

## 2020-21 UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

### University Senate Minutes: No. 2 Faculty Senate Minutes: No. 2

#### Special Meeting

Monday, October 5, 2020  
3:00 - 4:30 p.m.

The second meeting of the University Senate and the Faculty Senate for 2020-21 was convened at 3:00 p.m. on October 5, 2020, online via Zoom, and was also live-streamed and recorded on [YouTube](#). This special meeting was called in order to vote on proposed changes to the Twin Cities/Rochester and Morris academic calendars for spring 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of this meeting, there were 268 voting members of the University Senate, including the 162 voting members of the Faculty Senate. Present were 120 faculty/academic professionals, 19 P&A members, 21 civil service members, and 34 student members. President Joan Gabel and University Senate Vice Chair Carol Chomsky presided.

President Joan Gabel called the meeting to order and made some announcements. She then asked Chomsky to chair the rest of the meeting.

#### **1. Motion to Approve Special Rule (*Action by the University Senate*)**

*Professor Phil Buhlmann, chair, Senate and Faculty Consultative Committees*

The Senate Consultative Committee proposes the following special rule during this meeting:

- Speakers are limited to two minutes each time they are recognized.

A  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority of those present and voting is required to approve the special rule.

The clerk will interject when speakers have thirty seconds left and when time is up.

**Motion:** To approve the special rule.

Motion carried.

#### **2. Discussion of and Action on Changes to the Twin Cities/Rochester 2021 Spring Break Schedule for the Undergraduate and Graduate Colleges (*Discussion by the University Senate; Action by the Faculty Senate*)**

*Professor Thomas Chase, chair, Senate Committee on Educational Policy*

#### **Background information:**

Due to concerns about spring break travel leading to increased COVID19 exposure on campus, many colleges and universities canceled or changed their spring breaks for 2021. Most of the

University of Minnesota system campuses proposed modifications suited to their individual situations.

Pursuant to Administrative Policy: [Academic Calendars](#), the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP) and the Faculty Senate have the responsibility to review and approve all Twin Cities/Rochester and Morris academic calendars, as well as revisions and exceptions thereto. The Twin Cities/Rochester and Morris calendars were presented for Faculty Senate approval.

The Crookston and Duluth calendars are not under the control of the Faculty Senate, as the faculty on those campuses are unionized. The amended Crookston calendar was provided for reference. Duluth was still consulting on proposed changes to its calendar.

The following documents were provided in the [Google Drive](#):

- Proposed Twin Cities/Rochester amended calendar
- Proposed Morris amended calendar
- Crookston amended calendar (for reference)
- Information report to the Board of Regents
- Spreadsheet of area K-12 schools spring breaks

Senators who were not able to attend the Provost's Forum on October 2, 2020, were encouraged to view the video of the [opening remarks](#) from that forum.

### **Discussion:**

Provost Rachel Croson opened up the discussion, noting that, as with Thanksgiving this fall, there are concerns about students traveling away from campus over spring break and then returning to campus. Most of the Big 10 universities have cancelled their spring break, and most have chosen to start the semester later, generating a longer winter break, with a few choosing to add study days just before finals, or including a few "scattered" breaks throughout the semester. During consultation with faculty, staff, and students, including the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP) and the Faculty Consultative Committee (FCC), the importance of having a contiguous week of spring break emerged for various reasons, such as mental health, internships, field work, and perhaps study abroad, if the public health situation allows.

Croson continued, stating that these concerns impact each system campus in different ways, so the proposed calendars are not the same for all campuses, with the exception that the Twin Cities and Rochester campuses must remain linked because of financial aid. She noted that professional schools and specific programs that are already decoupled from the undergraduate and graduate calendars would continue to set their own calendars, consistent with current University policy.

The proposed resolution retains a contiguous spring break moved into April, concluded Croson. This would allow for more time to watch how the public health situation develops and to consider what modes of instruction would be best for the weeks of instruction after spring break. Croson clarified that faculty would retain autonomy over their own class modalities, so any instructor who wishes can plan their course to be blended or in-person before the spring break and distanced after.

