

## SRC Survey for 12 Week Semesters

### Sampling Strategy

The survey was promoted via a two-fold strategy that aimed to capture the widest range of student respondents. The first aspect of the strategy was to promote the survey via the SRC's public-facing social media channels, including our Facebook page, our email list (which students sign up to during Welcome Week), websites (such as our website and the *Honi Soit* website) and in the *Honi Soit* paper itself. The second aspect of the strategy was to promote the survey through unaffiliated channels. These included the Facebook pages, groupchats and email lists of Faculty Clubs & Societies and student Facebook groups such as "USYD Discussion Group" and "USYD First Year Group".

### Survey Results

#### Survey Preamble:

The University is proposing a move from a 13-week semester (current system) to a 12 week semester (similar to Semester 2 2020). This survey is designed to gauge the opinions of undergraduate students in relation to the proposal. A similar survey for PG and HDR students can be found here (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JWVZY8L>). The details of the proposal are as follows:

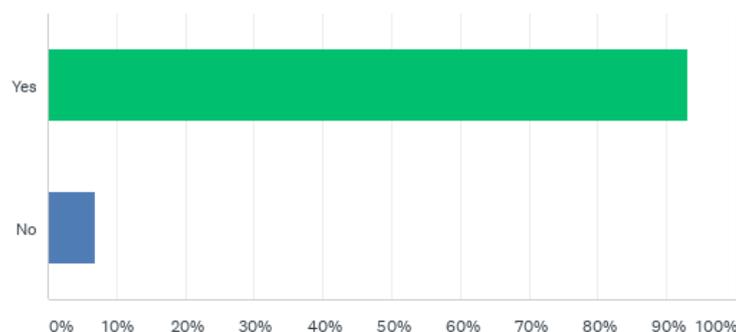
- The "introductory" and "course guidance" week at the start of the Semester will be removed.
- The amount of course content will not change, only the length of semester.
- There will be no change to fees.
- A shorter semester is designed to allow for greater summer and winter intensive teaching.

#### Question 1 – Are you an undergraduate student?

[Yes/No question, required]

Answered: 375. Skipped: 0.

#### Q1 Are you an undergraduate student?



375 students responded to the survey overall, of which 349 were undergraduates. 26 students who were not undergraduates also completed the survey, with most of these being students undertaking masters or Juris Doctor degrees.

Question 2 – What is your degree?

[Long answer question, required]

Answered: 375. Skipped: 0.

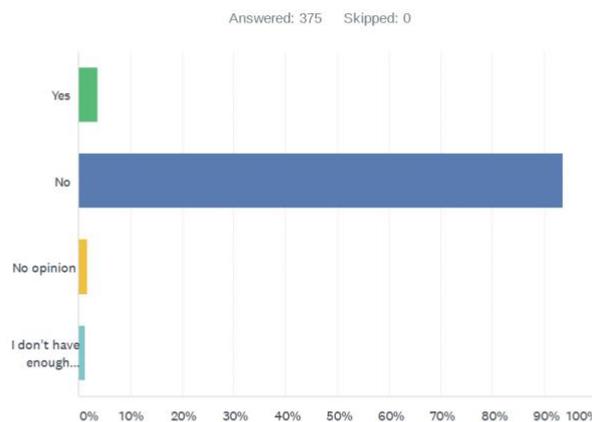
This survey was answered by students across the undergraduate cohort. The top four degrees of students were Arts, Science, Commerce/Economics, and Law, with combined degrees or Advanced Studies streams making up a large proportion. Engineering and Advanced Computing students also made up a significant part of all respondents. Other students undertook degrees in the schools and faculties of Architecture and Design, Music, Occupational Therapy, Project Management, Social Work, Visual Arts, and Veterinary Sciences.

Question 3 – Do you support the change in semester length?

[Multiple choice question, required]

Answered: 375. Skipped: 0.

