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Chair of the Assembly and the Academic Council
Faculty Representative to the Board of Regents
University of California
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
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September 8, 2009

DIVISIONAL CHAIRS

Re: Non-podium instructional days

Dear Colleagues:

A recent decision by the UC Berkeley campus adjusting the campus calendar to replace “podium” days with a “Reading/Review/Recitation Period” has raised questions regarding application of Interim Provost Pitts’ August 21, 2009, letter regarding furloughs on days of instruction.

In his letter, Interim Provost Pitts indicated that there would be no furlough days taken on days of instruction, which were described in the letter as “days for which a faculty member is scheduled to give lectures, lead classes or workshops, have scheduled office hours, or have other scheduled face-to-face responsibilities for students.” Thus, furlough days are to be taken during the campus instructional period only on days that do not require face-to-face encounters or other direct (telephonic or electronic) encounters with students.

On the Berkeley campus, in an August 20 memo to “Instructors,” Vice Provost Catherine Koshland, on behalf of herself and Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost George Breslauer, informed “instructors” on the campus that “the last three podium days of the semester . . . will be converted to a Reading/Review/Recitation Period.” This decision was based on a long standing discussion at the campus, Divisional Senate consultation, and a May 15, 2009, recommendation of a Joint Task-Force on Exams.¹ Vice Chancellor Koshland indicated that, “There will be no traditional classes or lectures during the five-day period; nor should instructors introduce any new material”, and described the Reading/Review/Recitation Period as follows:

During the RRR Period, student-faculty contact can be maintained through office hours, chat and e-mail, review sessions, and the flexible scheduling of oral or poster presentations of semester projects. Whether or not faculty members wish to hold review sessions or presentations, they are expected to be available to students for consultation during the period, either during office hours or in other forums. Though faculty members are expected to be available to students, they may not require students to attend any review sessions or a particular presentation time as part of their final grade.

¹ Report available at <http://vpapf.chance.berkeley.edu/ExamFinalReport.pdf>

The complete text of Vice Chancellor Koshland's memo to instructors is attached to this letter for your information.

Interim Provost Pitts' told us that the Berkeley initiative is not inconsistent with his August 21 directive that furlough days not be taken on days of face-to-face instruction. In his opinion, the Berkeley Reading/Review/Recitation Period qualifies as instructional days. Faculty should not take furlough days during the RRR Period since "they are expected to be available to students." Provost Pitts stated that a divisional Academic Senate, in collaboration with their campus administration, can convert some classroom teaching days into other teaching activities (such as the RRR Period instituted at UCB) if there is a sound pedagogical rationale. As long as such newly created instruction days entail face-to-face encounters with students, they should not be taken as furlough days.

The Berkeley calendar adjustment clarifies that your Divisional Senate and your campus administration may adjust the academic calendar to substitute various forms of instructional activity for traditional podium-based classroom presentations should you wish to do so. In the meantime, we will be asking the University Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP) to examine the definition of days of instruction for purposes of the policy that requires a fixed number of instructional days during the academic year.

Sincerely,

Henry C. Powell
Chair, University of California
Academic Senate

Daniel L. Simmons
Vice-Chair, University of California
Academic Senate

Cc: Interim Provost Pitts
Academic Senate Standing Committee Chairs

Encl (1)

From: Catherine P. Koshland, Vice Provost - Acad Planning & Facilities
(Campus-wide) [mailto:CALmessages@berkeley.edu]
Sent: Thursday, August 20, 2009 6:07 PM
To: Instructors,
Subject: CHANGES TO FALL 2009 ACADEMIC CALENDAR

Dear Colleagues:

EVCP Breslauer and I wish to inform you of an important change in the Fall 2009 academic calendar: the last three podium days of the semester (December 7-9, 2009) will be converted to a Reading/Review/Recitation Period. This is being done with the complete support of the Academic Senate and in keeping with the recommendations of the Joint Task Force on Exams, which addressed many complex long-term challenges during year-long deliberations that culminated in a May 15, 2009 report to EVCP Breslauer.

In combination with the already scheduled exam prep days (December 10-11), this will create five days for student review and synthesis of course material. There will be no traditional classes or lectures during the five-day period; nor should instructors introduce any new material. Final exams will begin on December 12, as scheduled. This is the first phase in implementing the Task Force's comprehensive recommendations. The full report can be seen on my web page at <http://vpapf.chance.berkeley.edu/ExamFinalReport.pdf>.

We know this gives relatively short notice to faculty members with completed syllabi for Fall 2009 courses, but we think it important to make this change at this time. We hope any inconvenience involved in revising syllabi is far outweighed by the obvious benefits of this change for faculty members as well as students.

The Reading/Review/Recitation (RRR) Period has long been sought by students who want more time to prepare for final exams. Currently they have only two days and are almost unanimous in finding it too little time to review 15 weeks of material. It has also been requested by a growing number of faculty members and Academic Senate committees for both pedagogical and policy reasons.

In addition to the pedagogical advantages of a review period before final exams in the fall semester, implementation of RRR days in the spring semester will bring other benefits as well, including equalization of the number of class days in spring and fall semesters, completion of the spring semester a week earlier, and the scheduling of graduation ceremonies after final exams, thereby reducing conflicts and stress for students, parents, and faculty, and making for happier alumni.

During the RRR Period, student-faculty contact can be maintained through office hours, chat and e-mail, review sessions, and the flexible scheduling of oral or poster presentations of semester projects. Whether or not faculty members wish to hold review sessions or presentations, they are expected to be available to students for consultation during the period, either during office hours or in other forums. Though faculty members are expected to be available to students, they may not require students to attend any review sessions or a particular presentation time as part of their final grade. Additional guidelines on

acceptable uses of the RRR Period will follow in the near future, but we wanted to alert you now regarding the change.

To facilitate classroom scheduling during the RRR Period, the Office of the Registrar will retain the Fall 2009 general assignment classroom assignments for courses meeting on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, December 7-9. Instructors of courses that meet only on Thursday and Friday during the term, or instructors who want a review period to last longer or include additional classroom times or days, should contact their department schedulers to request appropriate rooms for desired times. The last day for student group special event reservations will be Sunday, December 6th.

The remainder of recommendations from the Joint Task Force on Exams will be implemented in Spring 2010. Though there is not space in this letter to address all the changes in the offing, more detail can be seen in the full text of the final report referenced earlier. We will issue comprehensive implementation plans for Spring 2010 in the next few weeks.

If you have questions about this change, please contact Cynthia Schrager, Office of the Vice Provost-Teaching & Learning, at schrager@berkeley.edu or 3-7856.

Best regards,

Catherine P. Koshland
Vice Provost-Academic Planning & Facilities