

Academic Calendar Survey Academic Calendar Task Force Spring 2013

Background

The Academic Calendar Task Force was formed of equal representation of faculty, staff, and students. Student representatives on the task force were identified through their membership in the Student Government Association (SGA). The Academic Calendar Task Force was charged with finding a course of action concerning the possibility of additional time off during the week of Thanksgiving. The task force initiated this survey with Student Life Studies to gather feedback from faculty, staff, and students related to this topic and campus community members' travel habits during Thanksgiving. This is the first time Student Life Studies has worked with the Academic Calendar Task Force on a survey.

Method and Sample

The 46-question survey was developed using Qualtrics[®], a software program that creates web-based surveys and databases. Student Life Studies evaluated the results using SPSS[®], a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel[®]. The survey consisted of 30 quantitative questions, four qualitative questions, and 12 demographic questions. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions.

The web-based survey was distributed via campus email addresses on April 17, 2013. Up to three reminders were sent to non-respondents to increase the response rate. The survey closed on May 3, 2013. Of the 2,000 randomly selected students who were sent the survey link, 417 completed the survey, providing a 21% response rate. Additionally, 285 faculty and 715 staff members were randomly selected and sent the survey. There were 111 faculty members who completed the survey for a response rate of 39%; while 258 staff members completed the survey yielding a 36% response rate. The combined response rate for all respondents who completed the survey was 26%.

Results

Results will be reported as means, standard deviations (sd), and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Qualitative themes are reported here; the entire list can be found in a separate document. This report is broken into five sections: Demographics, Calendar Changes, Travel Habits, Programs, and Academics

Demographics

The breakdown of respondents included 53% students, 33% staff members, and 14% faculty members. Demographic information, which can be found on Table 1 on the following page, was either pulled from the University's information system or asked directly on the survey. One note is that the demographics pulled from the University's system combines all three affiliations and includes 882 responses. The demographics asked directly on the survey are shown by the affiliation type and includes 786 responses. Respondents who selected the "Not Listed" option for ethnicity were provided the opportunity to write in a response and those included: Asian, American, Arab, Italian, White, Hispanic, and Asian Indian. Faculty and staff who indicated they did not live in Brazos County were asked how far away they live. Almost one-third (31%) of staff said they live more than 51 miles away, 48% said 26-50 miles away, and 21% said 1-25 miles away. A majority (86%) of faculty that lives outside of Brazos County indicated they live more than 51 miles away and 14% live 26-50 miles away. None of the faculty selected the 1-25 miles away option.

Demographic Category	Combined	Staff	Faculty	Student
Gender	n=882			
Female	61%			
Male	39%			
Classification	n=882			
Freshman (U1)	6%			
Sophomore (U2)	10%			
Junior (U3)	10%			
Senior (U4)	18%			
Graduate and Veterinary Students	10%			
Unknown/Not a Student	45%			
College	n=882			
Agriculture and Life Sciences	7%			
Architecture	2%			
Dwight Look College of Engineering	11%			
Education and Human Development	8%			
General Studies	3%			
George Bush School of Government	<1%			
Geosciences	2%			
Liberal Arts	9%			
Mays Business School	7%			
Science	3%			
Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Science	3%			
Unknown/Not College Affiliation	45%			
Ethnicity		n=258	n=111	n=417
African American/Black		5%	2%	3%
Asian American/Asian/Pacific Islander		1%	2%	5%
Caucasian/White		74%	72%	74%
Hispanic/Latino		8%	6%	16%
Multiracial		<1%	1%	1%
Native American/American Indian		1%	--	1%
Not Listed		<1%	--	1%
Prefer Not to Answer		--	14%	4%
Length of Employment at A&M		n=255	n=109	
Less than a year		6%	8%	
1 – 5 years		28%	18%	
6 – 10 years		22%	14%	
More than 10 years		46%	60%	
Live in Brazos County		n=256	n=110	
Yes		87%	94%	
No		12%	6%	
Prefer Not to Answer		2%	--	
Length of Time at A&M				n=410
First Year				29%
2 Years				26%
3 Years				24%
4 Years				13%
5 Years				4%
More than 5 Years				4%
Residency				n=410
On-Campus				22%
Off-Campus				78%
First Generation Student				n=410
Yes				40%
No				57%
Prefer Not to Answer				3%

Table 1: Respondents' Demographics

Faculty and staff were also asked about the job titles of their current position. For staff members, almost half (45%) were professional staff, 24% were administrative/management, 16% were associate staff, 6% indicated technology, 3% said they were skilled crafts, and 1% said service and maintenance. An additional 6% selected the “other” option and were given the opportunity to write in a response. A wide range of titles were provided including library staff, research assistant, student worker, analyst, and technician. Almost half (45%) of the faculty indicated their job title was professor, 17% said assistant professor, 10% said lecturer, and 7% said senior lecturer. Assistant dean and dean options were not selected. An additional 20% selected the “other” option and wrote in responses including associate professor, clinical professor, executive professor, instructional professor, and researcher.

