

Implementing a Fall Break at Wayne State University

Background

For several years, the Student Senate at Wayne State has requested consideration of a break during the month of October in the interest of promoting student well-being. Doing so would require adjusting the structure of the Fall semester of the academic calendar.

The creation of the academic calendar is guided by several factors. Federal regulations require a 15 week Fall semester-14 weeks of instruction and a week of final exams. Wayne State is also guided by contract dates for faculty and has historically balanced the number of instructional days for each day of the week. Exam dates can run no later than December 22 in order to meet requirements and processing needs.

In fact, Wayne State University sets several institutional priorities for the fall semester of our academic calendar that are unusual among our peers. While institutions may do some of the following, no other peer institution does all of the following:

- Have an election day holiday
- Have a fall break
- Have a study day that isn't a weekend
- Have an even number of instructional day (M-F) meetings

While Wayne State values all of these priorities and their benefits to students, there are a limited number of ways to create a semester to encompass all of these benefits.

In order to study possible structures for a fall break in the academic calendar, the Office of the Registrar assessed the calendars of the 14 other public universities in Michigan, as well as our 8 national peer public universities. The examination included counting instructional days, evaluating start days, and noting number and types of breaks.

In early 2022, at the behest of the Provost, an ad-hoc Fall Break Workgroup of Academic Senate members and administrators was formed to explore the possibility of adding a two-day break into the Fall semester of the academic calendar.

Consultation Process

Working with the Academic Senate, a committee was convened with membership from each school or college, as well as various administrative departments. The membership of that committee is listed below.

Unit	Membership
Business	Manoj Kulchania
Education	Jennifer Lewis
Engineering	Stephanie Chastain
CFPCA	Jane Fitzgibbon
Honors	Rachel Pawlowski

Law	Stephen Calkins
CLAS	Jennifer Wareham, Richard Pineau, Nicole Trujillo-Pagan
Information Science	Joan Beaudoin
Medicine	Paul Walker
Nursing	Erik Carter
Pharmacy	Michael Rybak
Social Work	Lisa O'Donnell
Athletics	Michael Horn
Dean of Students	Brandon Shamoun
Orientation	Kathryn Rawlings
Provost	Darin Ellis, Kelly Dormer
Registrar	Kurt Kruschinska, Jessica Addy

The committee met on Friday, January 14, 2022. Based on earlier research, the Office of the Registrar presented two possible break options to the committee, a model with fewer instructional days and a model with earlier start and end dates for the fall semester, as well as the possibility of not adopting a fall break. The committee met for 90 minutes and had robust discussion. The committee members were then asked to take these options back to their units and collect additional feedback. The meeting discussion and options were summarized into a document, Implementing a Fall Break Summary, and provided to the committee members to assist their efforts. This supplemental feedback was collected through email and a Microsoft Forms survey, linked [here](#), facilitated by the Office of the Registrar and with a deadline of March 1.

Feedback

Participation in these discussion and feedback opportunities by unit is listed below.

Unit	Meeting Attendance and Discussion	Email Feedback	Feedback Form Responses
Business	Manoj Kulchania		Manoj Kulchania submitted
Education	Jennifer Lewis		36 faculty responded
Engineering	Stephanie Chastain		Stephanie Chastain submitted
CFPCA	Jane Fitzgibbon	Jane Fitzgibbon submitted summary comments from CFPCA students and faculty	
Honors	Rachel Pawlowski		Rachel Pawlowski submitted
Law	Stephen Calkins	Stephen Calkins submitted comments from conversations with Law faculty	
CLAS	Jennifer Wareham, Richard Pineau, Nicole Trujillo-Pagan	Richard Pineau submitted comments gathered from faculty	Nicole Pagan submitted Richard Pineau submitted

		and staff, mainly from CLAS	
Information Science	Joan Beaudoin	Joan Beaudoin submitted email comment	
Medicine	Did Not Attend		
Nursing	Erik Carter		
Pharmacy	Michael Rybak		Michael Rybak submitted
Social Work	Did Not Attend		Lisa O'Donnell submitted
Athletics	Michael Horn		
Registrar	Kurt Kruschinska, Jessica Addy		
Dean of Students	Brandon Shamoun		Brandon Shamoun submitted
Provost	Darin Ellis, Kelly Dormer		Kelly Dormer submitted
Orientation	Kathryn Rawlings		

Survey responses and email feedback are attached. No additional options for adoption of a break were proposed, so Wayne State's choices continue to be

- Fewer instructional days
- Earlier start and end dates for the Fall semester
- No fall break

Feedback, especially from faculty, was fairly evenly split over all possible options. However, faculty-especially from those units with clinical components-did bring forward major concerns about the possibility of fewer instructional days. Many programs would require significant curricular changes if offered fewer meeting days, and some may have accreditation standards that would be impacted. Any change in instructional days would require a longer multi-year implementation, far expanding the initial parameters of this project.

Summary

Given the results of faculty and staff feedback, the university's best options are to start and end the fall semester earlier or to forgo a fall break.

Wayne State does currently start later than most peer institutions, with an August 30 start date in Fall 2022. While most Michigan public institutions will start on August 29, Lake Superior State University will start on August 22, as will 7 out of 8 of Wayne State's national peer institutions.

Note that the Law School calendar already begins somewhat earlier than the university's main academic calendar and the feasibility of a fall break may need to be assessed separately. The School of Medicine operates on a separate academic calendar and was not included in this project.