

May 2011

The Cornell University Faculty continued and enhanced their tradition of outstanding teaching and scholarship in 2010/2011. We taught nearly 500,000 credit hours in 2010/2011. Research expenditures were more than \$500,000,000 in FY2010 (the most recent year for which we have data). Four faculty were named as Weiss Fellows. These were: Harry Greene (Ecology and Evolutionary Biology), Paul Sawyer (English), Robert Smith (Industrial and Labor Relations), and Robert Thorne (Physics).

The University's strategic plan includes the aspiration: **to be widely recognized as a top-ten research university in the world.** We are very close to that goal. We are 15th in the US News rankings of all universities and colleges in the USA. But internationally, we are ranked very high, often in the top 10 or 20. International rankings rely heavily on peer reputation and it is the faculty who create this well-justified international reputation. I am immensely proud to be associated with this group of outstanding teachers and scholars.

Cornell University is a community of more than 30,000 persons, who live and work together. Many issues arise from any community of 30,000 persons, -- particularly when many of the members of the community feel they have a very personal and important role in the activities and directions of the community as an entity. Certainly, the faculty feel that they have special responsibility to influence policy and decisions and they express their opinions via the University Faculty Senate. Resolutions this past year have concerned community life (Child Care Center), faculty life (faculty club/center), faculty governance, and the student experience. I will expand on several of these resolutions.

Work over break: In response to President Skorton's charge last spring to consider the "student experience", the faculty have developed several initiatives. One particularly public response was the passage of a "sense of the Senate" resolution which urged faculty to not mandate "additional" course assignments over breaks. The resolution was not intended to eliminate all work over breaks, but it was intended to allow students use a break as "a break". The Resolution is reproduced here:

EPC SENSE OF THE SENATE RESOLUTION ON ACADEMIC WORK DURING SCHEDULED BREAKS

Whereas student workloads have become an increasing cause of concern in relation to student mental health and stress; and

Whereas short breaks from academic requirements are intentionally included in the academic calendar to provide rest, respite and a break from schoolwork; and,

Whereas students are, at times, even assigned additional work over breaks.

Be it resolved, in keeping with the sense of the Senate on this issue, that while students are always expected to be prepared for class, framing assignments in such a way that necessitates academic work over Fall Break, Thanksgiving Break or Spring Break is strongly discouraged. Students should be given sufficient time to carry out assignments and prepare for classes without being required to devote their breaks to such preparation.

Be it further resolved that the Dean of the Faculty shall remind the faculty in the beginning of the semester reminder not to frame assignments that necessitate academic work over scheduled breaks

Academic Integrity. AI is a very big issue all over the nation. “Copy and Paste” plagiarism is very easy and readily available term papers for sale on the web have changed the academic landscape. The Senate passed resolutions directed at academic integrity. These ranged from asking that matriculants at Cornell acknowledge that they agree to Cornell’s code of academic integrity, and that the provost collaborate with the University Faculty to create a climate of academic integrity at Cornell.

Academic Calendar. The faculty have been concerned with the academic calendar for the past three years. Two years ago, we recommended to the Provost that Labor Day be a university holiday, and that recommendation was implemented for 2010/2011. This year an ad hoc group of faculty, students and staff, has worked diligently all year to consider more significant changes to the calendar. This group has published a set of principles it will use to make recommendations (see below). Some possibilities to be considered include: starting the spring semester earlier in January; including a “Presidents’ Day” holiday in the spring semester; moving spring break to occur at a slightly different time in the semester; and moving commencement to earlier in the year. The group hopes to bring a recommendation to the community before the end of the fall term, 2011. Here are the Objectives and Principles of the group:

Objectives: Reexamine the existing academic calendar with an eye to proposing changes that will (1) comply with New York State Education Department (NYSED) requirements; (2) afford optimal educational opportunities for both students and faculty; and (3) address concerns about student stress and mental health related to prolonged periods of instruction without multi-day breaks (exclusive of weekends).

Basic Principles

- Provide for a 15 week semester (including a final examination period) pursuant to NYSED Regulations of the Commissioner – [Title 8, Chapter II, Part 50.1\(o\)](#) – which defines a “semester hour” as “a credit, point, or other unit granted for the satisfactory completion of a course which requires at least 15 hours (of 50 minutes each) of instruction and at least 30 hours of supplementary assignments.”
- Allow for an equal number of days of instruction (69) in both the fall and spring semesters¹.
- Allow for two “breaks” each semester – Fall Break (2 days) and Thanksgiving (3 days) in the fall, along with President’s Day (2 days) and Spring Break (5 days) in the spring.
- Schedule breaks so as to break up long periods of instruction; if possible coordinate breaks with those of regional school systems.
- Shorten the exam/reading period in both the Fall and Spring semesters², while providing sufficient time for students to prepare for exams.
- Provide sufficient time to submit grades, clear individuals for graduation, and conduct academic reviews.
- Shorten the period between the end of final examinations and May commencement³.
- Hold May commencement prior to Memorial Day weekend.
- Coordinate with Ithaca College to ensure that move-in day for fall semester does not occur on the same day.
- Coordinate with Ithaca College to ensure that May commencement does not occur on the same weekend.

Fall Semester Specifics

- Do not hold classes on Labor Day.
- Fall Break: Monday and Tuesday, centered in semester.
- Thanksgiving break: Wednesday (all day), Thursday, and Friday.
- Schedule seven days of classes after Thanksgiving break.

Spring Semester Specifics

- Do not hold classes on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
- President's Day (February) break: Monday and Tuesday.
- Spring Break: Monday through Friday; equal number of instruction days from February break to Spring Break and from Spring Break to end of classes.

Additional Implications

- An earlier start to spring semester would shorten Winter Session.
- Commencement weekend earlier than Memorial Day weekend could lengthen summer recess (depending on the beginning of Fall semester), leaving more time for Summer Sessions.

Faculty Governance. As result of the closing of a department and changing the reporting structure for a different unit, the Senate passed a resolution to further clarify issues surrounding faculty governance. Specifically, the definition of “consultation” can have diverse meanings to different groups. A small group from the University Faculty Committee is meeting with the senior Vice Provost for academic affairs to provide some definition to this word.

University/Faculty Club. This year the “Statler Club” was dissolved as legal entity. However, there are groups of faculty who value the opportunity afforded by a facility that enables cross-college interactions among individual faculty. The Senate urged the Cornell Administration to plan for a faculty center that would meet this goal and would specifically include a luncheon. Presently, there is a modest faculty lunch available in the Regent Lounge of the Statler Hotel.

In closing. Faculty get paid to do what they love to do; it's a great life. We get to investigate questions that we find intellectually challenging. We are privileged to interact with very bright, challenging and inquisitive young people -- in and out of the classroom. We learn and are inspired by that interaction. It's very important to us that Cornell remain an excellent institution, and we work hard to contribute to that excellence.