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The Fall Pause: An Overview of the Current Canadian University Landscape and a Review of the Related Emerging Literature

Daniel B. Robinson

St. Francis Xavier University, drobinso@stfx.ca

Erin Andrews

St. Francis Xavier University, erin.andrews@fmprsd.ab.ca

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The Fall Pause: An Overview of the Current Canadian University Landscape and a Review of the Related Emerging Literature

Abstract

In recent years, many Canadian universities have added a Fall Pause to their academic calendars. However, those who have been making these decisions have been doing so without having access to any resources that provide an overview of existing Fall Pause practices or models across the nation. Additionally, there exists a paucity of literature that provides a sound rationale for the introduction of a Fall Pause. This paucity of literature makes research-informed decision making about the introduction of a Fall Pause an especially difficult task. Given these observations, we have undertaken the task of writing this article with two goals in mind: (a) to provide an overview of the current Canadian university landscape with respect to the Fall Pause; and (b) to provide a scoping review of the related emerging literature related to the Fall Pause. With this information made available, it is our hope that university faculty and administrators will be better positioned to make informed decisions about the possible introduction or continued inclusion of a Fall Pause in their own universities' schedules. They, and we, might also then be able to have a better (informed) sense of the research-based outcomes for those who have already introduced and/or experienced a Fall Pause.

Depuis quelques années, de nombreuses universités canadiennes ont ajouté un congé d'automne à leurs calendriers universitaires. Toutefois, celles qui ont pris cette décision l'ont fait sans avoir accès aux ressources qui fournissent un aperçu des pratiques relatives au congé d'automne ou aux modèles d'un bout à l'autre du pays. De plus, il n'existe que très peu d'études qui fournissent un justificatif solide pour l'introduction d'un congé d'automne. Cette quasi absence de publications fait en sorte que la décision basée sur la recherche d'introduire un congé d'automne devient une tâche particulièrement difficile. À la lumière de ces observations, nous avons entrepris la tâche de rédiger cet article avec deux objectifs en tête : (a) fournir une vue d'ensemble du paysage actuel des universités canadiennes en ce qui se rapporte au congé d'automne, et (b) fournir un examen de la portée des publications émergentes connexes qui se rapportent au congé d'automne. Avec ces renseignements devenus disponibles, nous espérons que les professeurs et les professeures, ainsi que les administrateurs et les administratrices d'universités, seront mieux préparés à prendre des décisions éclairées sur l'introduction possible ou la continuation d'inclure un congé d'automne dans leurs calendriers universitaires. Ils pourront, et nous aussi, être également en mesure de mieux comprendre les résultats basés sur la recherche pour ceux et celles qui ont déjà introduit et/ou fait l'expérience d'un congé d'automne.

Keywords

fall pause, reading week, higher education, students, academics; congé d'automne, semaine de lecture, enseignement supérieur, étudiants et étudiantes, universitaires

Background

For many years within Canada, university students have been afforded a weeklong pause of coursework in their second (winter) semester. Though some universities and their students might offer differing labels for these pauses (e.g., Spring Break, Reading Week), what is common to all is that they occur mid-term—when students might catch up on coursework, review or study for exams, and/or take a break or holiday from schooling. Within recent years, some Canadian universities have introduced a second weeklong pause during students' first (fall) semester. This Fall Pause has become commonplace in some provinces' universities, while it remains absent in others.¹

For faculty and administrators in Canadian universities who might be considering the introduction of a Fall Pause, there are currently no resources that provide an overview of existing Fall Pause practices or models across the nation. This absence makes informed decision making difficult, as decision makers at Canadian universities are functionally forced to search, university-by-university, for what is occurring elsewhere. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, there is a paucity of literature that provides a sound rationale for the introduction of a Fall Pause. This paucity of literature makes research-informed decision making about the introduction of a Fall Pause nearly impossible. Given these observations, we have undertaken the task of writing this article with two goals in mind: (a) to provide an overview of the current Canadian university landscape with respect to the Fall Pause; and (b) to provide a scoping review of the related emerging literature related to the Fall Pause. With this information made available, it is our hope that university faculty and administrators will be better positioned to make informed decisions about the possible introduction or continued inclusion of a Fall Pause in their own universities' schedules. They, and we, might also then be able to have a better (informed) sense of the research-based outcomes for those who have already introduced and/or experienced a Fall Pause.

