

Faculty Senate

Minutes, March 5, 2013

College of Arts and Sciences

- Baumer, William
- Hughes, George
- Metcalf, Sara
- Weinstein, Bernard
- Zarembka, Paul

SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE

- Davis, Elaine
- Miller, Ray
- Tezal, Mine

SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING

- Alexandridis, Paschalis
- Fam, Adly (Excused)
- Mollendorf, Joseph
- Su, Weifeng

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

- Sanders, Larry
- Smith, Sanjukta

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE & BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES

- Gelfond, Daniel
- Joshi, Prashant (Excused)
- Lehman, Heather
- Sawyer, Robert

- Silvestri, Nicholas (Excused)
- Tumiel-Berhalter, Lauren (Excused)
- Udin, Susan

SCHOOL OF NURSING

- Dean, Grace

SCHOOL OF PHARMACY

- Ceacareanu, Alice (Excused)

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

- Rittner, Barbara

SUNY SENATORS

- Behun, Michael
- Kielar, Kathleen
- Nickerson, Peter

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

- Belford, Rebecca

GUESTS (Eleven signatures are illegible.)

Cain, Eileen
Casarella, Gary
Castanzo, Jean
Czaja, Donna
Douglas, Natalie
Hemlock, Laura
Heneseey, Mary
Ho, John

Hossain, Tazrin
Kaufman, Elias
Konovitz, Cindy
Landel, Ann Marie
Lanier, Kesha
Love, David
Macy, Bernadine
McCain, Leslie
Nolan-Weiss, Sharon
Pohancsek, Gene
Pokras, Rabbi Gary
Pyszezyusk, Annette
Rizzo, Joseph
Rockmaker, Julie
Ryan, Michael
Saffeir, Ilana
Selsky, Lyle
Siegel, David
Strudler, Alexa
Sullivan, Robin
Thompson, Mick
Wedne, J.
Young, Rebecca
Zubrow, Marcia

1. Zubrow explained the **ground rules for discussion**.

- Scott Weber, Richard Libschitz, William Baumer, and Bernard Weinstein would each have 8 minutes to present their cases, and each would have 2 minutes for rebuttal.

- Those present would then have opportunities to question the speakers and/or note their concerns in the following order:
- Faculty Senators
- Members of the Professional Staff Senate
- Others

2. Debate on the proposal to hold classes on **Labor Day**.

- S. Weber, Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education, spoke in favor of doing so. [Click here](#) to view the slides that outline his position. Key points include:
- A complete week of instruction minimizes disruptions in our academic offerings and schedule.
- Over 500 once a week lecture/lab/recitation/etc. is on Mondays during the fall term. Canceling class on this day puts labs/recitations tied to lectures behind others and causes scheduling challenges for many departments.
- A break so soon in the semester disrupts academic momentum.
- Having classes on Labor Day minimizes the number of residential students going home the first weekend, helping them to better acclimate to, and engage in, campus life.
- Labor Day weekend (if the weather is good) can be a heavy off-campus party weekend in surrounding neighborhoods. Classes would help reduce this problem for the community.
- Holding class on Labor Day would enable UB to cancel classes Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week, a time that is already de facto holidays for many students and some faculty. The longer break offers greater travel flexibility and time for students to catch up and complete semester projects before the start of final exams.
- Holding classes on Labor Day is not unique. Nine SUNY campuses do so. [Alfred State, Alfred University, Canton, Cobleskill, Delhi, Morrisville, Oneonta, Plattsburgh, and Potsdam] Other schools holding classes on Labor Day include Duke, Notre Dame, Texas A&M, Colgate, Vanderbilt, UVa, and Virginia Tech.

3. Richard Lipschitz, President of the Western New York American Federation of Labor, spoke in favor of not holding classes on Labor Day.

- Labor Day is a national holiday that honors working people.
- Labor Day represents the struggle for an 8 hour work day, plus reasonable benefits.
- Labor Day is representative of social issues the entire society faces.
- Union contracts entitle staff that day off.
- Holding classes on Labor Day is a departure from national traditions.
- Students use the holiday to retrieve last minute items from home before the semester gets into full swing.
- Observing Labor Day illustrates the University's symbolic unity with the community.

3. Debate on the proposal to hold classes on **Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.**

- William Baumer, a Philosophy Professor and Faculty Senate Parliamentarian, spoke in favor of holding classes.
- Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the only religious holidays on which UB does not hold classes. This is discriminatory towards other religions. All religions ought to be treated equally.
- New York State law prohibits repercussions against students, faculty, and staff that choose to celebrate any religious holiday.

