

## *Academic Support Committee Report*

### **Committee Charge:**

To systematically review and provide advice on broad policy issues relating to academic support, including but not limited to the university calendar, scheduling and registration, scholarships and financial aid, classroom management, and summer school.

Specific charge in 2015-16: Should Labor Day be designated as a non-class day.

**Reports to:** Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies.

The Academic Support Committee (appendix 1) has reviewed implications of a class or non-class, authorized university closing on the Labor Day holiday.

### **Review Process:**

The committee first consulted with the registrar to understand university policy in regard to the academic calendar. Next, the committee compiled a list (appendix 2) of peer institutions and reviewed their university calendars to determine semester start date, status of Labor Day as a class or non-class day, and the number of class days in the semester. Committee members solicited input from different constituencies by attending one of their regularly scheduled meetings. The committee and Steve Culver, Assistant Provost for Assessment and Evaluation, created a survey (appendix 3). The survey was distributed in March 2016 to a randomized sample of undergraduate and graduate students (determined by the registrar according to university procedures for sampling students) and to all faculty members teaching courses in spring 2016.

### **Recommendation:**

### **Findings**

#### **University Policy**

The University Calendar Criteria was originally approved by University Council in 1993 to set parameters around the academic calendar. That criteria stipulates that the fall and spring semester shall be of equal length and therefore does not accommodate the loss of one instructional day in the academic year. This criteria was adjusted by Presidential Policy Memorandum No. 228 on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2003 to restate the number of class days for each semester from 73 to 72 days. This change was made in order to add the MLK holiday and an October fall break as non-class days.

#### ***Peer Institutions' Academic Calendar***

In the sample review of academic calendars for over 92 institutions, only 10 schools are open on Labor Day. Nine of those schools (Christopher Newport University, College of William and Mary, James Madison University, Radford University, University of Mary Washington, University

of Virginia, University of Virginia-Wise, Virginia Military Institute, and Virginia Tech) are in Virginia. Some trends in reviewing the calendar data: schools that have Labor Day as a non-class day, either start their semester after Labor Day, also have Veteran's Day off, or offer no break until Thanksgiving. Schools with the least number of instruction days in the fall were in the Pacific Northwest or California. Schools with the most instruction days were in the Southeast.

***Committee Meetings Attended***

Representatives attended Commission on university support meeting in both December and January seeking input on the potential to close on Labor Day. In general, the comments heard from faculty who teach labs that if we were to close on Labor Day another Monday - specifically Monday - would need to be added into the calendar. If there are not equal numbers of each day of the week during the semester lab instruction is disrupted. This applies to fall break too. From administrators, the feedback was more varied. Some would like the additional holiday; others said if students are on campus, they understand the need to be in their offices. The student perspective was no strong feeling either way on Labor Day, they would defer to the faculty, but they stated their strong support for a fall break in addition to Thanksgiving.

At the Faculty Senate meeting on January, mixed opinions about Labor Day as a class or non-class day were expressed. The concern was expressed that most research-intensive schools have Labor Day off. Faculty members representing departments who teach introductory undergraduate research laboratories or who teach these classes, expressed concern about the disruption of lost instruction to a day off in the third week of classes just as the labs are beginning. Concern was expressed that Virginia Tech should respect and value the meaning of Labor Day and be sure that students understand the significance of the day, which is only really possible if it is a non-class day.

***Survey***

Complete results of the survey are presented in appendix 4.

Out of the sample of 4000, 1155 students (28.9%) responded to the survey; of the 2149 teaching faculty, 916 (42.6%) responded. Tables 1 and 2 summarize these responses.

