TO: Chancellor Borrego

FROM: Dan Lair, Chair, Academic Affairs Advisory Committee

DATE: March 25, 2018

SUBJECT: Changes to Academic Calendar

For the past year, the Academic Affairs Advisory Committee has been exploring revising the Academic Calendar Guidelines. While these guidelines were originally adopted in 2001, and updated after a 2004 Academic Calendar Task force, but have often not been put into practice—in fact, for the past several years, AAAC was even unaware of their existence.

Because the Guidelines have not driven the construction of the calendar in recent years, but also contained several inaccuracies (e.g., they assume that the calendar cannot begin before Labor Day), AAAC undertook a process of exploring the creation of new calendar guidelines that would reflect many of our current practices and generate possibilities for new, updated practices as well.

Over the past year, AAAC has been actively engaged in soliciting feedback from the campus community regarding the academic calendar, including conducting a faculty survey in Winter 2017, as well consultation with the various academic units and Student Government. In this process, we have heard a number of consistent concerns about our calendar scheduling practices—most notably the short break between Fall and Winter Semesters.

Our goal is to create a set of guidelines that will facilitate the calendar creation process and result in academic calendars that better serve the interests of our academic community. With these guidelines, we will be able to put into place three-year slates of calendars, rather than our current practice of creating calendars one academic year at a time. Creating such guidelines will require a substantial departure from many of our current practices and, as such, will take some time to develop. In the meantime, we must first create an academic calendar for 2019-2020. As we work towards a long-term solution, however, we would like to begin implementing changes to address community concerns with the calendar.

Therefore, AAAC is proposing that in the 2019-2020 calendar, Fall Semester should begin on Wednesday, August 28, 2019. That date represents a substantial departure from recent practice, though it is a return to a longer-term historical norm for this campus. We are asking for support for this change, and your assistance in facilitating the process of switching to a pre-Labor Day start in our academic calendar going forward.

In the faculty survey we conducted in April 2017, 67% of faculty members rated having a longer break between Fall and Winter Semesters as the most important principle they would wish to guide construction of our academic calendar (17% rated it the second-most important
principle). Our student government representatives inform us that students share this concern as well. From our research, allowing for a longer break between Fall and Winter Semesters is important for several reasons. For students, a longer break between semesters is advantageous because it creates greater for flexibility for work, time with family, and travel. This latter consideration is particularly important for international students, who face substantial challenges stemming from the high cost of holiday travel and a compressed period in which they can travel. For faculty, a longer break will ensure adequate time to finish grading in Fall courses, create more space to prepare for Winter Courses, and create more focused time for research and other work. A longer break will also create a longer window of administrative time for end- and beginning-of-semester business.

Creating such a break is exceedingly difficult without starting Fall semester before Labor Day, however. Our survey indicated that such a change enjoys widespread faculty support, with 41% of faculty indicating they were extremely likely and 17% that they were somewhat likely to support such a change. Our further conversations with faculty in the various units indicates that support for this move might be even stronger if it would truly yield a longer break. It will.

Attached is a proposed calendar for 2019-2020. Our understanding from Beth Manning is that an August 28 start date is workable from an HR standpoint, though it would require some conversation with LEO. We recognize as well that there will be other offices on campus who will have to adjust their practices as well, and we would like to be able to begin those conversations immediately.

Cc: D. Knerr

Enclosures:  Proposed 2019-2020 Academic Calendar
             Academic Calendar Guidelines Survey, April 2017