

## Academic Calendar Position Paper

The MSP believes that the proposed change to the academic calendar would be detrimental to the university and its mission. We believe that teaching and research would both suffer, resulting in a decrease in the overall quality of education and reputation of the school. While there have been some interesting arguments put forth for the change, we believe the administration has not been completely candid about its major motivation for making the change: increasing revenue through more continuing education courses that are beyond the reach of the union.

### 1. Teaching and learning would suffer

Faculty use January to improve their teaching. This includes researching new developments in their field, revising syllabi, learning new technology, attending national conferences, and developing new courses.

Many students use the January time productively by doing internships, working in laboratories, or taking intensive language courses (including ones abroad). Many opportunities would be lost to students, such as January “travel courses” which provide important opportunities for learning and service, and semester-abroad programs at overseas schools whose fall semesters often run until late January.

### 2. Research would suffer

Faculty research is one of the foundations of a great university. The month of January has been a key time when many faculty and graduate students can devote intensive time to research, to writing up their findings, and completing grant proposals that are due very early in the spring. Some spend time doing important field work or traveling – both to teach and to learn about what is happening in their fields.

### 3. The university as a whole would suffer

Recruiting could be impacted since some national meetings take place in January. If classes were held in January, more teaching time would be lost to snow days; certain facilities, including dorms, would incur huge heating costs; administrative staff do a tremendous amount of work in January for which there is no time during the semester. UMass would lose some transferring international students whose fall semesters extend through the end of January.

### 4. The Five College Alliance would suffer

The calendar change would make it virtually impossible for students to take courses at the four colleges in the area, and vice versa. One of the great benefits the Five College arrangement is that students and faculty can take and teach courses at all five schools with relative ease. The University is moving forward with the calendar change without gaining support from the other colleges.

The major argument for making the change has been that it would increase opportunities for students. While this is a goal MSP wholeheartedly supports, the argument does not have much validity upon close examination. Faculty have overwhelmingly told us that placing students in summer internships and jobs has not been a problem with the current schedule. They have a lot more experience and knowledge about this than current students. While many students think they would prefer time off in the summer to time off in January, they don't necessarily realize how much of their education is being prepared in January, and how many opportunities they might miss out on.

One major reason the administration has made this proposal is to create the opportunity for a third summer session. Since summer courses are all run through Continuing Education, this could

result in major additional revenue for the campus. But the quality of education would decline. We expect we would see an increase in on-line courses, more courses taught by non-tenure system faculty, and fewer courses taught by people with union representation. This is part of a national trend toward the casualization of academic labor and the emphasis on profit over education.

Both the MSP and the Faculty Senate surveyed faculty about the proposed change. There was a very high response rate, and the faculty overwhelmingly rejected the proposed change. Judging from the many detailed and specific comments people wrote on their surveys, faculty have clearly thought through the implications very carefully and reached a correct conclusion. The survey of students, on the other hand, resulted in very few responses, was not made available to juniors and seniors (who have more experience and perspective than freshmen and sophomores), did not allow space for comments, and had questions phrased in ways that tended to steer students in a certain direction. We believe the administration should trust the wisdom of faculty and withdraw its proposal to change the academic calendar. If they persist, we urge the Faculty Senate to reject the proposal.