



VP Academic and University Affairs response to the EUS Statement

February 5th, 2019

Dear AMS Council,

The VP Academic and University Affairs (VP AUA) Office would like to thank both the EUS and Engineering students for their active involvement in the AMS Fall Reading Break and Extended Holiday Break consultation. We provide this statement in response to the *EUS Statement on Fall Reading Break 2019 Consultation and Advocacy*.

Throughout this process, the VP AUA Office has strived to hear the concerns of every interested stakeholder group and every interested student. We will be the first to admit that, although this consultation was one of the largest in terms of engagement in recent memory, there were flaws in the process. That is why **our office has not recommended a permanent position on a Fall Reading Break** to AMS Council, but rather a position that supports a one or two year pilot.

The VP AUA Office has made all efforts to engage with students and stakeholders during this process. We have made our office available to anyone who had concerns during the consultation process. We would have hoped that our willingness to have a dialogue would have been an opportunity that the EUS and anyone who had concerns would have entirely taken advantage of and many students did. However, no one from the EUS Board of Directors discussed this issue with our office outside of EUS Council, AMS Council, and VP Academic Caucus. We offered to answer any concerns in person or by email after our presentation at the EUS Council meeting on January 21st, and this opportunity was not taken. We also would have been more than happy to respond to the concerns raised in this statement at their recent Council meeting on February 4th. We, however, were not informed. In our absence, the EUS Board of Directors approved a statement that has many legitimate concerns that we will include in our report, but the statement also includes misleading and inaccurate information.

We recognize that members of the EUS Board of Directors felt that their concerns had not been answered in this process. **The EUS statement would have you believe that we failed to acknowledge many of their key concerns, but this is not true.** We have acknowledged many of these concerns, but often the answers may have been unsatisfactory to the EUS. This distinction is important because one implies our office failed to consider all of the concerns that were raised to us during this process, thereby not having an open consultation. While the truth of what happened was we did address all of these concerns but how we addressed them may have been limited by the information we had, by a difference of opinion, or our ability to completely address the matter.

The primary concern the EUS statement highlights are three main issues brought to our office's attention that they feel have been left unacknowledged:

- “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.” – EUS Statement

We acknowledge that people felt that this title might have led to confirmation bias towards implementing a Fall Reading Break. However, this title was not directly created by our office

but it was approved by our office. It would have never been our intention to bias this consultation in any way. We approved a title created by our Communications Department that we understood would lead to the most meaningful engagement on the email blast. If we could do the consultation again, we would not have used this title for the email, but the email text created by our office clearly discussed that there were tradeoffs for any of the options to implement a Fall Reading Break. Additionally, around a third of all respondents did not answer the survey through the link provided in the email.

- “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.” –EUS Statement

We acknowledged that this data was not available and, in an ideal world, the AMS would have this data available to us and the student body. However, the AMS cannot provide data that we do not have and receiving additional data from Enrolment Services takes time. We did address this on multiple occasions. We have also acknowledged that students with a high course load will most likely have a higher likelihood of increased exam hardships, but the same can be said of the current exam schedule too.

- “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.” –EUS Statement

We acknowledged that this consultation period might have been more accelerated than some University consultations. However, University consultation periods are often meant to engage with more than one stakeholder body (Students, Faculty, Staff, and Neighbourhood Residents to name a few) and the University is often the body making a permanent decision that will affect those stakeholders. In this case, the AMS is endorsing an advocacy position on a pilot project and our only duty is to students in considering the merits of this position. Also, whenever we consult on issues there are often timelines outside of our control, in this case there are University scheduling timelines to consider. The AMS also takes stances on advocacy issues often without the combination of a pre-consultation town hall, survey, and a multitude of student stakeholder meetings. **In this process, we have engaged more than 10% of the student body, something that has not been done on most of the issues we advocate on.** If we set the threshold higher than this, we worry the AMS will have nothing to advocate on.

We understand that our answers and acknowledgment of the EUS’s concerns may not be the answers they want. However, it is misleading to suggest that we are dismissing or failing to acknowledge the concerns that have been brought to us throughout this consultation. Our office always has to the best of our ability acknowledged and answered every concern that has been brought to us.

The second concern raised by the EUS is the conflicting interests of the VP AUA as a member of the Senate Academic Policy Committee and as VP AUA. These concerns have never been raised with our office until now. The EUS also implies that as a Senator, the VP AUA has advocated for a Fall Reading Break within Senate before consulting students. This assertion is not true and is also not corroborated by the publicized minutes of the Senate Academic Policy Committee.¹ **The VP AUA as a Senator and AMS Executive has advocated on gathering the necessary information to consult students on the**

¹ <https://senate.ubc.ca/vancouver/committees/academic-policy>

possibility of a Fall Reading Break and has never supported any proposal for a Fall Reading Break without consultation on the options with students first.

The EUS goes on to suggest these conflicts are made worse by the AMS Advocacy Committee's lack of faculty diversity and proper oversight. **The EUS then suggests the AMS Advocacy Committee will be the body responsible for approving the AMS Fall Reading Break stance. This is false and was false at the time this statement was published.** There is a motion from the VP AUA on the AMS Council agenda to have all of AMS Council approve the AMS Fall Reading Break stance. It is disappointing to see the EUS try and undervalue the opinion of the AMS Advocacy Committee just because the body has a disproportionate amount of Arts Students. To suggest that AMS Councilors from Arts or any other faculty are incapable of providing advocacy or any other positions that take into account concerns from students outside their faculty is unfounded.

The EUS mentions within their statement that they would be more than happy to approve the implementation of a Fall Reading Break if there were no consequences. **The inherent nature of student advocacy and meaningful change is that there will always be consequences.** Throughout this process we have tried to inform both students and stakeholder groups of those consequences.

Finally, the EUS provides recommendations for the AMS to consider when it takes its stance on a Fall Reading Break. **We assure both AMS Council and the EUS that in the final report we will include the differing impact on students with a higher course load, flaws in the consultation process and how this can be improved in the future, and we will try to include any other concerns from AMS Council.** The EUS also recommends that AMS Council approves the AMS Fall Reading Break stance, however, this recommendation was already completed prior to the EUS statement.

We hope that both AMS Council and the EUS recognize that our office has put incredible work and effort into this consultation but that there are limits. **We understand that this consultation was not perfect but it was also one of the first AMS consultations of its kind.** We hope to continually improve on this process and we will offer recommendations on improvements for the future. We hope AMS Council endorses the pilot project put forward for a Fall Reading Break. We feel that a pilot will offer both the break the majority of students are looking for and the ability to review the effects and impact of a permanent Fall Reading Break.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Max Holmes', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Max Holmes

Vice President Academic & University Affairs
AMS Student Society of UBC Vancouver
vpacademic@ams.ubc.ca