Table 1  
*Students' Preference on Labor Day*

	Response in Percent <sub>1</sub>	Number of Responses
No classes	90%	1042
Classes	3%	39
No preference	6%	74

*Notes.* 1 = Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding

Table 2

### *Faculty Members' Preference on Labor Day*

	Response in Percent <sup>1</sup>	Number of Responses
No classes	76%	692
Classes	15%	134
No preference	10%	90

*Notes.* 1 = Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding

Of those students who completed the survey, 170 (14.8% of student respondents) made additional comments. Students favoring no classes on Labor Day were more likely to comment. Many cited the importance of honoring this national holiday, writing "It's important to pay a tribute to American workers" and "...we should have off on the day that is dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers." Some students specifically mentioned how the decision to hold class on Labor Day reflects Virginia Tech's values: "Seems pretty 'bougie' for a land-grant university not to celebrate a holiday honoring the American worker." Others expressed surprise that Virginia Tech holds classes on this holiday when other businesses and universities do not: "Labor Day is given off by most corporations and businesses in the country, so it stands to reason that Labor Day should be a non-class day as well." Another commented, "Labor Day is usually taken off at other universities. I don't see why we have to be different."

Some students indicated their preference to have Labor Day off to be contingent on the impact it would have on the academic calendar: "I only want to have Labor Day off as long as the rest of the schedule stays the same. I'd rather have class on Labor Day than have fall break taken away or thanksgiving break shortened" and "If classes would end one day earlier, then it should be a class day, if not, it should be a day off." "How will the university change if Labor Day becomes a non-class day? Will we lose another day, start a day earlier, or go a day later?"

Of the students who indicated preference for Labor Day to be a class day, 12 (31%) commented, particularly about missing course material. For example, one student commented, "For many people the degree received from VT isn't want matters, it is being able to pass your PCAT / MCAT / LSAT / etc. how many days can you cheat us out of before we can't pass these tests anymore." Another wrote, "Some classes would expect tighter schedules due to the missed classes on Labor day." A couple of students mentioned they would rather have a day off from class later in the semester or in the spring. One commented, "If the goal is to have x amount of days per semester, you can remove a day at the end."

### Faculty comments

Of those faculty members who completed the survey, 323 (35.2%) made additional comments, most of them in support of Labor Day as a non-class day. Many cited the importance of the university showing respect for the reason behind this national holiday. For example, one faculty member wrote, "As a public institution, we should celebrate the struggles and work of the Labor Movement and the contribution they have made to the modern worker's life." Another commented, "Canceling class on Labor Day would demonstrate a university commitment to the

important history of the labor movement in the United States and globally.” Several faculty members expressed concern about the message sent by having class on Labor Day: “Holding classes on Labor Day sends the wrong message to the community. It suggests a lack of unity with the rest of the nation, and perhaps more importantly, a lack of value on labor, specifically laborers.”

Many faculty members indicated that their preference to have the day off is influenced by the impact on the rest of the academic calendar. One respondent commented, “For some classes (particularly intro classes) losing a class day is detrimental. Is it possible to eliminate “Fall Break” and make Labor Day a non-class day in order to maintain the number of MWF class days in the fall semester?” Another wrote, “I think it is important to keep both [Fall Break and Thanksgiving Break], even if Labor Day becomes an observed holiday.” A few respondents mentioned their desire to acknowledge other national and international holidays. One faculty member commented, “If the university decides to honor Labor Day as a holiday but not Veteran's Day, then I think the university will need to explain why it chooses not to honor veterans but chooses instead to honor workers.” Another wrote, “We should also celebrate International Workers Day on May 1.”

Of those who indicated preference to have class on Labor Day, many wrote of the difficulty in coordinating and scheduling labs or different sections of the same course when a single day of class is missed. As one faculty member commented, “For standalone lab classes like I teach, missing a day of class disrupts the entire week of labs.” Another wrote, “For those of us who teach the multiple sections of the same course on MWF, losing a day is nightmare of scheduling.” Some mentioned difficulty covering course material: “One day off means less time to cover the syllabus” and “for classes that meet only once a week on Mondays, significant course content is lost if Labor Day is lost as a class day.” A few felt that having the day off would deny students valuable opportunities for learning. One faculty member wrote, “If we keep cutting out days, when do students have the opportunity to learn?” Another commented, “If no class is taught on Labor Day it should be made up somewhere else on calendar OR return that portion of tuition to the student.” A few respondents felt that Labor Day falls too early in the semester to have a day off: “Days off in the beginning [of the semester] are not helpful, as [students] are not behind, and days off at the end (Thanksgiving) are useless because many are too far behind to catch up.”

