



Report on the
St. Thomas University Spring Reading Week Survey
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Summary

The St. Thomas University Spring Reading Week Survey was designed to gauge the preferences of the St. Thomas community concerning the timing of the spring reading week. Specifically, the survey was created at the request of the Vice-President (Academic and Research) in response to discussions at the University of New Brunswick concerning the possibility of revising the timing of the UNB spring break.

The survey results suggest that the preference of the St. Thomas community is to maintain the status quo, with 59% of respondents preferring that the spring reading week be scheduled in the first week of March to coincide with the New Brunswick public school break. The preference for this option was stronger among students and staff than among faculty. It should also be noted, however, that just under half of respondents (48%) believe that it is important that STU and UNB share the same spring break schedule, although aligning the two institutions is more likely to be important for students taking or planning to take courses at UNB and faculty teaching or expecting to teach at UNB.

Introduction

The survey was conducted online from January 17-24, 2019 with open invitations distributed on the STU student, faculty, and staff email lists and posted on the STU website. The survey was anonymous and confidential. No prize incentive was offered.

The estimated full- and part-time student population at the time of the survey was 1875, the estimated full- and part-time faculty population was 162, and there were 96 staff and administration employees. Due to the likely differences in concerns and circumstances among the three subpopulations, the results of the survey were analysed both *in toto* and by separate subpopulation.

In total, 354 respondents completed the survey, including 236 students, 68 faculty members, and 50 staff or administration employees. This represents approximately 13% of the student population, 42% of the faculty population, and 52% of staff. Although calculating a precise response rate is impossible due to the delivery methodology, the estimated overall response rate is approximately 17%.

Table 1. Distribution of Responses by Role

Q. Which of the following best describes your role at St. Thomas?

	N	%
Faculty member	68	19.2
Staff/administration	50	14.1
Student	236	66.7
Total	354	100

Alignment with UNB

All respondents were asked whether it is important to them that STU and UNB have the same spring reading week. In total, 164 respondents (47.5%) reported “Yes” and 181 (52.5%) reported “No.” While a large majority of faculty members (73.5%) and a smaller majority of staff (53.3%) indicated that maintaining the same spring reading week as UNB was not important to them, a small majority of students (53.9%) reported that it *was* important to maintain the same timing.

Table 2. Importance of STU/UNB Alignment by Subpopulation

Q. Is it important to you that STU and UNB have the same spring reading week?

	Total	Yes		No	
		N	%	N	%
Faculty member	68	18	26.5	50	73.5
Staff/administration	45	21	46.7	24	53.3
Student	232	125	53.9	107	46.1
Total	345	164	47.5	181	52.5

Not surprisingly, students taking courses at UNB are much more likely to prefer that the two institutions maintain the same reading week schedule.

Table 3. Students: Importance of STU/UNB Alignment

Q. Is it important to you that STU and UNB have the same spring reading week?

	Total	Yes		No	
		N	%	N	%
All Students ¹	232	125	53.9	107	46.1
Students taking/planning to take courses at UNB	46	38	82.6	8	17.4
Students not taking courses at UNB	185	87	47.0	98	53.0

¹ “All” includes one student who did not respond to the UNB course question.

Similarly, faculty teaching or expecting to teach at UNB were more likely to prefer that the schedules be aligned, although not to the same extent as students studying at UNB.

Table 4. Faculty: Importance of STU/UNB Alignment

Q. *Is it important to you that STU and UNB have the same spring reading week?*

	Total	Yes		No	
		N	%	N	%
All Faculty members	68	18	26.5	50	73.5
Faculty teaching or expecting to teach at UNB in the near future	12	7	58.3	5	41.7
Faculty not teaching or planning to teach at UNB	56	11	19.6	45	80.4

Preferences

The clear preference among all three subpopulations is to maintain the status quo, scheduling the spring break in the first week of March. The preference is stronger among students and staff. 31% of faculty would prefer the third week in February, while a similar percentage of staff had no preference. In total, 59% of respondents preferred the current timing.

Table 5. Preferences by Subpopulation

Q. *Which of the following options do you prefer for the timing of spring reading week?*

	Students		Faculty		Staff/Admin		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
First week of March (continuing to coincide with the NB public school break)	144	62.6	29	43.3	28	62.2	201	58.8
Third week in February (incorporating the NB Family Day holiday)	16	7.0	21	31.3	1	2.2	38	11.1
Fourth week in February	36	15.7	8	11.9	2	4.4	46	13.5
No preference	34	14.8	9	13.4	14	31.1	57	16.7
Total	230		67		45		342	

Summary of Comments

Respondents were invited to comment on their preferences. In general, the comments reflect the distribution of preferences.

Many students stressed the importance of aligning with the public school break, both for students with children and for those who wanted to spend time with their younger siblings. Some students focused on the impact of the timing of the break on work load, although their opinions varied in this regard.

Although some faculty comments also focused on the importance of aligning with the public schools, others expressed a preference for a February break for pedagogical reasons, and noted that decoupling the reading week from the school March break would highlight the academic purpose of the break.

Relatively few staff members provided comments. Some noted that, since they do not have the time off from work, they had no preference. Some preferred reading week to be coordinated with the school break. One suggested that an earlier break would be preferable, since students “burn out before reading week.”