

# Proposed Fall Reading Week

## Dalhousie University

### 2014-2018

#### Things to Consider:

- In the past, classes have begun on the Thursday after Labour Day. Upon review of Orientation Week and the implementation of a Reading Week, classes will now begin on the \*Wednesday after Labour Day. Orientation week will now be 3 days from \*Sunday-Tuesday. \*(with some exceptions. eg. In 2016, Orientation week will run from Saturday-Monday, and class will begin on Tuesday.)
- The following proposal is based around a 61 day teaching period, with other options indicated by an asterisk. These 61 days do not include Thanksgiving, Remembrance Day, or Fall Reading Week.
- There is a one-day break between the end of classes and the start of the formal examination period.
- The following exam periods are \*10 days long, however they are also marked with an asterisk because of the new software Dalhousie has implemented should allow us to schedule more effectively. Therefore, if needed, the exam period may be shortened to ensure optimal Holiday Break and ample time for instructors to submit grades. \*(2016, 2017, and 2018 may be examples where this is especially necessary)
- There are 7 days allowed below for instructors to submit their marks following the final exam, and 14 days for instructors where no final exam is scheduled. \*(This may also change depending on the efficacy of Dalhousie's new software program and if it can schedule exams properly into less than 10 days)

# 2014

Fall Reading Week: November 10-14

Class Begins: Wednesday, September 3

Thanksgiving: Monday, October 13

Reading Week: Monday, November 10-Friday, November 14

Class Ends: Thursday, December 4

\*Teaching Days: 61 Days

1 day break before Exams

Exams Begin: Saturday, December 6

\*Exams End: Monday, December 15 \*(Or Sunday, December 14)

\*Marks Due: December 22 + 29 \*(Or December 21 + 28)

# 2015

Fall Reading Week: November 9-13

Class Begins: Wednesday, September 2

Thanksgiving: Monday, October 12

Reading Week: Monday, November 9-Friday, November 13

Class Ends: Thursday, December 3

\*Teaching Days: 61 Days

1 day break before Exams

Exams Begin: Saturday, December 5

\*Exams End: Monday, December 14 \*(Or Sunday, December 13)

\*Marks Due: December 21 + 28 \*(Or December 20 + 27)

# 2016

Fall Reading Week: November 7-11

(assuming Orientation Week will run from Saturday September 3-Monday September 5)

\*Class Begins: Tuesday, September 6 \*(This is necessary as Labour Day is especially late)

Thanksgiving: Monday, October 10

Reading Week: Monday November 7-Friday November 11

Class Ends: Wednesday, December 7

\*Teaching Days: 61 Days

1 day break before Exams

Exams Begin: Friday, December 9

\*Exams End: Sunday, December 18 \*(Or Saturday, December 17)

\*Marks Due: December 25 + 31 \*(Or December 24 + 30)

# 2017

Fall Reading Week: November 13-17 (November 11 is a Saturday, but the holiday is observed the following Monday)

Class Begins: Wednesday, September 6

Thanksgiving: Monday, October 9

Reading Week: November 6-10 or November 13-17

Class Ends: Thursday, December 7

\*Teaching Days: 61 Days

1 day break before Exams

Exams Begin: Saturday, December 9

\*Exams End: Monday, December 18 \*(Or Sunday, December 17)

\*Marks Due: December 25 + January 1 \*(Or December 24 + 31)

# 2018

Fall Reading Week: November 12-16 (November 11 is a Sunday, but the holiday is observed the following Monday)

Class Begins: Wednesday, September 5

Thanksgiving: Monday, October 8

Reading Week: November 5-9, or November 12-16

Class Ends: Thursday, December 6

\*Teaching Days: 61 Days

1 day break before Exams

Exams Begin: Sunday, December 9

\*Exams End: Tuesday, December 18 \*(Or Monday, December 17)

\*Marks Due: December 25 + January 1 \*(Or December 24 + 31)

# Some Quick Facts about Fall Reading Weeks Across Canada

- "Now, 11 of Ontario's 20 publicly funded universities have allocated a block of time in either October or November — usually ranging from two to five days" (1)

Including,

**-Brock University**, Three-year trial of fall reading week, proposed as a solution to the anxiety, homesickness that students feel, particularly in their first year. Students reported that even after the holiday break between the fall and winter semesters, they still felt tired because the fall has been so hectic.(1)

**-Western University**

**-McMaster University**

**-Carleton University**

**-Trent University** has had a fall break since 1964!

**-Queen's University** discussing possibility of a fall reading week/rearranging of fall semester structure to address questions of students' mental health.

