1. **What were your reasons behind suggesting a "fall breather" to your faculty?**

Our University is committed to retaining our freshmen, and more generally serving first generation students. But we begin the year with a fall semester featuring an 11 ½ week gauntlet, unrelieved (unlike very many of our competition schools and aspirant peers) by any official break. Many students come to us never having gone to a school system that met for even 7 consecutive complete weeks. The results? We know that our students are less well, physically and mentally, and as that long slog drags on, less able to study and concentrate and do their best work. Even faculty get exhausted, and they start getting sick in noticeably larger numbers in November. If a spring break of nine days makes sense for these constituents, why wouldn’t a formal fall break of just a Monday and Tuesday, a four day weekend, make at least as much sense? It takes the whole University to change the schedule—the support of student government last year was a good start. But as an individual, I felt I could invite faculty to schedule the necessary work in their courses so that one weekend would be without homework. It’s entirely voluntary, I suspect it’s mostly going to happen in CLAS, but if enough faculty choose to do it, we might get to see a little of the positive impact. So, ask your teachers if they’ve scheduled a Fall Breather this year.

2. **When will this break take place?**

It’s not a true break, just a breather: I’ve invited CLAS faculty, and anyone else who’d choose to join, to plan to give no reading, no assignments, no homework for the weekend before the drop deadline (October 24)—that is, the **weekend of October 18 and 19**. Faculty are not being asked to schedule any less work, just to schedule around that weekend.

3. **Do you have full participation from your faculty?**

I don’t know, and I have no intention to check up. Some courses don’t lend themselves to this, and other faculty may just choose not to. It’s entirely voluntary. I just hope we have enough faculty participating so a significant number of students get enough of a break so students and faculty can give us their impressions.

4. **Do you think/suggest that the university adopts a fall break in the future? How would this benefit students?**

I do. It won’t cure all ills, but a 4 day weekend could do a lot in the students’ and faculty’s interest. I suspect people would be healthier, I think they would have the physical energy and mental focus and be more in a frame of mind to learn in their courses through the whole month of November. And here’s a potential gain: we’ve all seen the dip in attendance as Thanksgiving comes on. If people are feeling better as a result of a Fall Break, perhaps fewer of them would be declaring their own breaks on Thanksgiving Tuesday and Monday and even the week before. Net attendance could go up. And it occurs to me that a student could use a Fall Break in another way: if you’re behind in a course, you can catch up—and perhaps there might even be some small step forward in courses successfully completed, and time to graduation. There are lots of good reasons to try scheduling a Fall Break, if we only have the will.

5. **Any other information you could include?**

We learned last year about how different degree programs, internships, clinical placements and other cool things that Grand Valley enables students to do obstruct some students in some programs. And we all feel inertia in the face of change. But somehow good universities, including ones we model ourselves after and try to emulate, find some way to do something like this. We grow up hearing ‘where there’s a will, there’s a way.’ GVSU has every bit as much flexibility and inventiveness as other places; we can find a way. What we lack right now is the will. And that’s where students and faculty come in. If enough of the people who do the work in classrooms, studios, labs, clinical settings, etc. raise their voice, I believe change can happen—change that doesn’t shortchange any of the majors and courses that seemed to have problems with the idea.

A lot of students come to college because they want to learn the lessons and skills that will enable them to make positive changes in the world. The first lesson is that change is hard, and requires persistence. The second lesson is that if you truly believe in something—rather than thinking, yeah it’d be cool if someone else did that—then you express that belief by persisting, and working with people who have trouble with your first idea to see if there’s a common ground of compromise. No compromise is going to strike everyone as perfect, but surely we can think of lots of alternatives that could be better for students than what we have. Where there’s a will, there’s a way. CLAS’s Fall Breather is an attempt to see if the will is there—most importantly among students.