Q3 Do you support the change in semester length?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	3.47% 13
No	93.60% 351
No opinion	1.60% 6
I don't have enough information to decide	1.33% 5
TOTAL	375

**Overwhelmingly, students who completed the SRC survey did not support the change in semester length to 12 weeks, with 93.60% of students answering that they did not. Of the 375 respondents, only 13 (3.47%) explicitly supported the change, with the other 11 students undecided or without enough information.**

Question 4 – Please explain why you do or don't support the change in semester length.

[Long answer question, optional]

Answered: 349. Skipped: 26.

**Students who support the change**

Of the thirteen students who said that they agreed with the 12-week semester plan, seven cited either longer holidays or shorter semester length as the reason behind this. Most of these students point to being overwhelmed in university and needing a break. Other students suggest that some courses don't have heavy amounts of content and could be taught in a shorter time than they have experienced it.

## **Students who do not support the change**

The 351 students who responded that they do not support the proposed change of a decrease in semester length had a variety of reasons for this response, as outlined below.

- **Same work in less time.** The biggest concern that students raised was that maintaining the same workload in less time would make the semester too busy and unmanageable for many students. This has many varied implications. Most working students already do not have the freedom to spend as much time on their studies as they would like, and many students indicated that they already find the workload of university to be too intense. This would only be exacerbated by cramming the same content into one less week. Students raised that they would be less inclined to take difficult or advanced courses as they know that they would not be able to learn or perform well while so pressed for time. Students are also less likely to remember content past the time of their assessments without adequate time to sit with it. In addition, students are concerned about the impact of this on their mental health and believe that the stress will become overwhelming.
- **Course orientation, administration, and reading** – Students are explicit about the value they find in an extra week at the beginning of semester, beyond course content. Some of the benefits noted in the survey include:
  - Flexibility – figure out if particular units of study, majors, or even degrees are what students want to do. Allows time to change subjects in the first week without falling behind in content
  - Understanding the style of teaching and administration, including weekly course content, assessments, objectives and requirements
  - Getting into the routine of university, particularly for first year students
  - Settling into Sydney
  - Meeting people in classes
  - Time to buy textbooks, readers and other equipment (e.g., lab-coats)
- **Decreased education quality** – With less time to learn but the same number of assessments needing to be included, students worry that they will be taught content to fit to the assessments, rather than being taught to learn, and then needing to apply this to assessment tasks. Students worry that content will be taken out, and that they will receive a less comprehensive education. In particular, students in courses with placements worry that a decreased semester length would mean that they do not fulfil the experience requirements necessary for a qualification.
- **Stress and Mental Health** – Students cite worrying about how they will personally cope with the increased workload that this change would bring about, with many confident that their mental health would suffer as a result.
- **Less teaching time for the same course cost** - Students indicated that the most value they gain from university is having time in the classroom with teachers and peers. Despite the university indicating that there would be an extended online orientation in place of the first ‘introductory week’, this is clearly not a sufficient replacement for students, who value in-person teaching and are concerned with the concept of this being reduced where their fees are not. Students clearly do not accept that they would have to pay the same fees for a reduced quality of learning. International students who pay significantly higher fees are particularly concerned and feel that the quality of their education already doesn’t correspond with the level of fees paid, especially if online.

- **Specific course concerns** - Students in specific courses pointed to the fact that in their courses there is already no ‘introductory week’. From first week of university, tutorials or practical classes begin, and the content is heavy and assessable. These courses include law, music (at the Conservatorium), physio, and engineering. As such, cutting the first week of classes would directly impact the in-class time of students, and subsequently, the amount of content able to be taught. This change would also have a heightened impact on practical classes where skills are taught which prepare students for the rest of the course or degree, or where projects and experiments are bound by time constraints. This includes engineering, science, and architecture.
- **Intensive classes** – Many students point to the fact that they would not be able to undertake intensive classes for a number of reasons. This includes the university not offering relevant classes for their courses in intensive periods, such as at the Conservatorium or in the law faculty. Students also express that they do not want to undertake intensives, simply because they would like a holiday from their intense time at university and believe that their formal learning should remain within semester times. Other undertake full-time work, research projects or internships in the holidays, many of which are essential to the students’ livelihood or degree and career progression.
- **Burden on staff** – Many students show concern for teaching staff, in particular casual staff, and the effect that such a move would have on their workloads.
- **Remote learning** – Students undertaking remote classes bring up concerns that online teaching already produces poorer learning outcomes which would be exacerbated by the proposed change.