"A survey last year at Queen's University in Kingston showed some 4 per cent of students said they had thought about suicide the previous term and 10 per cent had considered it at some point. ***Suicide is the leading cause of death in Canadians aged 10 to 24***, after car accidents." (1)

**-University of Alberta**, "Our student ***counselling services had last year the highest usage numbers in November*** so in recognizing that February winter reading weeks are established to deal with the mental health there, November seemed like another time to take a look at," says Nick Dehod, University of Alberta's student president. (2)

**-Windsor University**, currently campaigning for a fall reading week for the sake of ***mental health*** (give students a chance to reevaluate their year, catch up on assignments, 'take a breather', particularly first year students who are often very young (sometimes just 17) and having to suddenly adjust to a very different work load and way of life. Fall reading week can also help to alleviate some ***financial strain***: "some students will chose to go home, but many will use it to work extra hours at their jobs. He said the financial pressure on students is now comparable to the academic strain" (3)

-From "University students and mental health", Sean Madden, Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, OUSA (4):

“Canadian Mental Health Association: mental illness affects one in five Canadians; this number is even higher among post-secondary students, where **close to one-third of students experience elevated psychological stress.**”

“There are a number of reasons why university students experience mental health issues at a higher rate than other demographics, including:

- The **typical age of onset of many disorders is 18 to 24**, meaning individuals often have their first encounter with mental health issues while in university.
- Many students at university or college are living away from home for the first time in their lives, **at a distance from familial networks and social-support programs.**
- Universities are demanding, competitive, and **high-stress environments**, which can trigger anxiety and depression-related illness.
- Many university students are at the age where they are coping with **transitional life experiences**, including their first experiences with alcohol and drugs, their first romantic relationship, and the first death of a close relative.

-fall reading week part of complex system-wide change, including more access to mental health services

Articles:

1. Ontario universities embrace mid-term “fall break” to ease students’ minds, Paul Irish, The Star, 2013 [http://www.thestar.com/life/health\\_wellness/2013/10/14/ontario\\_universities\\_embrace\\_midterm\\_fall\\_break\\_to\\_ease\\_students\\_minds.html](http://www.thestar.com/life/health_wellness/2013/10/14/ontario_universities_embrace_midterm_fall_break_to_ease_students_minds.html)

2. Fall reading weeks on the rise, Maclean’s, 2011, <http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2011/01/27/fall-reading-weeks-on-the-rise/>

3. University students campaigning for fall reading week, The windsor star, 2013, <http://blogs.windsorstar.com/2013/10/15/university-students-campaigning-for-fall-reading-week/>

4. University students and mental health-Sean Madden, 2012 <http://www.ousa.ca/2012/01/06/university-students-and-mental-health-by-sean-madden-january-6-2011/>

# Why is this relevant at Dalhousie?

- Internal data has told us that counselling services receives the most appointment requests in November as it is an extremely stressful time; especially for first year students. We need to prioritize **mental health** and acknowledge the need for a break.
- Students have responded in an **overwhelmingly positive** way. Surveys are currently being administered on paper and electronically. We will present the full data set at the next SLTC meeting.
- The university has identified **retention** as something we need to focus on. Fall Reading Week will encourage retention. Example: Offers homesick first year students an opportunity to visit home.
- The addition of a Fall Reading Week will benefit our **recruitment** efforts. As you can see above, many schools across the country have successfully implemented the break and this will make Dalhousie more desirable to prospective students.
- This will also encourage **academic success** as it gives students a full week to dedicate time to their studies.
- Fall Reading Week will also make sense **logistically**. Currently with a 2 day break in November, many departments will cancel all labs or tutorials for that week to be consistent with all other. If there are labs and tutorials that fall on the Monday and Tuesday, Remembrance Day or Study Day, it would be inconsistent to allow the other labs and tutorials to continue on the remaining days. This would allow some students one less lab and tutorial than other students. This week is already lost, and a Fall Reading Week will not further affect those classes.
- Professional faculties have expressed concern about this split in the semester. They are currently exempt from the Study Day in the fall. There will need to be individual discussions on what the best solution is for those faculties.