

Rutgers University Senate
Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee
Updated Response to Charge A-0906

A-0906 Academic Calendar, Commencement Dates: Consider and decide on Secretary of the University Leslie Fehrenbach's [request](#) (and [its attachment](#)) that the University Senate change the University Commencement dates on the [academic calendar](#) for 2010 and beyond. The Senate Executive Committee, at its September 2009 meeting, on behalf of the Senate, approved the change for 2010 as an urgent matter requiring immediate action. The ASRAC is now asked to consider the requested changes for academic years 2010-11 and beyond.

Background

For several years prior to 2010, University Commencement was held on Voorhees Mall on the Wednesday afternoon following the end of the spring final exam period. In fall 2008, President McCormick and Executive Vice-President Furmanski charged an ad-hoc committee of faculty, students, and staff, chaired by Vice President for Undergraduate Education Barry Qualls, with reviewing and revising the commencement schedule for 2010 and beyond in the light of the reorganization of undergraduate education in New Brunswick and the formation of the School of Arts and Sciences. Such a review was deemed necessary since starting in 2011, when SAS would graduate its first full class, it would not be possible to accommodate the SAS graduating class and guests on Voorhees Mall.

The ad-hoc commencement committee recommended that beginning in spring 2011, University Commencement be held in Rutgers stadium on the Sunday immediately after the spring final exam period and that the SAS graduation ceremony be held in the stadium later in the same day. For 2010, on the other hand, the ad-hoc committee recommended that University Commencement continue to be held on Voorhees Mall and that individual graduation ceremonies be held for the last entering classes at the former liberal arts colleges: Douglass, Livingston, Rutgers, and University Colleges. Although University Commencement was initially scheduled for Wednesday, May 19, it was proposed to move it to Sunday, May 16, because of conflict with the Jewish holiday of Shavuot.

The Senate was officially informed of the ad-hoc commencement committee's recommendations and asked to approve the proposed changes of commencement dates by means of Secretary Fehrenbach's letter of July 27, 2009. The Senate Executive Committee considered this request on an emergency basis at its meeting of September 4, 2009, and acting on behalf of the Senate, approved the changes in the commencement schedule for spring 2010 and charged ASRAC with considering the requested changes for 2011 and beyond.

In considering this charge, ASRAC members expressed serious concerns about (1) holding University Commencement and the SAS graduation only two working days after the last final exams are given and (2) holding the SAS graduation in the stadium shortly after University Commencement. On the other hand, members were cognizant of the need to make a decision quickly with respect to Commencement 2011 in order to give the University sufficient time for planning the 2011 graduation ceremonies. ASRAC agreed, therefore, to recommend approval, on a trial basis, of the proposed changes in the commencement schedule for 2011 but to defer making a recommendation concerning commencement in 2012 and beyond until additional information became available. In its January 2010 partial response to the charge, ASRAC made the following three recommendations:

1. that the Senate approve the request to hold the 2011 University Commencement on Sunday, May 15th in Rutgers Stadium.
2. that the Senate be kept informed of planning for Commencement 2011 by having a representative of ASRAC serve on the planning committee.
3. that no decision be made about commencement dates for 2012 and beyond until (a) the 2010 commencement exercises had occurred and been evaluated and (b) planning for the 2011 commencement had progressed to the point that ASRAC's questions and concerns could be addressed satisfactorily.

Discussion and Recommendations

ASRAC has discussed the proposed move of University Commencement in spring 2012 and beyond over the course of this academic year in light of our assessment of the 2010 University Commencement and of the ongoing planning for Commencement 2011. We were not encouraged by University Commencement 2010, in which recognition of more than 1,000 liberal arts graduates who chose to graduate with SAS (rather than one of the former liberal arts colleges) was appended to the traditional all-university graduation ceremony. After the hooding of the Ph.D. candidates, there was a musical interlude during which a good portion of the platform party and nearly all the Masters and Ph.D. recipients left Voorhees Mall. In addition, many of the SAS graduates left right after being recognized, so that the president of the Rutgers Alumni Association gave his "welcome to the alumni" speech to row upon row of empty chairs. Moreover, plans for the 2011 University Commencement and school convocations have addressed some, but not all, of our concerns while raising a number of others. We have therefore concluded that we cannot make a fully informed decision concerning permanently moving University Commencement to the Sunday immediately after final exams until we have had a chance to evaluate Commencement 2011. We realize, however, that at least the date for Commencement 2012 has to be set before such an evaluation could be completed. We therefore put forth the following recommendation:

ASRAC recommends that the Senate approve moving the 2012 University Commencement to Sunday, May 13, 2012, but defer making a decision concerning the dates for subsequent commencements until ASRAC has had the opportunity to perform a thorough evaluation of the success, or lack thereof, of Commencement 2011.

A subcommittee of ASRAC members will gather data for the evaluation of Commencement 2011 over the summer and the full committee should complete its evaluation and make a recommendation concerning approval of permanently moving University Commencement to the Sunday following final exams by January 2012.

Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee

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