Calendar Changes

All respondents were asked if they were in favor of changing the academic calendar to allow for more time off during Thanksgiving week. Three-fourths (76%) said yes, 16% said no, and 8% had no opinion. Table 2 shows the breakdown by affiliation and that students were more in favor of allowing more time off at Thanksgiving.

	Staff (n=258)	Faculty (n=111)	Students (n=417)	Overall (n=786)
Yes	70%	70%	81%	76%
No	16%	23%	14%	16%
No Opinion	14%	6%	5%	8%

Table 2: Preferences of Changing the Academic Calendar

Those who were in favor of changing the academic calendar were given a follow up question asking them to rank six calendar options, which were explained. Table 3, in ascending order by the overall mean on the following page, demonstrates the three options allowing only Wednesday off were most preferred overall and by each affiliation. Please note: the lower the means shows a higher preference.

- Option 1: Wednesday before Thanksgiving is made into a holiday
 Variables: First day of school will start a day earlier on a Friday in the fall semester
 Graduation and dead week remain the same
- Option 2: Wednesday before Thanksgiving is made into a holiday
 Variables: One of the reading days is taken away to allow another redefined day
 Graduation and the start of the semester will remain the same
- Option 3: Wednesday before Thanksgiving is made into a holiday
 Variables: Graduation is moved to Saturday/Sunday
 Finals are all moved to Monday – Thursday on exam week
 Dead week will have three redefined days and two reading days
- Option 4: Full week of Thanksgiving is a holiday comparable to spring break
 Variables: Dead week becomes full class week
 Saturday becomes exam day and further exams on Monday-Wednesday
 Graduation stays the same
- Options 5: Full week of Thanksgiving is a holiday comparable to spring break
 Variables: Dead week becomes a full class week
 Finals are Monday – Thursday
 Graduation is on Saturday/Sunday
- Option 6: Full week of thanksgiving is a holiday comparable to spring break
 Variables: Dead week becomes a full class week
 Saturday becomes an exam day and further exams again on Tuesday – Thursday

Graduate is on Saturday/Sunday

	Staff Mean (sd) (n=136)	Faculty Mean (sd) (n=65)	Students Mean (sd) (n=302)	Overall Mean (sd) (n=503)
Option 2	2.66 (1.43)	2.52 (1.36)	2.58 (1.26)	2.59 (1.32)
Option 1	2.79 (1.77)	3.26 (1.84)	2.56 (1.54)	2.71 (1.66)
Option 3	2.99 (1.35)	2.98 (1.53)	2.53 (1.35)	2.71 (1.39)
Option 5	3.58 (1.55)	3.37 (1.65)	3.69 (1.47)	3.62 (1.52)
Option 4	3.87 (1.30)	3.81 (1.36)	4.46 (1.19)	4.22 (1.28)
Options 6	5.10 (1.51)	5.05 (1.34)	5.19 (1.30)	5.15 (1.36)

Table 3: Preferences of Individual Options

Faculty and staff were asked if they would have difficulty working on Saturday if finals would be held over the weekend and the university was opened. For staff, 42% said yes, 39% said no, and 19% were unsure compared with 38% of faculty who said yes, 54% said no, and 8% were unsure. Those who said they would have difficulty working a Saturday were asked to explain their response. Both faculty and staff reported being unable to find childcare over the weekend, having family and personal obligations, taking care of errands and other responsibilities, and spending time with family. Some staff expressed frustration at the possibility of working a Saturday saying that the workweek is Monday through Friday and does not include Saturday, that they already work over 40 hours most weeks, and that they already work many weekends. A few faculty indicated that time away from class and school is essential to have time to process information, that they already work more than 40 hours a week, and that it would be costly to keep the university open on a Saturday.

Travel Habits

Faculty, staff, and students were all asked about their typical travel habits during the week of Thanksgiving. All respondents were asked if they typically traveled during this week. For staff, almost two-thirds (63%) indicated they did travel, 34% said no, and 2% preferred not to answer. For faculty, almost half (45%) said they traveled, 50% said no, and 5% preferred not to answer. Almost all (91%) of the students reported they traveled, 8% said they did not, and 1% preferred not to answer.

Those who indicated they typically traveled during Thanksgiving week, were asked how many miles they typically travel. Table 4 illustrates that faculty are most likely to travel further distances; however one-third or more of all three affiliations travel more than 200 miles.

	Staff (n=162)	Faculty (n=48)	Students (n=371)
1 – 100 miles away	19%	6%	24%
101 – 200 miles away	38%	27%	43%
201 – 300 miles away	17%	15%	16%
301 – 400 miles away	8%	6%	5%
401 or more miles	17%	46%	12%

Table 4: Distance Traveled over Thanksgiving Week

Using a check all the apply option, all respondents were also asked about the mode of transportation they typically used during Thanksgiving week. Over half (60%) of staff utilized car and 7% said airplane. For faculty, 29% selected car and 19% said airplane. No faculty or staff selected the bus option. Almost all (84%) of the students said they used cars, 8% said airplane, and 1% said bus.

