

MINUTES

Academic Support Committee February 6th, 2026 9:00AM Zoom

Present – S. Clements (presiding), E. Austin, M. Davidson, H. Drewry, F. Ferretti, C. Haines, M. Kimbrell, J. Lucas, M. Manteghu, S. Mutsa Jozi, S. Rinehart, K. Robertson, N. Schwab, D. Sedgwick, R. Sparks, J. Weppner, E. Wikle

Absent with Notice:, I. Lazar, S. Marine, M. Wypyski

Absent: A. Parikh

Guests: E. Moon, R. Pitcher, Z. Tucker

Sherwood Clements called the meeting to order at 9:02. A quorum was present.

1. Adoption of Agenda

A motion was made and seconded to adopt the agenda. Motion carried.

2. New Business

Background on Request for a Two-Day Fall Break – Meghan Davidson

M. Davidson introduced herself as a new committee member who has been at the institution since July and is new to the committee process. F. Keen shared a proposal with M. Davidson for presentation to the committee. The proposal emphasized the positive impact of a longer Fall Break on student mental health and burnout, noting benefits to cognitive performance and restoration. The document outlined several options for making up the additional instructional day, including potential use of Reading Day, Labor Day, or Thanksgiving Break.

Overview of Current Calendar Criteria – Rick Sparks

R. Sparks provided historical context regarding the academic calendar and the origin of Fall Break. Fall Break was first implemented in 2005. At that time, a two-day break was desired, but a one-day break was adopted as a compromise. Consideration was also given to avoiding home football games so that students would have a true break.

R. Sparks reviewed calendar policy criteria, including required numbers of class days (71 in fall and 72 in spring). Summer terms are defined separately and structured differently. Fall commencement must occur after final examinations, and coordination with Radford University is also considered. He explained the federal definition of a credit hour and its relationship to contact hours, noting that semesters must be 15 weeks to meet federal financial aid requirements. While minor reductions could be considered, doing so would reduce flexibility for snow days and other disruptions.

Spring commencement previously had a stronger influence on calendar policy; however, that influence has diminished since diplomas are no longer distributed at commencement. Calendar criteria could be adjusted through policy changes. Memorial Day and July 4th primarily affect

summer terms and are not impactful to the Fall Break discussion.

Committee Discussion – Identification of Four Fall Break Options, Challenges, Data, and Information to Inform a Decision About a Two-Day Fall Break – S. Clements

H. Drewry raised a question regarding the option of moving Reading Day, asking whether this would result in Saturday exams similar to the Spring semester. She also expressed concern that a virtual instructional day during Thanksgiving Break would likely not be effective or honored by students.

R. Sparks responded that several configurations could be possible, including Reading Day on Friday followed by exams on Saturday through Wednesday, or Reading Day on Friday followed by exams Monday through Thursday.

S. Rinehart stated that she opposed removing Labor Day, viewing it as a significant improvement for the institution. She also expressed concern that a virtual day during Thanksgiving Break could create additional barriers for students, negatively affect mental health, and be incompatible with many pedagogical approaches. She noted that Option 2—moving Reading Day by one day—appeared to be the strongest option so far. She added that concentrating Tuesday/Thursday classes during the final week could be beneficial.

M. Kimbrell expressed opposition to the remote instruction option, noting that faculty are not being encouraged to use remote teaching and that including such an option would create mixed messaging.

D. Sedgewick stated that, assuming broad support for a two-day Fall Break, she could not envision effective student participation on a virtual day. She agreed that adjusting Reading Day appeared to be the most feasible option.

S. Clements also noted that shifting the academic calendar could significantly affect Housing, particularly if the semester were to begin on a Wednesday, and emphasized the need to involve Housing early in the process.

S. Rinehart noted that in the Spring semester such a shift would place the start of classes ahead of a three-day weekend, which could offer advantages but might also complicate the discussion.

M. Kimbrell raised concerns about Weeks of Welcome and other events that may require weekend scheduling, potentially increasing overtime costs.

R. Sparks noted that extending the Fall semester alone could require changes to faculty contracts, reduce time between Fall and Winter terms, and limit separation between Fall and Summer terms.

J. Lucas confirmed that academic terms cannot overlap due to federal financial aid requirements. From Academic Advising, N. Schwab noted that the transition from Fall to Spring is already very compressed, with prerequisites, major changes, and other processes occurring in a tight timeframe. Extending the Fall term by five days would be challenging.

The committee generally agreed that Option 2, adding Thursday to Fall break and moving reading day back one day, represented the most viable path forward. S. Clements expressed concern regarding whether sufficient time would remain to complete final examinations before commencement.

R. Sparks suggested exploring adjustments to calendar criteria related to grade submission deadlines in both Fall and Spring. This would allow additional flexibility while maintaining 71 instructional days in the Fall. He reiterated that removing Labor Day would introduce additional challenges. Also, he suggested further exploration of impacts on laboratory courses. If momentum builds toward a proposal, feedback would be needed from affected units. He suggested that associate deans could present proposals to impacted departments for review.

A question was raised regarding whether teaching assistants could provide additional support during this period; however, it was noted that existing contracts would not change.

The committee agreed to begin developing a proposal using Option 2 as the starting point, specifically trading instructional days within the existing Thursday framework.

3. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 9:59am.