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### Message regarding graduate education and five break days in Spring 2021

Now that the university has made the decision to have five one-day breaks rather than a contiguous week-long break for Spring'21, it is important to reflect upon the impact upon graduate students specifically and the ways in which they will be impacted. Graduate students are pursuing their degrees primarily through coursework and research, and graduate students also serve as graduate assistants (GTA, GA, GRA) for the tripartite missions of Virginia Tech.

Traditionally spring break (and Fall and Thanksgiving breaks) has provided a time to take a mental and sometimes physical break from their courses, research, and assistantship responsibilities. Our graduate students are balancing these responsibilities as well as family and other life commitments.

Mental and physical wellness of our graduate students are very important. On the break days, no courses, no assignments, and no related work are to be assigned or due, nor are assignments to be made that are timed so as to expect progress during the days off (see statement from Provost). Additionally, there should be no expectation of research responsibilities. Just as important is a break from assistantship responsibilities and expectations. Graduate students on full time assistantships are expected to work 20 hours/week and on those weeks with the one day break, the expectation of hours to be worked is 16 (not 20 or more). We must be committed to ensuring that the graduate students really get a break. They need the respite during a long semester that is likely to be more taxing due to the pandemic, and so do our faculty members.

I suggest that graduate students and their advisors/supervisors plan accordingly. Please join me in helping our graduate students get the rejuvenating breaks they deserve.

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