

FALL BREAK RESOLUTIONS:

The Agenda Committee, urged by various senators and constituents who would like to see some closure on the fall break issue, has elected to place five different (even conflicting) motions before the Faculty Senate for an up or down vote on September 14. The fate of these resolutions should help to determine how the Senate might best proceed and to indicate to the Texas Tech University Administration what options enjoy the most support.

Motion I: The Faculty Senate endorses the general thrust and intent of the Student Senate's May 2005 "Proposal for a Fall Break" (see <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/senate/issues/FallBreakProposal.pdf>), although recognizing that some refinement in detail is desirable.

Pro: At the last Faculty Senate Meeting, this late-arriving student proposal was deferred until fall, when the Faculty Senate promised to consider it. Although even the Student Senate might, at this point, wish to change it in some details, its essence is a request for a mid October Thursday/Friday fall holiday in order to break up the longest uninterrupted stretch of classes in the calendar year. Many universities have such a break and find it workable and enjoyable. There would be no net loss of days of instruction because the lost days would be made up at the end of the semester by advancing final examinations two days (so that they would be held Monday through Friday prior to graduation, with the preceding weekend serving in lieu of "Dead Day").

Con: Laboratory sciences such as Biological Sciences, Chemistry, and Geosciences have objected that, even if there is no net loss of days, this proposal breaks up a mid semester week, disrupting the week-by-week progression of courses which require extensive laboratory set up time. Theatre objects that this proposal breaks up its fall schedule by establishing a break right where a midterm musical production would customarily be staged. If final examinations are moved forward, then diplomas for fall graduation would need to be mailed to students (involving additional expense and decoupling graduation from degree presentation). Currently only the August graduates must receive their diplomas in the mail. Different consequences, some adverse, result for different constituencies if the break occurs while the football team is playing at home or away. It is argued that these harms outweigh any hypothetical benefits. It is argued that fall break works in other Big XII schools (all of those outside Texas) only because they have eliminated some of the time constraints by starting classes a week earlier or removing the Labor Day holiday.

Motion II: The Faculty Senate endorses a one day fall break, to be held on a Friday in mid October, and the advancing of fall final examinations by two days.

Pro: Such a "mini-break" does not upset laboratory classes, which tend not to run labs on Fridays. It would acknowledge the students' desire for some relief in the calendar, albeit not as much as they had originally requested. It would actually provide either an extra day of instruction or a "Dead Day" Friday to be added to the weekend prior to finals.

Con: Such a "mini-break" still has potentially adverse consequences for theatre performances and football games. It complicates fall graduation. Yet it does not provide real vacation time for our students, who now live an average distance of more than 200+ miles from campus and who would lack adequate time for both commuting and resting.

Motion III: The Faculty Senate endorses a two day fall break to be held on Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week, to be compensated for by advancing the fall final examinations two days.

Pro: Last year, the Faculty Senate was most sympathetic to this proposal. Such a break would not disrupt laboratory classes or theatre productions, which do not use this week anyway. It eliminates days already characterized by low student attendance. It offers the most substantive holiday of all the proposals, permitting varied combinations of recreation and study. By advancing final examinations, it provides more time between them and the Thanksgiving holiday.

Con: Such a break does not solve the problem the students initially sought to address—the unbroken stretch of classes between Labor Day and Thanksgiving. It complicates fall graduation.

Motion IV: The Faculty Senate requests that a Senate committee be charged with examining the possibility of starting fall semester classes earlier (by two days? or even by one week?) and using some or all of the days of instruction gained to allow a two day mid October fall break.

Pro: This proposal would eliminate the time constraints that complicate the student fall break proposal. It would allow other aspects of our calendar to remain as they are. It would place Texas Tech University's calendar in conformity with other Big XII universities that do have such fall breaks. Although the full consequences of this move have not yet been fully studied by the Faculty Senate or by other university bodies, this proposal would redress that lacuna by beginning such study.

Con: Starting earlier would require faculty members to be "on duty" even earlier than under the present calendar. It complicates already difficult financial issues involving personnel hired on budget year contracts beginning September 1. It would have adverse effects on orientation, band, "rush week," and other events. If, as has been suggested, local primary and secondary schools will be shifting their start dates to conform to the present Texas Tech University calendar, then an earlier starting time for Texas Tech University might create problems for faculty members with children in local schools. The full consequences of such a proposal have not yet been studied.

Motion V: The Faculty Senate requests that Senate Committee A be charged with modifying the Student Senate's May 2005 "Proposal for a Fall Break" so that it will do the least possible harm to existing academic programs; that the Committee on Committees recommend additional members for Committee A so that the constituencies most directly affected by a fall break proposal will be directly represented; and that the modified Committee A offer a finished report to the full Senate, prior to the end of this fall semester, on how a fall break might best be established.

Pro: Further committee deliberation should provide the Senate with the information needed to make an informed decision. The units most directly affected should have a chance to craft structures that would be least harmful to their own interests. Presented with a polished proposal, the Senate could best judge whether the benefits of fall break would outweigh its harms.

Con: This issue has already been around for a long time and amply debated. The exact details concerning how best to fit existing programs into a fall break structure are better determined directly by the units involved and by university administrators, not by the Faculty Senate, an advisory body ill suited for micro-managing. The Senate would do better to make its general wishes known now and get

the issue off the table.