

Academic Calendar Report



Yale College Council

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Introduction

In the 2012-2013 academic year, Yale College introduced a new academic calendar, marking the most significant change to the calendar since the early 1970s. The primary changes were an addition of a five-day break in October (fall break), a two-day shortening of reading week, a two-day shortening of exam period, and an increase of 2-5 days (depending on the year) of winter break. The reading week and exam period changes applied both to the fall and spring semester terms. The changes were received with mixed reactions from the student body, and sparked a debate as to whether or not they positively affect the Yale experience.

In order to evaluate the policy changes, the Yale College Council (YCC) released a survey to the general student body on January 10th (receiving 1,340 participants) and engaged in a series of discussions with student groups, such as residential college councils. We understand the selection bias associated with open surveys and the unique circumstances in the fall 2012 term due to Hurricane Sandy, but we have taken these factors into consideration with regards to our final recommendations. The following report includes a final summary of student opinion and a series of recommendations regarding the calendar structure and academic policies. The appendix includes the quantitative results of the general survey.



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Student Opinion

1. The introduction of fall break reduced stress during the term, adding a respite from the previously uninterrupted 12-week period before Thanksgiving break. However, the **shortening of reading period caused an unprecedented amount of stress** and anxiety at the end of the term. Nonetheless, 62% of participants support having fall break next year even at the cost of shortening reading period, while 38% oppose.
2. Based on the survey, the typical Yale student had, on average, 2.74 papers, 3.69 exams, and 1.9 additional projects/oral exams throughout the reading period/final exams phase of the year.
3. 60% of students would like **fall break to be earlier** than its current schedule (fourth week of October), with a **preference towards the third week of October**.
4. The shortening of reading period received an overwhelmingly negative response from students (freshmen were excluded from this question). 75% of these students indicated that the **shortened reading period had a negative influence on their academic abilities** compared to previous years. With the official end of classes falling on a Friday, but many classes still meeting during reading period, there was very little time for many students to devote to final papers.
5. Additionally, the shortening of reading period disproportionately hurt those with more final papers, especially juniors and seniors.



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6. Approximately 70% of students (freshmen were excluded from this question) find the **new structure of exam period significantly less manageable.**
7. 8% of students who participated in the survey indicated that they were eligible to postpone an exam to the spring term (meaning they were scheduled for three or more exams in four consecutive time slots). This indicates that the **shortening of exam period complicated the schedules of many students.**
8. A vast majority of students **oppose the 7 PM exam time slot** (only 13% supported the exam time). Much of the concern over the late time slot stemmed from the scenario that some students encountered, in which a 7-10 PM exam was followed by a 9 AM exam the following morning.
9. 66% of students would **prefer winter break to be shortened by 2-3 days**, to allow for a longer reading/exam period.



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Calendar Recommendations

1. **Maintain fall break, but schedule it one week earlier** (third week of October). The current timing of break does not necessarily mark a definitive end to “midterm exams season.” Thus, an earlier scheduling is crucial in relieving stress and allowing more time for preparation during this period for a larger number of students.
2. **Reading period should be lengthened**, either by shortening summer or (more likely) winter break. Students do not see a need for a longer winter break. It unnecessarily compresses the spring semester reading period by two days and finals week by two days. Even if changes for the fall term are not possible, an expansion of reading period during spring term is crucial, due to its unique traditions, such as “Spring Fling.”
3. **Exam period should be lengthened**. The compression of exam time slots caused unprecedented distress among students and negatively impacted their performance. If only two days can be added to the academic calendar each term, we recommend these days be added to exam period.
4. **Maintain the structure of Thanksgiving break**. Students enjoy the length of the break and value it as a time to relax and prepare for reading and finals period.



