







Yale College Council
Term Paper Deadline Proposal

January 2014

Introduction & Survey Demographics

In fall of 2012 and spring of 2013, students reported to YCC that they were having difficulty completing term papers. Although reading and finals periods were shortened, there was no change made to the term paper deadline, which is officially the last day of reading period. As a result, students are provided fewer days to complete term papers. Additionally, students who have few exams and many papers often must complete all final papers and exams with days to spare; the current system imposes an arbitrary deadline that does not equitably allocate study days to students in different disciplines. Moreover, some professors disregard the reading period paper deadline altogether, which is unfair to the students of professors who do enforce deadlines. YCC administered a survey on various academic issues to 1,602 freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, between November 26 and December 8,¹ and has compiled its findings and recommendations on the subject of term papers into this report. Respondents to the survey were evenly distributed by year and field of study.

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|--------|---|----------|------|
| 1 | 2014 |  | 324 | 20% |
| 2 | 2015 |  | 410 | 26% |
| 3 | 2016 |  | 410 | 26% |
| 4 | 2017 |  | 458 | 29% |
| | Total | | 1,602 | 100% |

¹ Survey questions developed with input from the Office of Institutional Research.

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-----------------|--|----------|-----|
| 1 | Humanities | | 567 | 37% |
| 2 | STEM | | 649 | 43% |
| 3 | Social Sciences | | 656 | 43% |

Current Situation

The 2012-2013 academic calendar was affected by the first calendar changes in thirty years. These changes included shortening reading period and exam period by 2 days each. No change was made to the term paper deadline, which is officially the last day of reading period. The term paper deadline was originally put in place to ease student stress by separating paper deadlines and final exams. Many students now have several term papers due at the same time but not as much time as they had in previous semesters to work on these papers. The term paper deadline affects almost all students during their time at Yale:

- Of the 304 seniors who took the recent YCC academics survey, 98% previously turned at least one paper in during reading or exam period.

Harm to Students

Some students write papers during reading week, take their final exam(s) the day or two after finishing their papers, and then are done for the semester with days to spare. If the term paper deadline were, for example, moved to the end of exam period, these students could study for exams during reading period and exam period and complete papers after taking their exams.

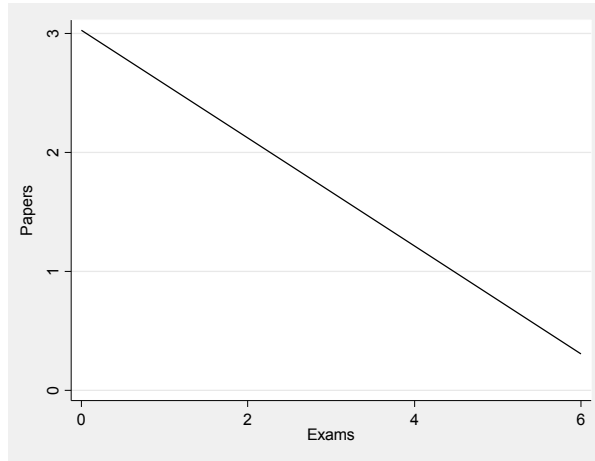
Many professors do not adhere to the end of reading period paper deadline, which is unfair to students whose professors do enforce the deadline:

- 43% of students (522/1209) who have taken a class in which a paper was due during reading or exam period have had a professor accept their final paper after reading period without penalty.
- 73% of seniors (224/307) had turned at least one paper in after reading period without penalty.

Other students only have final papers:

- A separate survey issued by the YCC in September with input from OIR found that in the spring of 2013 23.8% of students (206/863) had more papers due than exams to take during reading and exam period.

| # of Exams (# of Students) | Average # of Papers |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 0 (36) | 2.638 |
| 1 (108) | 2.768 |
| 2 (175) | 2.125 |
| 3 (259) | 1.656 |
| 4 (218) | 1.169 |
| 5 (63) | 0.841 |
| 6 (3) | 0.33 |



The YCC also received written feedback from students on reading period deadlines:

- “4-5 final papers due at the end of the semester, but no exams and having to hand all of them in at the end of reading period significantly harms my ability to do well in all of them”
- “The shortened reading week is AWFUL for humanities kids. It basically gives us no time to write papers. It's very unfair and prevents us from delivering our best work possible given time constraints.”

Peer Institution Policies

Research was conducted on the policies surrounding term paper deadlines at peer Ivy League institutions. Research was conducted in two manners: searching through the registrar or provost websites or contacting the undergraduate councils of peer institutions. For the purposes of our report, Dartmouth is not included because it is not on a semester system.

| Institution | Paper-writing days |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Princeton | 9 |
| University of Pennsylvania | 0-10 |
| Cornell | 7 to 16 |
| Brown | 6 to 14 |
| Harvard | 1 to 16 |
| Columbia | 4 to 12 |
| Yale | 5 |

Student Opinion

A majority (58.1%) prefer that papers be due later than they are, but very few students (12.9%) think that it would be desirable to have papers due during exam period.

Recommendations

Understanding that the students of Yale College need more time to work on term papers, but that term paper deadlines during exam period are problematic, the YCC recommends that the administration implement the following policy changes:

1. Change the term paper deadline from the last day of reading period to the last day of exam period.

2. Recommend in the faculty handbook that professors set the last day of exam period as a paper deadline.

Contact Information

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