### ***Observations***

- Students and faculty surveyed support Labor Day as a non-class day as long as no other changes are made to the academic calendar, for example removing fall break or changing fall break and Thanksgiving break.
- In the survey, faculty and students, mentioned negative pedagogy consequences of adding another non-class day to the academic calendar.
- On the surface, adding Labor Day as a non-class day would seem to align Virginia Tech with its peer group. However, further examination of the peer’s academic calendars indicate peer institutions might also have Veterans Day as a non-class day and often do

not have a fall break and a shorter Thanksgiving break or a short fall break and a short Thanksgiving break, which is different that the Virginia Tech academic calendar,

## Appendix 1

### Academic Support Committee 2015-16 Committee Members

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Department/College</b>
Tom Brown	Dean of Students	Dean of Students Office - DSA
Candice Clemenz	Associate Dean	College of Business
Michelle Czamanske	Student Services Coordinator	Materials Science & Engineering
William Ducker	Professor	Chemical Engineering
Nannette Jimenez Gordon	Assoc. Dir. Of Student Conduct	Student Conduct – DSA
Walt Mallory	Clinical Assist Professor	School of Education
Jason Malone	Asst. Professor of Practice	Dept. of Finance
Shelley Martin	Assoc. Professor	School of Architecture and Design
Harold McKenzie	Assoc. Professor	Dept. of Large Animal Clinical Sciences
Sally Paulson	Assoc. Professor	Dept. of Entomology
Ken Smith	Vice Provost for Resource Management and Institutional Effectiveness	Provost's Office
Kimberly Smith	Director	Univ. Academic Advising Center
Susan Sumner	Associate Dean	College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Eric Wiseman	Assoc. Professor	Dept. of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation
Deb Dickerson	Assoc. Professor	Dept. of Myers-Lawson School of Construction

## Appendix 2

### VA Public

Institution Name	Closed/Open on Labor Day	Number of Days in Fall Semester
Christopher Newport University	O	70
College of William and Mary	O	68
George Mason University	X	70
James Madison University	O	70
Longwood University	X	69
Norfolk State University	X	69
Old Dominion University	X	69
Radford University	O	70
University of Mary Washington	O	70
University of Virginia	O	71
University of Virginia's College at Wise	O	70
Virginia Commonwealth University	X	69
Virginia Military Institute	O	70
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	O	72
Virginia State University	X	74

### SCHEV Peer

Institution Name	Closed/Open on Labor Day	Number of Days in Fall Semester
Cornell University	X	68
Iowa State University	X	74
Michigan State University	X	74
North Carolina State University	X	72
Pennsylvania State University, The	X	74
Purdue University	X	74
Rutgers - New Brunswick	X	70
State University of New York at Buffalo	X	71
Stony Brook University, State University of New York	X	71
Texas A&M University	O	70
The Ohio State University	X	70
The University of Texas at Austin	X	70
The University of Washington - Seattle	X	50
University of California, Berkeley	X	68
University of California, Davis	X	49
University of Colorado Boulder	X	74
University of Florida	X	72
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	X	72
University of Maryland, College Park	X	72
University of Michigan	X	66
University of Minnesota - Twin Cities	X	70
University of Missouri - Columbia	X	73
University of Pittsburgh	X	70
University of Southern California	X	71
University of Wisconsin - Madison	X	72