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Policy Recommendations

1. **All final papers to be due on the last day of finals period.** Currently, regulations dictate that all papers and class assignments are due on the last day of reading period. While this policy is in place to protect students, by creating a separation and not adding additional pressure to exam period, with the shortening of reading period, this policy caused significant difficulties for many students. For example, some students might have three papers due on Wednesday night, and then a final exam on Thursday and be done with the semester. However, if all papers were due on the last day of finals, each student could plan his or her time accordingly with regards to their individual schedules. With the shortening of reading period, a change of this policy is crucial to create a more equal distribution of work deadlines among students at the end of the term. **We suggest that this policy be implemented for the current spring term.**
2. **Allow students to petition to change an exam date in the scenario where a student has a 7-10 pm exam followed by at 9 am exam the next day.** In Yale's current academic policy, this is not allowed. Given the harmful affects to sleep schedules, and the anxiety associated with final exams, the YCC recommends the implementation of such a policy to accommodate individual sleep schedules.



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APPENDIX – Survey Quantitative Results

The survey was distributed by the YCC to all Yale undergraduates via email on January 10th and closed on January 18th. A total of 1,340 undergraduate students participated in the survey.

1. Class year

#	Answer		Response	%
1	2016		358	27%
2	2015		385	29%
3	2014		355	26%
4	2013		242	18%
	Total		1,340	100%

2. Major (if you double major or have an interdisciplinary major please select the two appropriate boxes)

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Humanities		384	29%
2	Social Sciences		480	36%
3	STEM		494	37%
4	Unknown		171	13%



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3. Number of assignments due during reading and exam periods

#	Question	0	1	2	3	4	5		Mean
1	Papers	178	409	313	186	82	34	1,202	2.74
2	Final Exams	41	167	303	391	257	62	1,221	3.69
3	Other projects/oral exams	267	433	117	25	4	1	847	1.90

4. Were you eligible to postpone an exam to the Spring term? (If you have 3 or more exams in 4 consecutive time slots you are eligible to do so)

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		104	8%
2	No		1,139	92%
	Total		1,243	100%

5. If yes, did you postpone an exam?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		25	3%
2	No		873	97%
	Total		898	100%



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6. How did the shortening of reading period influence your abilities towards the end of the term? (This question was only available to Class of 2013, 2014, and 2015)

#	Answer		Response	%
1	1 - Positive impact		14	2%
2	2		24	3%
3	3 - Neutral impact		194	21%
4	4		304	33%
5	5 - Negative impact		374	41%
	Total		910	100%

7. What is your preferred hour to take a final exam?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	9 am		335	27%
2	2 pm		877	70%
3	7 pm		33	3%
	Total		1,245	100%

8. Do you support having final exams at 7 pm?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		164	13%
2	No		773	62%
3	I don't care		308	25%
	Total		1,245	100%



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9. Relative to previous years, how manageable did you find the new structure of exam period? (This question was only available to Class of 2013, 2014, and 2015)

#	Answer		Response	%
1	1 - More manageable		22	2%
2	2		24	3%
3	3 - Similar to previous years		254	28%
4	4		268	29%
5	5 - Less manageable		342	38%
	Total		910	100%

10. Do you support having Fall break next year even at the cost of a shorter reading period?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		767	62%
2	No		476	38%
	Total		1,243	100%

11. Would you prefer if Winter break was shortened by 2-3 days to compensate for Fall break (instead of shortening reading period)?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		823	66%
2	No		419	34%
	Total		1,242	100%



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12. When do you think Fall break should be? (It was on the fourth week of October)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Three weeks earlier (first week of October)	30	2%
2	Two weeks earlier (second week of October)	233	19%
3	One week earlier (third week of October)	463	38%
4	Exactly when it was	497	41%
	Total	1,223	100%

13. In many classes final exams are not returned to students, but in any case students are always eligible to view their graded exam in the Professor's office, and all final papers must be returned. Are all of your Professors aware of this policy?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	909	81%
2	No (Please list their names, and course number)	219	19%
	Total	1,128	100%

14. Please write any additional comments or suggestions regarding the structure of the academic calendar

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	253