Next, Professor Thomas Chase, SCEP chair, made the following points:

- The process for adopting University policies is set up to ensure that all stakeholders affected by a policy are properly consulted. Provost Croson did an exemplary job of enlisting a broad range of students, faculty, staff, and administrators to identify the best among all reasonable options for a calendar for spring 2021 to minimize damage attributable to COVID-19. Therefore, SCEP was comfortable recommending this exception.
- SCEP discussed many possibilities for the spring calendar, including starting late, ending early, adding additional study days, replacing spring break with individual break days distributed throughout the semester, moving spring break, and making no change to the original calendar. The committee narrowed down this wide range of choices by way of multiple polls.
- SCEP's final recommendations vary by campus. For Twin Cities/Rochester, SCEP recommends a contiguous five-day spring break in April. The start and end dates for the semester, as well as the final exam week, would remain as originally scheduled.
- The recommendation for a five-day contiguous break for the Twin Cities was primarily student-driven. Student members of SCEP indicated an overwhelming demand from both undergraduate and graduate students to preserve a break of five contiguous days. All were willing to be flexible on the placement of that break to maximize safety in the face of COVID-19.
- SCEP recommends a different calendar for Morris, which is favored by the faculty, staff, and students at the Morris campus. The recommendation is to replace the contiguous spring break with two individual break days, a floating holiday, and an undergraduate seminar day distributed throughout the semester, augmented by a capstone project day and an extra study day immediately prior to final exam week. As noted, the recommendation is the result of consultation at Morris, reflecting the circumstances of the Morris campus.
- Faculty governance does not control the calendars of the unionized Duluth and Crookston campuses, so the agenda item contains information about those calendars, but with no action proposed by the senate.

Next, Buhlmann explained that, in accordance with senate bylaws, the academic calendar is a faculty issue, which is why only faculty would be voting. However, he acknowledged that, especially in an academic year deeply affected by COVID, the academic calendar is not just an educational topic, but affects employees and students of the University in unprecedented ways.

Buhlmann then summarized feedback from consultation that involved student leaders and civil service and P&A leadership, as well as the leadership of the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and many other faculty members:

- Student leaders overwhelmingly requested that there be some form of a contiguous spring break.
- Civil service employees acknowledged that the academic calendar is an issue in the hands of faculty, but they expressed worries that a return of students back to campus after spring break would cause a surge in COVID cases and put the safety of everyone at risk.

They welcomed the option of fully online instruction after spring break if the situation warranted it. There were many similar comments from graduate students.

- Academic professional and administrative employees shared the concern of a COVID surge after spring break and welcomed the idea of an April spring break, with the option of going fully online with instruction after the spring break if the situation warranted it. P&A representatives also emphasized that they wanted students to have sufficient time after spring break to prepare for finals.
- Many faculty members agreed that a break somewhere between the start and end of the semester is important. Many faculty also expressed support for a spring break that coincides with local K-12 schools. That would make life a lot easier for many parents, be they faculty, students, or staff. Many faculty expressed major concerns about the disruption and added stress for faculty and teaching assistants that spreading out individual holidays over several weeks would represent. For example, five Friday holidays would severely disrupt a course only taught on Fridays. Similarly, the idea of giving one Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday off through the semester was considered a nightmare for many who teach large courses, and in particularly large laboratory courses. The Twin Cities deans also expressed unanimously the desire to retain a spring break.
- Kate Elwell, chair of the Prevention, Wellness & Training committee of the Provost's Council on Student Mental Health, gathered input from the Mental Health Advocates and from mental health professionals. This group emphasized the benefits of aligning spring break with local schools and highlighted the benefits of a shorter period between the start of the spring semester and spring break, thus favoring the dates of April 5-9 over April 12-16 for spring break. It also suggested that instructors be encouraged to build in—where possible—additional breaks during the long period from the start of the semester to an April spring break.