**Very High Research Public**

<b>Institution Name</b>	<b>Closed/Open on Labor Day</b>	<b>Number of Days in Fall Semester</b>
Arizona State University	X	71
City University of New York, The	X	70
Colorado State University	X	74
Florida State University	X	70
Georgia Institute of Technology	X	64
Georgia State University	X	70
Indiana University - Bloomington	X	73
Iowa State University	X	74
Louisiana State University	X	69
Michigan State University	X	74
Mississippi State University	X	71
Montana State University	X	70
North Carolina State University	X	72
North Dakota State University	X	75
Ohio State University, The	X	70
Oregon State University	X	54
Pennsylvania State University, The	X	74
Purdue University	X	74
Rutgers - New Brunswick	X	70
Stony Brook University, State University of New York	X	71
Texas A&M University	O	70
University at Albany, State University of New York	X	70
University at Buffalo, State University of New York	X	71
University of Alabama at Birmingham, The	X	69
University of Alabama in Huntsville, The	X	73
University of Arizona, The	X	74
University of Arkansas	X	73
University of California, Berkeley	X	68
University of California, Davis	X	49
University of California, Irvine	X	49
University of California, Los Angeles	X	49
University of California, Riverside	X	49
University of California, San Diego	X	49
University of California, Santa Barbara	X	49
University of California, Santa Cruz	X	49
University of Central Florida	X	72
University of Cincinnati, The	X	71
University of Colorado Boulder	X	74
University of Connecticut	X	69
University of Delaware	X	68
University of Florida	X	72
University of Georgia	X	75
University of Hawaii	X	75
University of Houston	X	71



University of Illinois at Chicago	X	72
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	X	72
University of Iowa, The	X	74
University of Kansas, The	X	74
University of Kentucky	X	74
University of Louisville	X	70
University of Maryland, College Park	X	72
University of Massachusetts Amherst	X	65
University of Michigan	X	66
University of Minnesota - Twin Cities	X	70
University of Missouri - Columbia	X	73
University of Nebraska - Lincoln	X	74
University of New Mexico, The	X	80
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	X	73
University of Oklahoma	X	76
University of Oregon	X	47
University of Pittsburgh	X	70
University of South Carolina	X	71
University of South Florida	X	71
University of Tennessee, The	X	70
University of Texas at Austin, The	X	70
University of Utah, The	X	71
University of Virginia	O	70
University of Washington	X	50
University of Wisconsin - Madison	X	72
Virginia Commonwealth University	X	69
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	O	72
Washington State University	X	73
Wayne State University	X	69

## **Appendix 3 Labor Day Survey**

On a regular basis, the Virginia Tech academic calendar is reviewed and potential changes are considered. Traditionally, Labor Day has been a class day. However, some have suggested that Labor Day be a non-class day. In order to assess student and faculty preferences regarding the scheduling of classes on Labor Day, we ask that you complete the following survey.

Please pick the one calendar option that you prefer for future fall semesters

1. I prefer Labor Day as a class day
2. I prefer Labor Day as a non-class day
3. I have no preference

In addition, please provide any comments regarding the Labor Day schedule.

## **Appendix 4**

Labor Day Survey Results  
March 2016

Dr. Steve Culver  
Assistant Provost for Assessment and Evaluation

Katie Biddle  
Doctoral Student

Brock Mutcheson  
Doctoral Candidate

Ryan Cook  
Doctoral Candidate



**Office of Assessment  
and Evaluation**  
at Virginia Tech

### Result of Labor Day Survey of Students

On a regular basis, the Virginia Tech academic calendar is reviewed and potential changes are considered. Traditionally, Labor Day has been a class day. However, some have suggested that

Labor Day be a non-class day. In order to assess student and faculty preferences regarding the scheduling of classes on Labor Day, surveys were sent by the Office of Assessment and Evaluation to a random sample of 4000 students and to the population of teaching faculty (N = 2149). A link to the survey was sent to students via e-mail on March 17<sup>th</sup> and to faculty on March 21<sup>st</sup>.

Potential participants were asked to respond to the following question:

Please pick the one calendar option that you prefer for future fall semesters

1. I prefer Labor Day as a class day
2. I prefer Labor Day as a non-class day
3. I have no preference

In addition, respondents were also provided an opportunity to make comments regarding the Labor Day schedule.

