

EUS Statement on Fall Reading Break 2019 Consultation and Advocacy

For many years, members of student government have run on campaigns to implement a fall reading break. This year, the AMS VP Academic and University Affairs (VPAUA) has made considerable progress on this longtime goal through their work within the AMS and the Senate Academic Policy Committee to establish options for fall reading break implementation. While the benefits of a fall reading break have been well-explained to students, the EUS believes that the office of the AMS VPAUA did not adequately communicate the possible harmful impacts on students with high course loads. The efforts to implement a fall reading break without unbiased recognition of the likely adverse side effects have left the EUS Board of Directors with concerns.

Throughout the process of this consultation and the duration of time leading up to it, the EUS has not felt heard in our concerns about the implementation of a fall reading break. The AMS did not adequately answer many of the questions raised through the pre-consultation Town Hall, AMS Council, and EUS Council. Our issues with the advocacy and consultation process surrounding fall reading break have mainly been dismissed and it is a disservice to the constituents we were elected to represent.

The primary concern of the EUS is that the consultation surrounding the implementation of fall reading break was deficient. While the EUS Board of Directors brought many issues to the attention of the AMS VPAUA office, the main concerns that continue to be left unacknowledged are as follows:

- Bias presented in the marketing of the survey skewed pro reading break. The email was titled “Want an extra few days off school in 2019/2020?” and we feel that the survey would show strong confirmation bias towards implementing a reading break. This tactic is not transparent and does not adequately draw attention to the drawbacks of implementation.
- Data presented in the survey was limited to generalized numbers about examination conflict potential. For students with high course loads, the likelihood of increased exam hardship and related concerns would be disproportionately above the probabilities quoted in the survey. Further, program-specific data was not available for students to make an informed decision.
- The consultation period is shorter than other open student consultations (e.g. tuition consultation); we are concerned that this consultation is being rushed to meet the goal of a 2019 fall reading break, thereby sacrificing the quality of the survey.

The second concern of the EUS is the conflicting interests of the AMS VPAUA in their roles as AMS VPAUA and a member of the Senate Academic Policy Committee. By attempting to implement a fall reading break through the Senate committee, the AMS VPAUA is unable to run unbiased consultation for the AMS. This issue is further exacerbated by the lack of diverse representation and oversight on the AMS Advocacy Committee – the body currently responsible for approving the AMS Fall Reading Break Stance. This body is composed almost entirely of Arts students and lacks meaningful representation from other faculties with a high proportion of students taking intense course loads.



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While most other undergraduate degree programs are 120 credits, engineering students complete a 150(+) credit degree over the same amount of time. Students with heavy exam schedules have a substantially increased likelihood of exam hardships. The potential for increased exam period stress may exceed the possible benefit to student wellbeing that the proposed break would offer. If a reading break were a consequence-free option, the EUS would be one of the most vocal advocates on implementing the break. However, **implementing a fall reading break is not a consequence-free option.**

Based on the issues outlined in this letter, the EUS proposes the following recommendations:

1. In the stance adopted by the AMS surrounding fall reading break, we request that the AMS acknowledge in writing that:
 - Students, especially those with a high number of exams, may experience a net negative impact on wellbeing as a result of implementing a fall reading break;
 - The consultation performed by the AMS about fall reading break was biased in favour of a pro-reading break response; and
 - The AMS did not adequately address or resolve the concerns raised by the EUS about the implementation of a fall reading break for 2019.
2. AMS Council becomes the body approving the AMS reading break stance rather than AMS Advocacy Committee.

Given our inability to fully understand the effects that it will have on our constituents due to insufficient data and consultation, we disagree that any decisions surrounding the implementation of a fall reading break based on this consultation would be a valid representation of the student's voice.

On behalf of the Engineering Undergraduate Society,



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