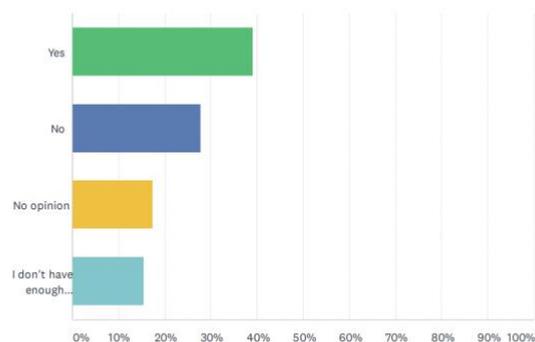
Question 5- The University is proposing to increase the number of intensive teaching units held in Summer and Winter school. Do you support that increase?

[Multiple choice question, optional]

Answered: 373. Skipped: 2.

Q5 The University is proposing to increase the number of intensive teaching units held in Summer and Winter school. Do you support that increase?

Answered: 373 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	39.14%	146
No	27.88%	104
No opinion	17.43%	65
I don't have enough information to decide	15.55%	58
TOTAL		373

Question 6- Please explain why you do or don't support this change

[Long response question, optional]

Answered: 270. Skipped: 105

Students who supported the increase in intensive units did so for the following reasons:

- Students are able to reduce their study load during Semester 1 and 2 and still stay on the degree progression that they would like
- Students are able to finish their degree faster
- Students would find it easier to transfer between degrees
- Allows students the opportunity to re-do subjects they have failed without harming their degree progression

However, many students who supported the increase in intensives were clear that they did not support it at the cost of the quality or length of the semesters.

Many students indicated that they would like their holiday to be a break from university and so they would not undertake intensive units even if more were offered. Students also cite needing to work or undertake research programs or internships in the holidays as a reason for not supporting increased intensives offered.

In addition, the following concerns were raised by students:

- Some subjects work as intensive courses, whereas others do not and should not be offered in the intensive sessions as the quality of learning would be harmed
- An increased number of intensive students may increase the pressure on students to do university the whole year without a break
- Some faculties do not offer intensives, such as law, or the Conservatorium
- Teachers would not have enough support or time off if they taught in all or most teaching sessions

Question 7 - If you do support the change in semester length, what do you think the university needs to do to ensure its success?

[Long answer optional question]

Answered: 164. Skipped: 211

Many students answered this question, not just students who supported the change in semester length as per their response in Question 3.

Students gave the following answers:

- Fees need to reflect the change in teaching length
- The university would need to ensure that all faculties utilise intensive units
- Reduce the study load by decreasing content
- Decrease assessment loads
- Plan assessment dates to ensure the study week remains and that assessments do not overlap more than students can deal with
- Unit of Study must be uploaded more ahead of time so students can familiarise themselves with the course
- Extend the time during which students can change subjects
- Make a help centre specific to each faculty to decrease the burden on the Student Centre which is often insufficient
- More hands-on tutorials required
- Increase student support throughout semester so students are less likely to fail
- Reduce the difficulty of exams

Many students reiterated that they do not think the university would be able to make this change without harming the quality of students' education and university experience.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the surveyed students overwhelmingly did not support a reduction in semester length. While the representativeness of the survey may be prejudiced by the small number of students surveyed (relative to the overall student body), a wide cross-section of students was nonetheless included. Students independently provided reasons for why they did not support the proposal, and these reasons were consistent with the issues flagged by the SRC in its initial submission to the DVC Education. While further consultation may be required, all indications suggest that students are broadly not in favour of the proposal.

### Acknowledgements

This survey and report were only possible due to the hard work of Priya Gupta, Sharon Maher, Francine Seeto, numerous faculty club & society executives and many others.