

Rutgers University Senate
Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee
(Partial) 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. Respond to Senate Executive Committee by January 2010.

Background

For the last several years, University Commencement was held on Voorhees Mall on the Wednesday afternoon following the end of the spring final exam period. The commencement set-up on the Mall was used the following day for the Rutgers College Commencement. 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 once SAS begins to graduate a full senior class (2011), it will not be possible to accommodate the SAS graduating class and guests on Voorhees Mall.

After considering various options, the ad-hoc commencement committee recommended that beginning in spring 2011, University Commencement be moved to Rutgers Stadium, be held early on the Sunday afternoon immediately after the spring final exam period, and be followed directly by the SAS graduation ceremony. The proposed move to Sunday was designed to alleviate traffic and other logistical problems caused by the very large SAS graduating class, to make it easier for the families of the graduates to attend, and to encourage many more Bachelors recipients and their families to attend University Commencement. It was envisioned that by holding University Commencement on Sunday right before the SAS graduation, the ceremony would become a more widely attended and noteworthy celebration for the whole university community, similar to commencement exercises at many other large universities.

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. Initially, University Commencement was scheduled for Wednesday, May 19, but this provoked widespread complaints due to that date coinciding with the Jewish holiday of Shavuot. In response, it was proposed that University Commencement be rescheduled for Sunday, May 16, and the liberal-arts-college graduations for the following Monday and Tuesday.

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 at its meeting of September 4, 2009. Although disturbed by not having been consulted earlier, the Executive Committee, 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.

Committee Discussions

ASRAC considered this charge at its meetings on September 25 and October 23, 2009. Vice President Qualls (now a non-senator member of ASRAC) was present at the September 25th meeting, together with Senior Executive Assistant Michelle Brazier from the Office of Undergraduate Education, to answer questions concerning the proposed changes in commencement schedules. Vice President Qualls made it clear to the Committee that a decision with respect to the 2011 commencement date was needed by early in 2010 in order to give the University sufficient time for planning the 2011 commencement ceremonies.

ASRAC members present had no major objections, in principle, to holding University Commencement on a Sunday afternoon; indeed they agreed that this would enable many family members to attend the ceremony without having to take time off from work and might well increase the number of graduates and family members in attendance. Many members objected, however, to holding University Commencement (at which Masters and doctoral candidates from the Graduate School – New Brunswick, Mason Gross, and GSAPP traditionally receive their diplomas) and the SAS graduation only two working days after the last final exams are given. This would mean that many faculty members would not have enough time to submit their grades before commencement and that more than a few students would walk across the stage at graduation not knowing whether or not they were going to receive a May degree. Moreover, we fear that the pressure on faculty members to submit grades in a timely manner would dissipate and some students would be left for an extended period not knowing whether or not they had graduated and could therefore move on to the next phase of their life. The majority of ASRAC members present at the October 23rd meeting expressed the opinion that holding University Commencement and the SAS graduation ceremony on the Sunday a week after the end of the final exam period would be a better choice than holding them the previous Sunday or on a weekday in between. Others, however, believe that that proposal simply isn't practical.

Some ASRAC members also have concerns about appending the SAS graduation to University Commencement, including the logistical challenges that this would create (parking, crowd control, etc.) and the disruptive effect on University Commencement of large numbers of people wandering in early for the SAS graduation. While coupling the two ceremonies would probably increase the number of graduates and guests attending University Commencement, we fear it would turn what should be a joyous celebration for the whole Rutgers community into essentially the prologue to the SAS graduation ceremony.

Recommendations

After much discussion, ASRAC agreed to recommend approval, on a trial basis, of the proposed changes in the commencement schedule for 2011. However, we are not prepared to make a recommendation concerning commencement in 2012 and beyond until additional information is available. Our formal recommendations are therefore as follows:

1. ***We recommend that the Senate approve the request to hold the 2011 University Commencement on Sunday, May 15th in Rutgers Stadium.***

2. *We recommend that the Senate be kept informed of planning for Commencement 2011 by having a representative of ASRAC serve on the planning committee.*
3. *We recommend that no decision be made about commencement dates for 2012 and beyond until (a) the 2010 commencement exercises have occurred and been evaluated and (b) planning for the 2011 commencement has progressed to the point that ASRAC's questions and concerns can be addressed satisfactorily.*

2009-2010 ASRAC

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| Cotter, Martha, GS-NB (F), Co-chair | Kaplan, Eric, SAS-NB (S) |
| Schantz, Daniel, Newark Staff, Co-chair | Katz, Harriet, Law-C (F) |
| Adam, Nabil, GS-N (F) | Kornmehl, Jason, SAS-NB (S) |
| Barnett, Paul, CCAS (S) | Kukor, Jerome, GS-NB Interim Dean (A) |
| Akincigil, Ayse, SSW (F) | Leonard, Ian, Alumni Association |
| Bhuyan, Sanjib, SEBS (F) | Levinson, Nathan, Camden Staff |
| Boikess, Robert, SAS-NB (F) | Lomiguen, Christine, Student Charter Trustee (S) |
| Diner, Steven, Newark Chancellor (A) | Luo, Vincent, Engineering (S) |
| Dougherty, Christopher, Assoc. Dean, UC-C (A) | Marsh, Margaret, FAS-C Dean (A) |
| Edwards, Richard, SSW Dean (A) | Nycz, Jonathan, SAS-NB (S) |
| Goldman, Rachael, PTL-N (F) | Pilotte, Eugene, Vice Dean, SB-C (A) |
| Graziosi, Kyrie, SAS-NB (S) | Qualls, Barry, VP for Undergraduate Education (non-senator) |
| Greenberg, Douglas, Dean SAS-NB (A) <i>Admin. Liaison</i> | Schaffner, Nathaniel, Engineering (S) |
| Greenhut, Victor, GS-NB (F) | Vodak, Mark, SEBS (F) |
| Gunkel, John, Associate Dean, UC-N (A) | Wang, Yuchung, GS-C (F) |
| Hanebrink, Paul, SAS-NB (F) | Weiss, Valerie, SAS-NB (S) |
| Kalelkar, Mohan, SAS-NB (F) | White, John, MGSA (S) |
| Kanj, Wael, Engineering (S) | Wu, Yi-Jung, GSE (S) |