RESOLUTION 2021-009

A RESOLUTION ADVOCATING FOR ADEQUATE INSTRUCTIONAL BREAKS TO SUPPORT
GRADUATE STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND SCHOLARLY PRODUCTIVITY

Authors: Abby Grief.2, Chair, Health, Wellness, and Safety; Kathryn Holt.351, Chair, Arts and Culture; Aviva Neff.336, Chair, Academic Affairs
Sponsor: Executive Committee

WHEREAS the Council of Graduate Students (CGS) is the representative body of all graduate students enrolled at The Ohio State University as established by Article 2, Section 1 of the CGS Constitution; and

WHEREAS the Council of Graduate Students or its appointed representative(s) have the power to act as an advisory agent on behalf of graduate students on all matters brought before personnel, committees, or agencies of The Ohio State University involving the interest of graduate students as established in Article 3 Section 3 of the CGS constitution; and

WHEREAS, on September 11th, 2020, The Ohio State University students received an email from Provost Dr. Bruce McPherson, stating that “There will be no spring break. Instead, there will be two instructional breaks — on Tuesday, Feb. 9, and Wednesday, March 31 — where there will be no classes. This approach will keep our community together throughout the semester and reduce travel-related exposures”; and

WHEREAS graduate student representatives were not involved in the decision-making process that led to the decision to eliminate spring break; and

WHEREAS the Council of Graduate Students has previously and unanimously opposed the continuation of unnecessary in-person instruction and advocated to move all instruction online where possible until adequate testing, contact tracing, and isolation/quarantine resources are available, and Franklin County is downgraded to a Level 1 Public Health Emergency; and

WHEREAS graduate students experience rates of depression and anxiety that are 6 times greater than that of the general population, some of the reasons being difficulty maintaining work-life balance, Imposter Syndrome, discrimination, and harassment; and

WHEREAS studies show that high rates of depression, anxiety, and other clinical mental health diagnoses amongst graduate students, along with a lack of access to adequate support resources, leads to detrimental consequences such as higher instances of suicidal thoughts; and

WHEREAS mental health in graduate students has declined since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic due to a shrinking job market, and upheaval within the academic environment where student work, take classes, and conduct research; and

WHEREAS, according to The Ohio State University COVID-19 Safe Return to Campus Survey Report for Ohio State Students, Faculty and Staff, students had the highest anxiety level, followed by staff and faculty (% with GAD score ≥ 3, 39%, vs. 29%, vs. 25%), and the highest depression level followed by staff and then faculty (% with PHQ-2 Score ≥ 3, 24% vs. 10%, vs. 7%); and

WHEREAS, according to The Ohio State University COVID-19 Safe Return to Campus Survey Report for Ohio State Students, Faculty and Staff, graduate students reported highest prevalence of anxiety, while prevalence of depression was second highest among Columbus campus graduate students; and

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1 https://cgs.osu.edu/blog/a-resolution-against-the-plan-to-return-to-campus/
WHEREAS, as stated in The Ohio State University “Emotional Fitness Tips and Skills for Mental Health,” many students look forward to spring break to relax, rest, and recharge; and

WHEREAS OSU “Emotional Fitness” states that spring break is beneficial for catching up on sleep, resting the brain, minimizing screen time, eating well, spending time outside, catching up with loved ones (even virtually), self-care activities, and the opportunity to improve mental health; and

WHEREAS the American Psychological Association states that taking short breaks from graduate school can be “a relief from the usual routine of graduate student life, and [they] can ensure that sustained focus and improved productivity prevail during intervals of the day that are strictly devoted to graduate school-related activities”; and

WHEREAS, given the multiple roles graduate students fill on campus as students, instructors, researchers, mentors, administrative assistants, and more, single-day instructional breaks do not provide an adequate break from obligations and responsibilities; and

WHEREAS graduate teaching associates will be deprived of necessary time dedicated to instructional administrative responsibilities, such as grading and writing lesson plans in addition to advancing their personal scholarly agendas.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the Council of Graduate Students stands in opposition to the current plan to replace spring break with two single-day instructional breaks; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Council of Graduate Students strongly urges the university to implement an alternative solution to contain the spread of COVID-19 that allows graduate students adequate breaks to rest, recharge, and attend to their mental health needs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Council of Graduate Students advocates for opportunities for respite including but not limited to reinstatement of a week-long spring break followed by a return to virtual instruction for the remainder of the semester or inclusion of at least two additional, consecutive instructional breaks in the current academic calendar; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Council of Graduate Students advocates that any alternative to the traditional spring break should provide graduate students with an equivalent number of days off to the week-long spring break; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Council of Graduate Students is dissatisfied and concerned with the lack of graduate student representation on the relevant task force and overall lack of attention to graduate student mental health and wellbeing in the decision-making process; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Council of Graduate Students demands graduate student representation on all future task forces and implementation committees tasked with making decisions regarding the academic calendar during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Council of Graduate Students directs its President and Vice President to distribute this resolution to The Ohio State University President Kristina M. Johnson, Executive Vice President and Provost Bruce McPherson, Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate School Alicia Bertone, Vice President for Student Life Melissa Shivers, Vice President for Government Affairs Stacy Rastaukas, and the Chair of the Council on Student Affairs Jordan Vadja, and all other relevant leadership and authorities of The Ohio State University and its partners.

3 Return to campus survey report
4 https://u.osu.edu/emotionalfitness/tag/spring-break-mental-health/
5 https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2012/01/academic-life#:~:text=Even%20taking%20these%20short%20breaks,to%20graduate%20school%2Drelated%20activities
Approved: Yes/No

Date: __11/6/20____

Stephen J. Post, President

Council of Graduate Students at The Ohio State University