Out of the sample of 4000, 1155 students (28.9%) responded to the survey; of the 2149 teaching faculty, 916 (42.6%) responded. Tables 1 and 2 summarize these responses.

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### Student comments

Of those students who completed the survey, 170 (14.8% of student respondents) made additional comments. Students favoring no classes on Labor Day were more likely to comment. Many cited the importance of honoring this national holiday, writing “It’s important to pay a tribute to American workers” and “...we should have off on the day that is dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers.” Some students specifically mentioned how the decision to hold class on Labor Day reflects Virginia Tech’s values: “Seems pretty ‘bougie’ for a land-grant university not to celebrate a holiday honoring the American worker.” Others expressed surprise that Virginia Tech holds classes on this holiday when other businesses

and universities do not: “Labor Day is given off by most corporations and businesses in the country, so it stands to reason that Labor Day should be a non-class day as well.” Another commented, “Labor Day is usually taken off at other universities. I don't see why we have to be different.”

Many students indicated they would appreciate having Labor Day free to spend time with family. For example, one student wrote, “This day off would be much appreciated for a family event/tradition that I miss every year.” Another student commented, “Having Labor Day off allows for more time available to spend the weekend with out of town family.” Several students emphasized the importance of being able to coordinate schedules around holidays that other family members have off: “Many families expect that this will be a non-class day and wish to schedule get-togethers. Unfortunately when this is a class day, many students cannot return home to see family members” and “Most schools (college and high, middle, etc) don't have class that day, so families plan trips on the last week before classes. Labor Day allows more flexibility for parents to plan trips with their children.”

Several students specifically mentioned the difficulty of finding childcare on a day when most daycares and schools are closed: “As a graduate student with children, it was always challenging to have to find childcare on Labor Day when all local schools and daycares are closed. Closing on Labor Day shouldn't be about football games, but rather about being equitable with those students, faculty, and staff that have families.”

Other students indicated they would value having the day off to rest and relax. One student wrote, “Even though Labor Day falls only a couple weeks into the semester, [the holiday] could be used as an important day for students to regroup after the first two weeks.” Others reported they would use the day to attend to school related responsibilities. For example, one student commented, “I feel like this will give students an extra day to catch up on things like school work.”

A few students mentioned the importance of honoring faculty and staff. One student wrote, “I believe the professors should get the day off in honor of all the time and work they put into this school and our courses.” Another commented, “I feel that we should have off for the faculty and staff.”

Some students indicated their preference to have Labor Day off to be contingent on the impact it would have on the academic calendar: “I only want to have Labor Day off as long as the rest of the schedule stays the same. I'd rather have class on Labor Day than have fall break taken away or thanksgiving break shortened” and “If classes would end one day earlier, then it should be a class day, if not, it should be a day off.” “How will the university change if Labor Day becomes a non-class day? Will we lose another day, start a day earlier, or go a day later?”

Of the students who indicated preference for Labor Day to be a class day, 12 (31%) commented, particularly about missing course material. For example, one student commented, “For many people the degree received from VT isn't want matters, it is being able to pass your PCAT / MCAT / LSAT / etc. how many days can you cheat us out of before we can't pass these tests anymore.” Another wrote, “Some classes would expect tighter schedules due to the missed

classes on Labor day.” A couple of students mentioned they would rather have a day off from class later in the semester or in the spring. One commented, “If the goal is to have x amount of days per semester, you can remove a day at the end.”

### Faculty comments

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Respondents noted that most other universities, businesses, and organizations have the day off: “Labor Day has traditionally been a holiday in general and at other institutions. I was surprised when coming to VT that it was not” and “I have been a faculty member here for over 25 years, and no one has ever provided a satisfactory explanation of why we have classes on Labor Day when the rest of the country is celebrating a major US holiday.” A few faculty members suggested using the holiday to educate students and the community about the importance of the holiday: “It should be honored with alternative programming, much like MLK, Jr. Day, recognizing its history and meaning, and those who have sought to make working life better” and “Labor Day would be an excellent time to provide programs that would help students better understand the contributions of workers in the United States.”