- Instructors must make accommodations for students who observe religious holidays. Using his own case as an example, he scheduled an exam this semester on the first day of Passover, but made accommodations for a student.
- Holding classes on these days do not affect other parts of the University calendar.
- Bernard Weinstein, a Physics professor who is on the Advisory Board to the Institute of Jewish Thought and Heritage (IJTH), spoke in favor of cancelling classes.
- Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the most important Jewish holidays. Most Jews observe these days dedicating them to devotion, family, and fasting. Failing to do so would make many parents unhappy.
- Holding classes on these days impact between 1,500 and 2,300 Jewish students. Although this represents a minority, it is still a rather good size one. The same students would support others who observe holidays in their respective religions.
- Holding classes on these holidays disrupts the start of the semester, because students would need to make up time lost.
- Weinstein believes holding classes on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur inappropriately “front load” the beginning of the semester. He prefers having classes Monday and Tuesday during Thanksgiving week.
- UB is already sensitive to the needs of special groups, such as athletes, honor students, and foreign students.
- Despite having legal rights to ask for special accommodations to observe their holidays, students still feel intimidated when doing so.
- Binghamton University cancels classes for 2 days on Rosh Hashanah and one day on Yom Kippur, and the University at Albany follows UB’s current calendar. The system works fine at both schools.
- Holding classes on these holidays would affect enrollment adversely and would make Jewish students feel less welcome.

- Baumer responded that he could not see why students would be intimidated when asking for accommodations. They do so regularly for a variety of reasons. UB could not possibly recognize all holy days for all students and faculty. Classes would be cancelled at least 5 days per month every month. Weinstein disagreed replying that students are, in fact, often intimidated when asking for accommodations. He also added that no one is asking to cancel classes 5 days every month, but just 2 days each year.

4. Comments

- Labor Day and Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur
- R. Sawyer, Clinical Associate Professor of Neurology, did not think that holding classes on Labor Day is an imposition because many people work then. However, the religious holidays ought to be reserved for family.
- S. Udin, School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, thought that the rationale for holding classes these holidays is promoting efficiency in the calendar. However, all efficiency is lost when considering the effort involved in re-arranging schedules.
- A student stated that failing to observe Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is unfortunate. He thought that students would be too intimidated to ask for special accommodations, and observers would be singled out. The identical student also argued that having Thanksgiving week off would be harmful because it interrupts the flow of study close to the end of the semester.
- A student commented that freshman need the Labor Day holiday to step back, catch their breath, and become more acclimated to college life. Moreover, failure to recognize Labor Day is as insulting to workers as failure to recognize Veterans Day is to veterans. Regarding the Jewish holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are almost as important to non-religious Jews as they are to observant ones.
- Labor Day

- B. Rittner, Social Work, spoke about the difficulty parents of small children would have acquiring baby sitters if forced to work on Labor Day.
- P. Zarbemka informed those present that UUP's Buffalo Center Chapter passed a resolution in support of maintaining Labor Day as a holiday.
- R. Belford, University Libraries, said that failing to spend Labor Day with family is difficult. Also, the loss of classes during Thanksgiving week adversely affects the momentum of the semester.
- T. Tucker, President of UUP's Buffalo Center Chapter, noted that his union will investigate the legality of losing the Labor Day holiday.
- Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur
- K. Kielar, Training and Business Process Redesign Coordinator, thought UB ought to talk about diversity. Supporting one religion over others is contrary to that.
- A commenter noted that Jewish law requires followers to abstain from work, travel, and school on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, while the Christian faith only requires followers to attend Mass.
- Despite the law guaranteeing that accommodations must be made for observers, students will still be intimidated into attending classes on the High Holidays.
- Professor Kaufman, Dental School Emeritus, spoke about the late 1960's when classes were held on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Professors gave exams on those days and were never disciplined. He asked how future violations would be handled if classes were once again held on these holidays, and he suggested that most students would be too intimidated to pursue unaccommodating instructors. Kaufman encouraged a spiritual day for all faiths.
- A commenter believed that holding classes on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is counterproductive, particularly when UB will initiate a Jewish Studies Department in the Fall, 2013. Students and faculty in that Department would feel unwelcome. The loss associated with holding classes on these dates is clear cut, but the gains of doing so are dubious.

- Rabbi Pokras, Temple Beth Zion, argued that the current policy of not holding classes on these holidays is not discriminatory. UB does not have classes on Christmas, Easter, or Sundays. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are not comparable to other holidays due to restrictions placed on observers. Additionally, furthering diversity enables us to be true to who we are.
- J. Rockmaker, School of Dentistry, said that she attended a school that held classes on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and felt intimidated when requesting accommodations. Fellow students asked her if she actually did not believe in Christ.
- I. Saffair, a student, indicated that she chose UB because the University observed the Jewish high holy days. When attempting to explain to a professor that her religion prohibits Orthodox observant Jews from using vehicles and technical devices on religious days, the instructor responded that it is still possible to get to class. She did not attend class that day and lost points towards her grade. Saffair also noted that the Physics Department schedules exams on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath.
- Another student told the Faculty Senate about a TA who failed to provide accommodations for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.
- L. McCain, College of Arts and Sciences, said she follows the Baha'i faith that requires its followers to abstain from work and school 9 days each year. She also noted that the Chinese New Year celebration requires people to visit and pay respect to elders. Few faculty are aware of either. She called upon the Campus Ministries to educate students, faculty, and staff in these traditions and other customs/rituals.

The Faculty Senate did not vote to hold classes on Labor Day, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur because a quorum was not present. Twenty-two Senators attended the meeting. A quorum is a majority of the voting members, 43 Senators. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee will vote and forward its recommendations to the Provost and President.

Prepared by
Edward Herman,
Secretary, Faculty Senate