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## **Enhancing student mental health behind University of Lethbridge decision to approve a fall reading break**

The University of Lethbridge continues to introduce initiatives that address the mental health and well-being of its students, approving the implementation of a fall reading break for the 2016 Academic Schedule.

The break will run Nov. 7-10 and, with Remembrance Day included, amounts to a full week away from classes in the midst of the Fall 2016 Semester. The University has traditionally incorporated a spring reading break into its academic schedule, and will continue to do so.

“The University’s students and faculty saw this as a priority and we are pleased that we have a solution that is so well supported,” says Susie Kennedy, U of L registrar. “We are always looking at strategies to better support our students and put them in the best possible position to succeed in their studies.”

The University’s General Faculties Council initiated discussions on whether a fall reading break should be added to the academic schedule and a work team was created that included faculty members, graduate and undergraduate student representatives, as well as stakeholders from the U of L’s northern campuses, the registrar’s office and ancillary services.

Further consultation through the Strategic Enrolment Management Committee and open meetings resulted in overwhelmingly positive feedback to implement the fall break.

“This break will have a positive impact on students and is consistent with the Students’ Union goal to advocate on the importance of student mental health,” says Brenna Scott, president of the University of Lethbridge Students’ Union. “The first semester can be a stressful one for students, especially new students that are still adjusting to the transition to university life. This break will not only give students the breather they need mid semester, but will help them in achieving academic success. I am thrilled to have the University’s support of this initiative and glad to see this break becoming a reality.”

The U of L has been active in enhancing its student supports in recent years, specifically highlighting student mental health and wellness. The creation of the Student Success Centre was one such initiative and just this fall, the University became the first Canadian post-secondary institution to join The Jed & Clinton Health Matters Campus Program in support of student well-being and mental health.

“Student demand for counselling services has never been greater,” says Dr. Mark W. Slomp, manager of Counselling and Career Services and acting director of Student Services. “A fall reading break will bring much needed relief to students at a time when it is most needed.”

Dr. Judith Lapadat, associate vice-president (students), adds that the approval of a fall break is in keeping with the University’s overarching philosophy towards mental health.

“I am very pleased that the University has committed to student wellness in such a significant and concrete way,” says Lapadat. “The addition of a fall reading break builds on a lot of excellent work that is being done under the auspices of the provincial Mental Health Grant to support student mental health.”

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