The presumed rationales for the introduction of a Fall Pause at various Canadian universities are varied and, at the same time, sometimes unclear. That is, it is difficult to find these rationales shared in any purposeful, systematic, or comprehensive manner. Indeed, one must rely, almost entirely, upon news-media sources to gain an appreciation for, and understanding of, these rationales. Consider, for example, the following. At Mount Royal University (MRU), university president David Docherty has been clear about his university's rationale: "we feel strongly that the timing of this break will be extremely beneficial to students' mental health and well-being" (Tucker, 2016, para. 2). Notably, the introduction of MRU's Fall Pause followed the recommendation of its own President's Task Force on Student Mental Health (Tucker, 2016). At Ryerson University (Ryerson), where students have enjoyed a Fall Pause since 2011, students have recognized the mental health benefits that come from being afforded "breathing room" while at the same time gaining opportunities to reconnect with family and/or prepare for upcoming midterms (MacLeod, 2018). The University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) piloted a Fall Pause for two years before reassessing it. Mirroring the rationale (and timing) of their February Reading Week, U of T Mississauga suggested a Fall Pause would "allow students to catch up, get focused, and spend some serious time reading and understanding the material presented to them" (U of T Mississauga, n.d.). The University of Waterloo (Waterloo) introduced an even more cautious (and calculated) approach, piloting a Fall Pause for three years before piloting it for three additional years. Again, Waterloo rationalized that the pause would encourage students to "prepare for the rest of term,

¹ We use the term "Fall Pause" within this article for all universities' breaks. We recognize that others may use different terms, and that no term is universally used.

which may include studying for upcoming midterms, catching up on readings and assignments, or taking some time for rest and personal wellness” (University of Waterloo, n.d., para. 2). At St. Francis Xavier University (StFX), almost 98% of the student body participated in a survey related to the then potential introduction of a Fall Pause. Those survey results gave the StFX Students’ Union a clear mandate to (successfully) push for the introduction of that university’s Fall Pause, so that students could “study, take a mental break, and contribute to their holistic success” (MacLennan, 2019, para. 6).

While these rationales might exist for these universities’ introduction of a Fall Pause, others have their own reasons for not affording their students the same break. The University of British Columbia (UBC), for example, has hesitated to introduce a Fall Pause. This hesitation has been largely due to concerns related to having students (and faculty) return to fall classes before September’s Labour Day long weekend or sitting fall final exams on Sundays (Ubysey Staff, 2017). These concerns lie alongside many at UBC (including its Alma Mater Society Mental Health and Well-being Commissioner) also recognizing that a Fall Pause might be one way of considering students’ mental health and well-being (Qualizza, 2015). McGill University (McGill) has similarly been hesitant to introduce a Fall Pause, identifying some of the same constraints. For example, McGill students and faculty have pushed back against a pre-Labour Day start date. They have also been vocally opposed to a shorter (winter) holiday break and a more intensive exam period with weekend exams (McGill Reporter Staff, 2017).

The Canadian University Landscape

Within Canada, there exists a large number of universities and colleges. Most are public institutions (and, generally, secular), though a small number are private institutions (and, generally, religious-based). Our consideration here is purposely delimited to the 94 members of Universities Canada (formerly Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada).² Among other things, this delimitation enables us to focus upon those Canadian universities which “meet strict criteria and adhere to set principles of institutional quality assurance” (Universities Canada, n.d., para. 2). This delimitation also allows us to disregard smaller unfamiliar institutions that do not meet these same criteria (some of these smaller unfamiliar universities that are not members of Universities Canada include Winnipeg Technical College in Manitoba and Dominican University College in Ontario). The 94 universities we consider here are spread across the country, from west to east as follows: 11 from British Columbia, eight from Alberta, six from Saskatchewan, six from Manitoba, 30 from Ontario, 18 from Québec, one from Newfoundland and Labrador, four from New Brunswick, one from Prince Edward Island, and nine from Nova Scotia. It is also our understanding that these 94 universities are fully autonomous, all with a government charter.

