

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM: 6.C

DATE: July 26, 2010

SUBJECT: Review of Academic Calendar

At the May Board Meeting, Regent Morris asked that the academic calendar be revisited specifically because of issues students raise about Thanksgiving travel. The set of academic calendars approved a few years ago have classes scheduled the Wednesday preceding Thanksgiving which effectively precludes out-of-region students from flying home to spend time with their families. He stated that this is a common complaint that he and other Regents receive and he asked that alternatives be considered with a response back to the Board by the October meeting.

A small working group was established to review the issues and to consider alternatives. The group met by conference call in early June and a second meeting was held in conjunction with the June Board meeting. Summaries of these meetings are attached. In addition, this topic was discussed the Student Federation when they met in May.

The working group recommends simply dropping a class day in the fall semester, reducing the number from 75 to 74. Since the approved calendars include 74 instructional days in the spring semester, this step would “balance” the semesters.

The academic officers who are members of the working group stated that this proposed solution would probably be challenged by the faculty. It was noted that this would be brought before AAC because the issue and the suggested solutions will need to be circulated on the campuses early this fall.

Members of the Council should be prepared to discuss the recommendations of the working group and to propose strategies to facilitate a broader campus review by mid-September. AAC and SAC will need to finalize a recommendation by then to meet the scheduled COPS and BOR meetings.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Discussion and Recommendation.

Review of Academic Calendar June 24, 2010

Here's a draft summary of the meeting.

The meeting started with a quick review of the background. At the May Board meeting, Regent Morris had asked that the calendar be revisited since students have stated that the current schedule precludes many from travelling home for the Thanksgiving holiday. A quick summary of the earlier conference call was provided including the small set of options developed at that time (drop an instructional day; change the first Monday from orientation/registration to a class day; change finals from five days to four days add this as a class day.)

Each campus provided a summary of local discussions/considerations. Those reporting stated a strong preference for simply dropping a class day in the fall semester, reducing the number from 75 to 74. It was noted that this would "balance" the semesters since the approved calendars have set the spring semester at 74 instructional days.

While the Student Affairs Officers did say that orientation schedules could be shifted so that classes could start on Monday, there was consensus that this could cause problems since changes to the orientation schedules would require faculty and staff to be on campus on Saturday and/or Sunday.

There was no support for changing finals from 5 days to 4.

The academic officers noted that the solution this group preferred to simply drop a class day would probably be challenged by the faculty. This issue and the suggested solutions will need to be circulated on the campuses early this fall.

The following issues/concerns were noted.

- While all campuses do understand and do support the move to have the Wednesday before Thanksgiving as a non-class day, there were concerns that students would start leaving earlier since there are only two class days in the week. It was agreed that as this unfolds, a tight message will need to be developed and circulated.
- Wednesday will be a non-class day. All offices will be open.
- All Tuesday evening classes will meet. Dorms will open and food service provided.
- There may be other issues that will need to be identified and addressed.

The goal is to take a recommendation to the Board in October (October 14-15). Recommendations will need to be formulated by mid-September.

The group did discuss broader issues with the calendar including start/end dates, etc. It was agreed that it might be appropriate to create an ad-hoc group to consider more substantive changes after this concern is addressed.

Sam

Review of Academic Calendar June 9, 2010, Conference Call

Participants:

BHSU – Lois Flagstad
DSU – Jesse Wise
NSU – Tom Hawley and Rhoda Smith
SDSU – Laurie Nichols and Marysz Rames
USD – Jeff Baylor and James Parker
BOR Staff – Sam Gingerich

Sam welcomed everybody and thanked them for agreeing to work on this. The issue before the group was briefly reviewed. It was agreed that the request to extend the Thanksgiving recess by making the day before Thanksgiving a no class day was reasonable. This group was called together to develop a recommendation(s) that would accomplish this.

As a note, Sam pointed out that recommendation(s) from the group would be broadly circulated on the campuses for review/comment before Board action would even be considered.

Sam also noted that if changes are made, they will be to the 2011-2012 calendar. We are not considering changes to the 2010-2011 calendar since this one has already been widely published.

The background information included with the agenda was reviewed. Marysz stated that she remembers the discussions that led to the incorporation of the three week inter-semester break simply because the enrollment services staff on the campus agreed that this was the minimum required to allow them to accomplish the required academic and financial aid processes. She did agree to ask MOCC if this time frame could be revised.

There were no other observations or questions about the policy or procedural documents circulated.

Sam said that he had done a quick review of academic calendars of universities in the region. One or two were a week shorter, one or two were a week longer, but most were identical in length to the calendar followed here in SD. There were subtle variations between these simply because of the difference in holidays observed.

The group was then asked to suggest and discuss some alternatives. The following were mentioned as changes that could be made if the Wednesday before Thanksgiving is changed to a no class day.

1. It was noted that the approved calendars include 75 class days in the fall and only 74 in the spring. It might be possible to simply balance the semesters and drop one class day.
2. It was noted that classes always start Monday at 5:00 pm and this is not counted as a class day. It might be possible to start classes at 8:00 am on Monday. Since this would have an impact on start of semester orientation and move in activities, this needs to be

carefully considered. However, reps from both SDSU and USD noted that some students on their campuses were saying that classes should start that day.

3. The academic calendar includes a number of state holidays. In many other states, public institutions are open for these traditional federal holidays and instead of recognizing these on the established dates, the holidays are “banked” and all staff are given the week off between Christmas and New Year’s Day. There may be variations of this that could be considered. It was noted that here in SD, these holidays are established in statute so legislation would be required before any changes could be made. In addition, all members of the group also recognized that a change of this magnitude would impact all employees so this is a discussion that probably should be led by those who work more closely with all classes of employees.
4. The calendar reserves five days for final exams. It might be possible to offer all final exams in a four day period which would add another instructional day.
5. As mentioned above, the three week processing period will be reviewed. If enrollment management staff believe that the required work can be accomplished in less time, there may be some opportunities here.

Members of the group were asked to have some discussions about these possibilities and to also see if there are other suggestions.

The group will meet at 8:00 am in Brookings on the Thursday morning (June 24) of the Board meeting. The location has yet to be established.