Programs

All respondents were asked if they usually attended Off Campus Bonfire, which is typically scheduled the weekend before Thanksgiving. Students were most likely to attend this event: 14% said yes, 83% said no, and 3% preferred not to answer. For staff, 5% said they typically attended the event, 94% said no, and 1% preferred not to answer. Faculty were the least likely to attend with 1% saying yes and 99% saying no.

Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors were asked if they intended to go to Elephant Walk, which is also held the week of Thanksgiving. Overall, 41% said yes, 29% said no, and 30% were unsure. Table 5 shows the breakdown by classification and that juniors and sophomores were to attend.

	Yes	No	Unsure	n
U1	34%	32%	34%	44
U2	42%	27%	31%	78
U3	44%	29%	27%	77

Table 5: Elephant Walk Attendance by Classification

Academics

Faculty members were asked how many classes they usually teach per fall/spring semester. Almost half (47%) taught two classes, 28% taught one class, 14% taught three classes, and 12% taught more than three classes.

When asked if attendance was taken in their classes, 40% of faculty said yes, 35% said no, and 25% reported that it depended on the class. Faculty were also asked if they used attendance as part of a grade for classes they taught. Over one-third (34%) indicated they did for all classes, 24% said they did for some classes, and 33% said they did not for any classes. An additional 9% preferred not to answer. Faculty who took attendance in some classes, but not all, were asked a follow up question to explain why they took attendance in only some classes. The size of the class and the class type were the most common responses as to why faculty took attendance in some classes.

Faculty were asked if they had taught classes during the fall semester at Texas A&M and most (90%) said yes. Those who have taught in the fall semester were asked if they typically have assignments due or schedule exams for the week of Thanksgiving. Over one-third (39%) said yes, 56% said no, and 5% preferred not to answer. Faculty who have assignments due or scheduled exams were asked additional follow up questions. First, they were asked if class attendance decreased during this week, even with assignments due or an exam scheduled. Almost two-thirds (62%) said yes, 33% said no, and 5% preferred not to answer. Next, they were asked why they thought attendance decreased during this week and almost all who commented said it was due to traveling for the holiday. One indicated that students take the break because it is the first break of the semester; another expressed that students make the “choice” to not attend class; and one indicated that attendance is usually only down on Wednesday, not the entire week.

Students were asked if they had classes canceled during the week of Thanksgiving. Over two-thirds (68%) said yes, 25% said no, and 7% could not remember. Those who had classes canceled were asked a follow up question about if the cancellation was on the course syllabus. Over one-fourth (28%) said yes, 58% said no, and 13% could not remember. Students who said the cancellation was on the course syllabus were asked approximately how many classes they have had with the cancellation indicated on the syllabus. Over three-fourths (77%) said one or two classes, 19% reported three or four classes, 3% said five or six classes, and 1% said seven or eight classes. Nobody selected the option of more than eight classes.

When asked if they had taken an exam or turned in a project during the Thanksgiving week, 71% of the students said yes, 15% said no, and 15% could not remember. Students who had taken an exam or had a project due during the week of Thanksgiving were asked a follow up question if they ever had more than one exam or project due during this week. Students were split when responding to this question with 49% indicating they have and 51% reporting they had not.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Most respondents were in favor of having a change to the calendar for the week of Thanksgiving. This was agreed on by all three affiliations: faculty, staff, and students. Further, each affiliation preferred the options that allowed for the Wednesday of Thanksgiving week to be a holiday and not the entire week. The two options that were least preferred included having the entire week off and having exams on Saturday. Additionally, faculty and staff expressed difficulties, as well as frustrations, over the idea of the university being open on the weekend. The Academic Calendar Task Force is encouraged to look further into the idea of the university being open on Saturday if one of these options is pursued.

Many respondents indicated they did travel during the Thanksgiving holiday. Students were the mostly likely to travel, while faculty were the least likely. Students who traveled were most likely to stay closer; while faculty who traveled were more likely to travel farther distances. Still, one-third of all affiliations traveled over 200 miles.

Bonfire attendance from all affiliations was low and may not be a factor in changing the calendar for Thanksgiving week. However, more students plan to attend Elephant Walk. This may be a factor to consider in looking at the options. The task force is also encouraged to talk with Class Council about the calendar recommendations to allow them time to adjust Elephant Walk if needed.

The Academic Calendar Task Force is encouraged to read all the qualitative comments to understand the full range of responses. Specific comments made by individual respondents may provide useful information. Additionally, the task force may want to share these survey results with appropriate campus entities as well as share the survey results and any plans to use these results with the campus community.

Prepared for: Brody Smith, Academic Calendar Task Force and Student Government Association
Prepared by: Kelly Cox, Student Life Studies
Prepared on: May 22, 2013
Analysis prepared by: Jennifer Reyes and Gulsum Korkmaz, Student Life Studies
Survey designed by: Funmi Amubieya, Student Life Studies

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