Of the 94 universities in Canada, 59 have a week-long Fall Pause and another 17 have shorter one- to four-day pauses (some of which are actually spread over two weeks; one other has a five-day pause spread over two weeks). Seventeen have no Fall Pause of any sort. Eight of Canada’s 10 provinces have at least one university with a week-long Fall Pause. In fact, in five of these eight provinces, the majority of the universities now have a Fall Pause of one full week in length. Outliers include British Columbia (where only two of 12 universities have a Fall Pause, one of which is only three days long), as well as Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island (where neither province’s lone university has a week-long pause, though both now have a two-day

² For the remainder of this article, we refer to all 94 members of Universities Canada as “universities” though some are listed as “colleges” (e.g., Luther College, St. Thomas More College).

pause). The lengths of these Fall Pauses vary, as do the actual dates of them. See Table 1 for a province-by-province overview of these 94 universities' Fall Pauses, including the durations and dates of them.

Table 1
Provinces' Universities' Fall Pauses, Durations, and Dates

| Province | University | Pause; # of Days | Dates |
|----------|---|---------------------------|------------------------|
| BC | Emily Carr University of Art & Design | No | N/A |
| BC | Kwantlen Polytechnic University | No | N/A |
| BC | Royal Roads University | No | N/A |
| BC | Simon Fraser University | No | N/A |
| BC | Thompson Rivers University | No | N/A |
| BC | Trinity Western University | No | N/A |
| BC | University of British Columbia | No | N/A |
| BC | University of Fraser Valley | No | N/A |
| BC | University of Northern British Columbia | No | N/A |
| BC | University of Victoria | Yes; 3 | Nov 11-13 ^d |
| BC | Vancouver Island University | Yes; 5 | Nov 11-15 ^d |
| AB | Athabasca University | No | N/A |
| AB | Concordia University of Edmonton | Yes; 5 | Nov 11-15 ^d |
| AB | The King's University | Yes; 2 ^a | Nov 13 ^e |
| AB | MacEwan University | Yes; 3 ^a | Nov 12-13 ^d |
| AB | Mount Royal University | Yes; 5 ^a | Oct 9-12 ^e |
| AB | University of Alberta | Yes; 5 ^a | Nov 13-16 ^e |
| AB | University of Calgary | Yes; 5 ^b | Nov 11-17 ^e |
| AB | University of Lethbridge | Yes; 5 ^b | Nov 9-15 ^d |
| SK | Campion College | Yes; 4 ^{b, c} | Nov 6-9 ^d |
| SK | First Nations University of Canada | Yes; 4 ^{b, c} | Nov 6-9 ^d |
| SK | Luther College | Yes; 3 ^b | Oct 19-23 ^d |
| SK | St. Thomas More College | Yes; 5 ^b | Nov 11-16 ^d |
| SK | University of Regina | Yes; 4 ^{a, b, c} | Nov 6-9 ^d |
| SK | University of Saskatchewan | Yes; 5 ^b | Nov 11-16 ^d |
| MB | Brandon University | Yes; 5 ^a | Nov 13-16 ^e |
| MB | Canadian Mennonite University | Yes; 3 ^{a, c} | Nov 7-8 ^d |
| MB | St. Paul's College | No | N/A |
| MB | Université de Saint-Boniface | Yes; 5 ^a | Nov 13-16 ^e |
| MB | University of Manitoba | Yes; 5 ^a | Nov 13-16 ^e |
| MB | The University of Winnipeg | Yes; 5 ^b | Oct 13-19 ^d |
| ON | Algoma University | Yes; 5 ^a | Oct 9-12 ^e |
| ON | Brescia University College | Yes; 5 | Nov 4-8 ^d |
| ON | Brock University | Yes; 5 ^a | Oct 9-12 ^e |
| ON | Carleton University | Yes; 5 | Oct 22-26 ^e |
| ON | Huron University College | Yes; 5 ^b | Nov 4-10 ^d |
| ON | King's University College at Western University | Yes; 5 ^a | Oct 9-12 ^e |
| ON | Lakehead University | Yes; 5 | Oct 8-12 ^e |
| ON | Laurentian University | Yes; 5 | Oct 14-18 ^d |
| ON | McMaster University | Yes; 5 ^b | Oct 8-14 ^e |
| ON | Nipissing University | Yes; 5 | Oct 8-12 ^e |
| ON | OCAD University | Yes; 5 | Oct 8-12 ^e |
| ON | Queen's University | Yes; 2 | Oct 25-26 ^e |

