



320 STEPHENS HALL
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

April 29, 2019

DANA ALPERT
ASUC EAVP Vote Coalition Director

Subject: ASUC Proposal to Make Election Day a Non-Instructional Day

Dear Dana,

On April 15, 2019, Divisional Council (DIVCO) discussed the proposal cited in the subject line, informed by the commentary of the Graduate Council (GC) and Undergraduate Council (UGC). The committee commentary is appended in its entirety for your consideration.

While DIVCO supports the goal of the proposal, we believe it is premature to designate Election Day a non-instructional day. We noted a number of concerns about implementing this change to the academic calendar, which are discussed in detail in UGC's commentary.

We do, however, strongly support other measures, described in the UGC report, intended to facilitate student participation in elections, including "establishing an automatic voter registration from CalCentral, and creating a conditional/provisional voting center on campus."

DIVCO underscored UGC's recommendation:

... the Chancellor's letter to the Berkeley community, which already encourages providing time for employees and students to vote, could contain more specific requests, in particular, that instructors not schedule exams or important review sessions on election day or have major assignments due the day after election day.

We recommend that the ASUC work with the Chancellor's office and the Academic Senate to craft any such language to be included in the Chancellor's letter.

In sum, DIVCO supports implementing measures to facilitate student voting, short of changing the academic calendar, then assessing their efficacy and considering whether additional measures are indicated.

Sincerely,



Barbara Spackman
Chair, Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate
Cecchetti Professor of Italian Studies and Professor of Comparative Literature

Encls. (2)

Cc: John Battles, Chair, Graduate Council
Jonah Levy, Chair, Undergraduate Council
Sumei Quiggle, Associate Director staffing Graduate Council and Undergraduate Council



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March 21, 2019

BARBARA SPACKMAN
Chair, Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate

Re: ASUC proposal to make Election Day a non-instructional day

Dear Chair Spackman:

At its meeting on March 4, the Graduate Council reviewed the ASUC proposal to make Election Day a non-instructional day and start instruction a day earlier in the fall. Some of our members supported the idea in principle, but all agreed that it would face significant logistical hurdles. The proposal has not been discussed by the Graduate Assembly, so we were unable to get a sense of the graduate student viewpoint. Consequently Graduate Council did not come to a decision either way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'John J. Battles'.

John J. Battles
Chair, Graduate Council



320 STEPHENS HALL
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

March 26, 2019

PROFESSOR BARBARA SPACKMAN
Chair, Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate

Re: ASUC proposal to make Election Day a non-instructional day

Dear Chair Spackman,

At the UGC meeting, 6 March 2019, two representatives of the ASUC presented a proposal to make election day a non-instructional day. In order to maintain the same number of instructional days, fall semester classes would start one day earlier, on the fourth Tuesday of August, rather than the fourth Wednesday. The ASUC representatives noted that only one in five students nationwide typically vote in midterm elections; they did not provide data on presidential elections. The representatives cited polls suggesting that lack of time, due to “intense course loads, midterms, part-time jobs, and extracurricular activities” are an important reason why student voting rates are so low. They also suggested that voting at a young age is a big determinant of voting later in life and pointed to a study by Columbia Political Scientist Don Green that the creation of election-day “festivals” to celebrate voting increased voting rates as much as 6 percent. Finally, the ASUC representatives related that campus-wide election holidays already exist at Columbia University and Princeton University and that a proposal was recently introduced in the California State Assembly (AB 177) to make election day a holiday for California schools and colleges as well.

The student presentation triggered a wide-ranging discussion, but no clear consensus emerged. Some faculty support the ASUC proposal, but most are reluctant to go forward until a number of questions and concerns have been addressed. A first concern involves student preferences. An ASUC poll revealed 80 percent support for making election day a non-instructional day, but the question did not ask students if they would be willing to start the fall semester one day earlier in order to make up the lost day of instruction. Consequently, we do not know how students feel about the actual ASUC proposal, as opposed to simply having one less day of instruction. Given that the ASUC proposal would involve real costs to students and the administration alike, UGC believes that it is important to ascertain whether such a change is, in fact, supported by the majority of Berkeley students, perhaps by holding a student referendum.

Other concerns are operational. The campus has a very tight turnaround between the end of summer session and the beginning of fall semester; moving up the starting day could add to the logistical challenges and costs. There was some discussion of adding an instructional day the Wednesday before Thanksgiving rather than the fourth Tuesday of August, but since election

day falls on a Tuesday, adding another day of instruction on a Wednesday would not address the need for an extra Tuesday/Thursday instructional day. Indeed, it would increase the imbalance between instructional days for Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes and Tuesday/Thursday classes. Another operational concern is that Berkeley's academic calendar is synchronized with that of UC Merced, so both campuses would probably need to agree to a change in the academic calendar.

The final set of concerns relates to the effectiveness of making election day a non-instructional day. Even without classes, students would still face the demands of homework, exam preparation, jobs, and extracurricular activities. What is more, an election-day holiday would have no impact on those students who live far away, vote by mail, or are not registered to vote.

While some UGC members are open to making election day a non-instructional day provided that the above concerns can be addressed, others favor accommodations to promote and encourage voting without changing the instructional calendar. The ASUC itself is deploying a multi-pronged approach to its goal of increasing student voting. Student representatives related that "in addition to our typical voter registration and get out the vote efforts," they are "working on creating a campus-wide Civic Engagement Coalition through the LEAD [Leadership, Engagement, Advising, and Development] Center, establishing an automatic voter registration from CalCentral, and creating a conditional/provisional voting center on campus." Several faculty suggested initiatives to encourage and help students vote by mail, such as by having more ballot drop-off boxes on campus. Finally, the Chancellor's letter to the Berkeley community, which already encourages providing time for employees and students to vote, could contain more specific requests, in particular, that instructors not schedule exams or important review sessions on election day or have major assignments due the day after election day. It may be that measures such as these could increase student voting without having to change the academic calendar.

The ASUC representatives have opened an important conversation about the need to increase voting by students. Three possible approaches have been identified. The first is to accept the ASUC proposal to make election day a non-instructional day. This change would not only make it easier for students to vote, but also send a powerful signal about the University's commitment to voting. To the extent that an initiative like AB 177 can be expected to pass, it would also allow the University to prepare for and get in front of future requirements. The second option would be to reject the ASUC proposal, focusing instead on less disruptive measures for promoting voting, including those being pursued by the ASUC itself. The third possibility would be to move forward with these less disruptive measures immediately, while remaining open to changing the academic calendar if a clear consensus among Berkeley students in favor of such a change can be demonstrated and the other operational and financial challenges relating to changing the academic calendar can be addressed.

Sincerely,



Jonah Levy
Chair, Undergraduate Council