Registrar will create a schedule in which few seniors have

exams on the final day.

In the process of formulating our recommendations, the committee considered many other options and ideas that word limits preclude from discussing here. The issues are complex and interacting, and we recognize that no calendar is perfect. Yet, we do believe that we are proposing a calendar that best meets the needs of all our constituencies, while addressing student mental health concerns. The committee voted to send this set of recommendations forward to the Faculty Senate because the majority of its members believed that it was the best set of difficult compromises.

Finally, we hope that we have laid to rest the erroneous assertion that the committee ignored input from undergraduate students (Sun editorial of April 25). Far from being ignored, the opinions of the two undergraduate members of the committee — both members of the S.A. — were sought on every issue. That in the final voting, one of these valued members of the committee was the lone vote against the resolution does not mean that he or she was "ignored." It just means the arguments against waiting to bring the calendar to the faculty senate were not persuasive enough to convince the other members. The committee has been responsive to feedback from many individuals and groups, including a number of undergraduates who wrote to the committee's e-mail address. We hope addressing the calendar in light of the S.A.'s two resolutions makes this point clear.

Jeff J. Doyle is a professor in the Department of Plant Biology and the Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics. He can be reached at jjd5@cornell.edu. Dr. Kate Walsh is Fred G. Peelen Professor of Global Hospitality Strategy and Associate Professor of Organizational Management. She can be reached at kmw33@cornell.edu. Guest Room appears periodically this semester.

President Skorton's Acknowledgement/Response from **May 22, 2012:**

Dear Natalie,

Thank you for sharing the SA Resolution 47 — the Undergraduate Student Body Denouncement of the Calendar Committee's Proposal and for communicating your concerns over the proposed changes to the academic calendar. We understand your concerns and very much recognize that differing opinions remain on the issues raised by the changes.

The major goals of the proposed new calendar are to help alleviate student stress and to address staff and faculty work-life issues. Implementation of the calendar, if approved, would occur in a process yet to be determined by the Provost. No changes, however, are envisioned for the next academic year. However, any changes to the academic calendar that might eventually occur would be closely evaluated to determine if some aspects of the calendar are ineffective, so the proper adjustments can be made.

We have clearly heard the concerns of many in our undergraduate student body, including the resolution passed by the Student Assembly. At the same time, we have heard the perspectives of the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly and the faculty, including the recent affirmative vote of the Faculty Senate and the commentary on the process used to arrive at the recommended changes, written by Professors Jeff Doyle and Kate Walsh, co-chairs of the Academic Calendar Committee:

<http://www.cornellsun.com/section/opinion/content/2012/05/04/new-perspective-calendar-changes>

We are currently considering all of these and other considerations and appreciate all the input we have received.

Sincerely,
David Skorton