| Province | University | Pause; # of Days | Dates |
|----------|--|------------------------|---------------------------|
| ON | Redeemer University | Yes; 2 | Oct 25-26 ^e |
| ON | Royal Military College of Canada | Yes; 3 ^a | Oct 15-16 ^d |
| ON | Ryerson University | Yes; 5 ^b | Oct 12-18 ^d |
| ON | St. Jerome's University | Yes; 5 ^a | Oct 15-18 ^d |
| ON | Trent University | Yes; 5 ^b | Oct 19-27 ^d |
| ON | University of Guelph | Yes; 2 ^a | Oct 15 ^d |
| ON | University of Ontario Institute of Technology | Yes; 5 ^{a, b} | Oct 15-20 ^d |
| ON | University of Ottawa | Yes; 5 ^b | Oct 13-19 ^d |
| ON | University of St. Michael's College | Yes; 5 | Nov 4-8 ^d |
| ON | University of Sudbury | Yes; 5 | Oct 14-18 ^d |
| ON | University of Toronto | Yes; 5 ^a | Oct 15-18 ^d |
| ON | University of Trinity College | Yes; 5 | Oct 22-26 ^e |
| ON | University of Waterloo | Yes; 3 ^a | Oct 9-10 ^e |
| ON | University of Windsor | Yes; 5 ^b | Oct 12-20 ^d |
| ON | Victoria University | Yes; 5 | Nov 4-8 ^d |
| ON | Western University | Yes; 5 ^a | Oct 15-18 ^d |
| ON | Wilfrid Laurier University | Yes; 5 ^a | Oct 15-18 ^d |
| ON | York University | Yes; 5 ^b | Oct 6-12 ^e |
| QC | Bishop's University | Yes; 1 | Nov 5 ^d |
| QC | Concordia University | No | N/A |
| QC | École de technologie supérieure | No | N/A |
| QC | École nationale d'administration publique | Yes; 5 | Oct 14-18 ^d |
| QC | HEC Montréal | Yes; 5 ^{b, c} | Oct 16-22 ^d |
| QC | Institut national de la recherche scientifique | Yes; 5 | Oct 21-25 ^d |
| QC | McGill University | No | N/A |
| QC | Polytechnique Montréal | Yes; 5 ^b | Oct 12-18 ^d |
| QC | Université de Montréal | Yes; 5 | Oct 21-25 ^d |
| QC | Université de Sherbrooke | Yes; 5 | Oct 21-25 ^d |
| QC | Université du Québec à Chicoutimi | Yes; 5 ^a | Oct 9-12 ^e |
| QC | Université du Québec à Montréal | No | N/A |
| QC | Université du Québec à Rimouski | Yes; 5 | Oct 21-25 ^d |
| QC | Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières | No | N/A |
| QC | Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue | Yes; 5 ^b | Oct 28-Nov 3 ^d |
| QC | Université du Québec en Outouais | Yes; 5 | Oct 14-18 ^d |
| QC | Université TÉLUC | No | N/A |
| QC | Université Laval | Yes; 5 | Oct 28-Nov 1 ^d |
| NL | Memorial University of Newfoundland | Yes; 2 | Oct 14-15 ^d |
| NB | Mount Allison University | Yes; 5 | Nov 11-15 ^d |
| NB | St. Thomas University | Yes; 5 | Nov 11-15 ^d |
| NB | Université de Moncton | Yes; 5 | Oct 29-Nov 2 ^e |
| NB | University of New Brunswick | Yes; 5 | Nov 11-15 ^d |
| PE | University of Prince Edward Island | Yes; 2 ^a | Nov 12 ^d |