Buhlmann then summarized advantages and disadvantages of April 5-9 versus April 12-16:

- The coincidence of an April 5 University spring break with the Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools' spring break would give many student and faculty parents a much appreciated break. However, parents with children in other school districts may not benefit from this advantage.
- Many students, faculty, and mental health professionals believe that an April 5 spring break would also give students and faculty more time between spring break and final exams, making that time less stressful.
- On the other hand, a spring break starting April 12 would allow for one more week of in-person instruction than a spring break starting April 5. Should the University have to make the difficult decision to go to online instruction only after spring break, an April 5 spring break would mean a loss of one full week of on-campus instruction as compared to an April 12 spring break. Especially for some of our laboratory and studio courses, this is not an insignificant difference. The University of Minnesota Rochester (UMR) campus expressed a preference for April 12 for that reason.

Next, Jeffrey Ratliff-Crain, vice chancellor, Academic Affairs and Innovation, University of Minnesota Rochester (UMR), made the following remarks:

- Although a distinct and separate campus of the University, UMR shares important elements with the Twin Cities campus, including Higher Learning Commission accreditation and federal and state financial aid processing. Those two elements mean that UMR's academic calendar, including spring break, is inextricably tied to the Twin Cities calendar. He added that UMR has senators on the University Senate.
- He thanked SCEP, the FCC, and the provost's office for seeking UMR input and taking its unique status into account as discussions progressed. He noted that he felt that UMR's perspectives were heard.
- UMR's consultation process very much paralleled what was occurring on other campuses: Seeking input from faculty, students (through the Rochester Student Association leaders), and staff. Overwhelmingly, faculty and students rejected the idea of break days scattered across the semester, in particular noting disruptions to lab courses. There was also clear consensus for a spring break, as opposed to other options.
- For UMR constituents, there was not a clear direction for when the break might take place. That said, all other things being equal, the later the break, the fewer concerns and instructional impact if there is a need to pivot to online following the break. The Rochester area K-12 schools have varying break schedules, starting as early as March 19, making alignment with the campus spring break a non-issue for faculty and staff with children when considering which week.

Chomsky then opened up the floor for discussion.

Sarani Rangarajan, student senator from the Law School, said that law students preferred not moving spring break, but if it must move, they preferred April 5. As the end of the semester approaches, she explained, students are more likely to spend the break studying rather than taking a real break, which reduces the mental health benefits.

Scott Petty, College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS) student senator, asked for clarification on whether the Law School could make its own determination about the calendar. Chomsky affirmed that this was the case.

Jerry Cohen, faculty senator from the CFANS, said that for plant-related field work, it is most beneficial to hold spring break as early as possible.

Hearing no further discussion, Chomsky initiated a vote on the following motion:

**Motion:** To approve the request to move the 2021 spring break on the Twin Cities/Rochester campuses for the undergraduate and graduate colleges to the week of April 5, 2021. *(This vote was for the Faculty Senate only.)*

With 97 in favor, 5 against, and 6 abstentions, the motion carried.

### **3. Discussion of and Action on Changes to the Morris 2021 Spring Break Schedule** *(Discussion by the University Senate; Action by the Faculty Senate)*

*Professor Thomas Chase, chair, Senate Committee on Educational Policy*

Janet Eriksen, vice chancellor, Academic Affairs, University of Minnesota Morris, described the consultation process on the Morris campus leading to the recommendation to replace the contiguous spring break with two individual break days, a floating holiday, and an undergraduate seminar day distributed throughout the semester, augmented by a capstone project day and an extra study day immediately prior to final exam week.

Hearing no discussion, Chomsky initiated a vote on the following motion:

**Motion:** To approve the [proposed revised Morris calendar](#). (*This vote was for the Faculty Senate only.*)

With 91 in favor, 1 against, and 13 abstentions, the motion carried.

#### **4. Adjournment**

Chomsky adjourned the meeting at 3:50 p.m.

Amber Bathke  
University Senate Office