



Gonzaga Student Body Association

Senate

2015-2016

Bill: SRA021601

Monday, April 11, 2016

Sponsor: Allison Drescher, On-Campus Senator

Co-Sponsor(s): Morgan Lancaster, On-Campus Senator; Rachel Larsen, Senior Senator; Jose Phillips Rangel, International Senator; Lauren Weiser, Junior Senator

Title: Analysis of a Faculty Survey Regarding the End of the Semester

Purpose: This resolution explains the results and the proposed future actions that the Gonzaga Student Body Association Senate recommends regarding a survey the body sent out to Gonzaga's full-time faculty questioning their practices during the last two weeks of the semester.

Text:

During the spring semester of the 2016 school year, the GSBA Senate, in partnership with Gonzaga's Faculty Senate, sent out a survey to all full-time faculty. The survey polled and requested information regarding professor's teaching practices during the last two weeks of the semester, commonly referred to as "Dead Week" and "Finals Week". The following document outlines the findings of this survey and the areas of growth that GSBA Senate believes should be focused upon during a crucial time in the academic year for students and professors alike.

The week prior to the final week of the semester, commonly referred to as "Dead Week," as well as Final Examinations have both been recurring topics of discussion throughout the 2015-2016 school year. These concerns have been heard by members of the GSBA Senate, through events such as Be Heard and other public forums. Senate has reached out to Faculty Senate and various administrators to discuss this topic as well.

In its decision to focus on the final week of the semester, Senate's Academic Committee has considered several alternative formats other universities have used during their last weeks of a semester. We discussed options that both reflected those sentiments expressed to us and those which would comply with Gonzaga's policies. To take into account and hear the opinions of the faculty of Gonzaga 156 faculty members, ranging in academic disciplines, completed Senate's

survey. It asked a multitude of questions focusing on their respective teaching practices during the week(s) prior to the final week of the semester.

The results of this survey in conjunction with student concerns can be summarized as follows:

1. 31.30% of faculty respondents indicated that they assigned a test, paper, or presentation during the week prior to Final examinations. Further, 32.06% marked that in “some classes” these assignments are worth more than 10% of the overall course grade. Those students who are taking what is considered a “full course” load may be preparing for several examinations in addition to completing other assignments or projects. Whereas we realize it is the student’s responsibility to manage their coursework in an efficient manner, we also acknowledge the stress this places on many students.
2. Whereas some faculty administer comprehensive examinations, others choose to give unit examinations. Further, one respondent mentions the practice of giving a large assignment or test in the week or two leading up to the final week of the semester. Assuming this takes the place of the final examination time, this practice could lessen students stress as they are able to stagger their studies. On the other hand, this could also induce stress giving students both less time to prepare, less time to review in class, and not granting the student the full 16 week semester.
3. A clear majority of faculty (70.23%) offer no review sessions outside of class, but specify other review opportunities such as office hours, study guides, as well as utilize Blackboard. Many of the faculty members who responded also stated that at least one class period is dedicated to review.
4. When asked what specific teaching practices were employed during the final weeks of the semester, many faculty respondents simply stated “the same practices I use during the entire semester.”

Based on these results, the Academic Committee recognizes students concerns that the week prior to the final week of the semester is anything but “dead”; rather, it is one of the busiest academic times of the semester. The one study day allotted to students during the final week of the semester is valued and integral to student success. It is imperative this day remains as such. Logistically, the committee recognizes the challenges of adding more study days and rather recommends that faculty who administer a cumulative examination offer some type of review or continue to do so. The committee also recommends that those courses which offer a final cumulative examination NOT have due dates that fall the week prior for assignments and/or projects that are worth more than 10% of the course grade. This has been the previous policy of Gonzaga University and student have seen a great increase in stress and a back log of large assignments since the policy was altered. Lastly, the committee recommends that professors offer an in-class synthesis in the week or two leading up to the final week of the semester if they are requiring students to take a cumulative final exam. Whether this is in the form of a study guide or in-class review, we also acknowledge that if a student needs more assistance beyond the synthesis offered, they should seek extra assistance on their own.

Turning our attention to end of semester evaluations, this is another area of growth for the university. These evaluations are vital to academic departments critically assessing their faculty, however, they are not satisfactorily filled out by students. A majority (62.60%) offer class time

for students to complete these evaluations in all of their respective classes, whereas some do not, contrary to university policy. Other than being required to do so, the committee believes students do not fully understand the value of their responses. A strong, thought out evaluation is generally only given in extremities, more often than not when there is a negative experience in the classroom. Whereas these surveys are important to the university as well as the student body in improving the classroom experience, the committee holds that these end of semester evaluation's questions should, at least, be reviewed and perhaps edited to be more efficient, constructive and less repetitive. The goal of this review is to increase the average number of students who actually complete these evaluations and find more of an incentive and benefit to their personal coursework in doing so.