

**Report to Senate Academic Committee:  
Fall Study Break Final Recommendations  
March 2018**

**Background:**

The Senate Academic Committee formed an Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Academic Schedule of Dates to meet and prepare a report with recommendations in response to the Referendum held in Spring 2015 by the Lakehead University Student Union on the interest of a Fall Study Break. In the spring of 2014, the Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Academic Schedule of Dates discussed the concept of a Fall Study Break when the dates were being set for the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years. At that time, the reactions around a Fall Study Break were mixed, and ultimately, no Fall Study Break recommendations were presented to Senate Academic Committee. This was primarily due to unknown levels of interest amongst our student body on this topic.

In the spring of 2015, the Ad-Hoc Working Group brought forward an initial recommendation for a 2-day break at the end of October on a Thursday and Friday. After discussion at Senate Academic, the Working Group was asked to review those recommendations again and to further explore a full week break.

The Ad-Hoc Working Group met again to further explore the feasibility of a break, its length and the best timing of a break. As part of this process, the Working Group also solicited the feedback of the academic units to assess their interest in a break and desired option.

In the Fall of 2015, the Ad-Hoc Working Group brought forward to Senate Academic a proposal to implement a 4-day Fall Study Break attached to Thanksgiving Monday as a 2-year pilot for the 2016/17 and 2017/18 academic years. As part of this, the Ad-Hoc Working Group would request feedback on the perceived value of the Break from both students and faculty/academic units to inform a final recommendation. The pilot was approved by Senate Academic and then by the Lakehead University Senate in November 2015.

In April 2017, the Group presented a report highlighting the results from the 2016/17 Fall Study Break. This included feedback from both students and faculty. The same mechanisms were then to be used to gather feedback from the 2017/18 Fall Study Break. The intent was the results from the two years of the Fall Study Break would ultimately help to inform Senate Academic regarding the future of a Fall Study Break and final recommendations to the Lakehead University Senate.

**Results from the Fall Study 2017 Break Feedback:**

***Student Feedback***

The Lakehead University Student Union (LUSU) launched an informal survey to solicit student feedback about their perspectives of the Fall Break. The survey was launched on October 26, 2017 and ran for 26 days. A total of 1,012 responses were submitted by students. **Of the 1,012 responses 90.91% (920) indicated the break was beneficial, while 9.09% (92) indicated it was not beneficial.**

Students had the opportunity to answer 'why did you find the break beneficial?'. Of the 900 responses received:

- 76.22% indicated "provided extra time to catch up on assignments"
- 82.67% indicated "mental health break"
- 68.00% indicated "time to study for mid-terms"
- 53.44% indicated "opportunity to go home to see family/friends"

9.33% indicated “other” reasons

Students were also asked ‘what were the drawbacks if any?’. Of the 441 responses, 39.5% answered that there were no drawbacks while 60.5% indicated the following drawbacks:

3.6% indicated “didn’t receive a break” (e.g. Education, Graduate Students)

13.8% indicated “timing of midterms either before or after the break”

8.2% indicated “impacts to the schedule – class start/end, exams, etc.”

14.7% indicated “too early in the term”

10.7% indicated “too short of a break/attached to Thanksgiving”

9.5% indicated miscellaneous reasons

### ***Faculty Feedback***

A Request for Feedback was sent on October 13, 2017 to all Faculty Deans, Directors and Chairs requesting feedback from all academic units on the value of the break. A total of 16 responses across all faculties was received. **15 of the 16 responses generally supported the Fall Study Break, while 1 did not support the Break** (1 indicated that now that it has started it should continue so was considered “supportive” of the break).

15 of 16 generally support the Break; 1 does not support;

- Value:
  - Reduced stress; more focused students
  - Opportunity to catch up on assignments, readings, studying
  - Opportunity to return home – help with homesickness
  - Benefits to 1<sup>st</sup> year new students, especially out of town students
  - Break from teaching
  - Allows faculty to catch up on their administrative work
- Drawbacks:
  - Too early in the term
  - Impact to field schools
  - Impact on summer employment earnings
  - The need to get students motivated and engaged again
  - Not all students get the break (MEd students get it but the BEd students don't)
  - Some students extend the leave to go home for longer periods
- Generally, submissions supportive of the break

### **Comparison of 2016/17 and 2017/18 Student & Feedback Feedback:**

In reviewing the results of the feedback from the two Fall Study Break periods, there was a 61% increase in student participation responses between 2016 and 2017. (Note: The Fall Study Break 2016 survey was sent out to students in March 2017 compared to the 2017 survey sent in November 2017 which was much closer to the Break itself.)

The Student Feedback results were very similar. In 2016, 91.9% indicated the break was beneficial compared to 90.91% in 2017. In both years, the break was most beneficial for mental health reasons, followed by extra time to catch up and time to study for midterms. The drawbacks noted also remained fairly consistent. In 2017, the drawback of the impact to the schedule (start/end dates, exams) was lower. This could be attributed to students knowing and becoming familiar with the Fall Break at the start of their studies.

The Faculty Feedback results were also very similar. With the exception of 1 or 2 academic units indicating concerns with the break and 1 particular unit not in favour of continuing with the Break, all other areas responded in favour of continuing with the break.

### **Proposed Recommendations:**

The Ad-Hoc Group met in January 2018 to discuss the final recommendations around the full adoption of a Fall Study Break for Lakehead University. Upon review of the feedback received as well as the Breaks at other Ontario Universities (see Appendix A), **it is our recommendation that Lakehead University move to permanently adopt a Fall Study Break.**

Students highly value the break and are using the break for a variety of different purposes. The University is becoming more aware of the mental health concerns of its students, and providing a study break in the middle of the term is a valuable tool in helping to address this problem.

**It is also our recommendation that the Fall Study Break remain as an extension of the Thanksgiving Week to allow for a 4-day break.** Not only is this time of year a trend throughout Ontario universities, it is also a natural break and fits well into the academic schedule.

It is also recommended wellness and stress relieving strategies around/during the Fall Study Break be explored on an annual basis to see how we can best support our students leading up to and during the break.

## **Appendix A: Fall Study Breaks by Ontario Universities**

The following summarizes the Fall Study Breaks for each of the Ontario Universities:

Institution Name	Length of Break	Time of Year	First Day of Classes
Algoma University	Full Week	Thanksgiving Week	Tuesday
Brock University	Full Week	Thanksgiving Week	Tuesday
Carleton University	Full Week	Last week of October	Wednesday
University of Guelph	1 day	Day after Thanksgiving	Thursday
Laurentian University	Full Week	Thanksgiving Week	Wednesday
McMaster University	Full Week	Thanksgiving Week	Tuesday
Nipissing	Full Week	Thanksgiving Week	Tuesday
OCAD	Full Week	Thanksgiving Week	Wednesday
University of Ottawa	Full Week	October 22 – 28 2017	Wednesday
Queen's University (No)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Ryerson University	Full Week	Thanksgiving Week	Tuesday
University of Toronto	Full Week	November 6-10 2017	Thursday
Trent University	Full Week	Third Week in October	Thursday
UOIT (Not yet but planned)	2 days	Last week of October	Thursday
University of Waterloo	2 days	Tuesday & Wednesday following Thanksgiving	Thursday
University of Windsor	n/a	n/a	n/a
Western University	Full Week	Thanksgiving Week	Thursday
Wilfred Laurier University	Full Week	Thanksgiving Week	Thursday
University of Windsor	Full Week	Thanksgiving Week	Tuesday
York University	2 days	Last week of October	Thursday