Some faculty members felt that the football schedule should not be the main factor in the decision to have the day off: “Labor Day should be observed as a holiday, and not just because we have a televised football game scheduled.” Yet others acknowledged logistical issues with having class on the same day as a home football game: “We have no control over the football schedule and whether or not students, faculty and staff are football fans. That must be considered for parking and safety on the road for all.”

Many faculty mentioned how valuable a day off would be for students: “Many of our students are parents and use this as a long weekend with the family” and “As a Professor, I would not lose a significant class time if we would let the students spend the time with their family.” Some acknowledged their ability to adjust to a change in the academic calendar: “Even though a single non-class day during the week can disrupt lab and lecture schedules in classes with multiple sections, we (faculty) can be flexible and adjust.” A few faculty members pointed out that having

this day off could actually help balance the academic calendar. One respondent commented, “Removing a M/W class from the fall calendar makes sense given that the T/TH classes meet 29 times in both fall and spring, but M/W classes meet 29 times in the spring, due to MLK day, but 30 times in the fall.” Some respondents mentioned that many students choose not to attend class on Labor Day: “I have found students in my lower level classes frequently do not come to class on Labor Day.” Other faculty members acknowledged that they already cancel class on Labor Day: “I typically cancel class this day and provide an online assignment.”

Many faculty members indicated that having Labor Day off would promote greater work/life balance: “The university should show support for working families and work/life balance by giving everyone Labor Day off.” Some would appreciate having additional time with their families. For example, one faculty member wrote, “This gives faculty a rare opportunity to spend some time with family at one of the traditional holidays.” Others would welcome a break from usual duties early in the semester: “It would be nice to have a day break considering that fall break is so late in the semester.” A few faculty members specifically mentioned the difficulty of finding childcare on days when daycare facilities and schools are closed: “I consistently have to find childcare on labor day because both school and daycare are closed. This is a struggle and very frustrating.”

Many faculty members indicated that their preference to have the day off is influenced by the impact on the rest of the academic calendar. One respondent commented, “For some classes (particularly intro classes) losing a class day is detrimental. Is it possible to eliminate "Fall Break" and make Labor Day a non-class day in order to maintain the number of MWF class days in the fall semester?” Another wrote, “I think it is important to keep both [Fall Break and Thanksgiving Break], even if Labor Day becomes an observed holiday.” A few respondents mentioned their desire to acknowledge other national and international holidays. One faculty member commented, “If the university decides to honor Labor Day as a holiday but not Veteran's Day, then I think the university will need to explain why it chooses not to honor veterans but chooses instead to honor workers.” Another wrote, “We should also celebrate International Workers Day on May 1.”

Of those who indicated preference to have class on Labor Day, many wrote of the difficulty in coordinating and scheduling labs or different sections of the same course when a single day of class is missed. As one faculty member commented, “For standalone lab classes like I teach, missing a day of class disrupts the entire week of labs.” Another wrote, “For those of us who teach the multiple sections of the same course on MWF, losing a day is nightmare of scheduling.” Some mentioned difficulty covering course material: “One day off means less time to cover the syllabus” and “for classes that meet only once a week on Mondays, significant course content is lost if Labor Day is lost as a class day.” A few felt that having the day off would deny students valuable opportunities for learning. One faculty member wrote, “If we keep cutting out days, when do students have the opportunity to learn?” Another commented, “If no class is taught on Labor Day it should be made up somewhere else on calendar OR return that portion of tuition to the student.” A few respondents felt that Labor Day falls too early in the semester to have a day off: “Days off in the beginning [of the semester] are not helpful, as [students] are not behind, and days off at the end (Thanksgiving) are useless because many are too far behind to catch up.” Finally, some faculty members indicated desire to have more

information regarding how designating a non-class day would impact the rest of the academic calendar: “Converting Labor Day to a non-class day must involve a trade-off, but the survey does not provide information concerning what those trade-offs should be.”