| Province | University | Pause; # of Days | Dates |
|----------|--------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| NS | Acadia University | Yes; 5 | Oct 28-Nov 1 ^d |
| NS | Cape Breton University | Yes; 5 | Nov 11-15 ^d |
| NS | Dalhousie University | Yes; 5 | Nov 11-15 ^d |
| NS | Mount Saint Vincent University | Yes; 5 | Nov 11-15 ^d |
| NS | NSCAD University | Yes; 3 | Oct 24-26 ^e |
| NS | Saint Mary's University | Yes; 5 | Oct 14-18 ^d |
| NS | St. Francis Xavier University | Yes; 5 | Oct 14-18 ^d |
| NS | University of King's College | Yes; 5 | Nov 11-15 ^d |
| NS | Université Sainte-Anne | Yes; 5 | Oct 21-25 ^d |

^a University's publicized Fall Pause dates do not include a bordering holiday and so true Fall Pause *weekdays* are listed here; ^b University's publicized Fall Pause dates include additional weekend days and so true Fall Pause *weekdays* are listed here; ^c Weekday Fall Pause days are spread over two weeks, rather than occurring within a single week; ^d Fall Pause dates are for the 2019-2020 academic year; ^e Fall Pause dates are for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Three key observations can be made from this information. They include the following: (a) there are inconsistencies across and within provinces with respect to the offering and the timing (within the semester) of Fall Pauses; (b) there is an observable tendency for most universities to tie the Fall Pause to one of two existing national holidays (Thanksgiving and Remembrance Day); and (c) among those universities with a Fall Pause, there exists differences across provinces and their institutions in terms of the durations (two to five days) of them, as well as the designated labels for them.

Offering and Timing of Fall Pauses

The majority of the Universities Canada members offer a Fall Pause of some nature. The information presented in Table 1 points to an inconsistent uptake of a Fall Pause nationwide, and also within provinces. For example, of the 18 Universities Canada members for the province of Québec, 12 offer a Fall Pause (11 for a full week) while the remaining six do not. Furthermore, there is a huge variance nationwide when it comes to the timing within the academic semester during which a Fall Pause is offered. While some Universities Canada members schedule a Fall Pause as early as the first week of October, others may be much later, falling between early- and mid-November. So, not only is the existence of a Fall Pause inconsistent across the nation but so, too, is the timing of those that are in place.

Connecting the Fall Pause to an Existing Holiday

There is also a tendency for the majority of Universities Canada members to tie an offered Fall Pause to an existing school holiday. For example, a number of institutions affix their Fall Pause to either the Thanksgiving or Remembrance Day holidays. It is also not uncommon for institutions to include an existing school holiday within the publicized Fall Pause dates. That being said, there are a small number of Universities Canada members that offer Fall Pauses as standalone days without an "absorbed" holiday. For example, Carleton University in Ontario provides students with a five-day Fall Pause occurring at the end of October which does not border or include an existing holiday. In contrast, both British Columbia universities that offer a Fall Pause connect it directly to the existing Remembrance Day holiday within the school calendar.

Durations and Designated Labels

The durations of Fall Pauses offered across Canadian universities vary widely. As detailed in Table 1, the number of weekdays included ranges from one to five. Universities that do offer a Fall Pause generally seem to afford students at least two weekdays, while others provide a full academic week without classes (i.e., five days). Beyond the disparity in duration of the Fall Pause, there is also minimal congruence in the naming of the event. The designated labels within Canadian universities can include, but are not limited to, Fall Break, Study Day(s), Reading Break, Reading Day(s), and Student Development Day.

Review of Related Emerging Literature

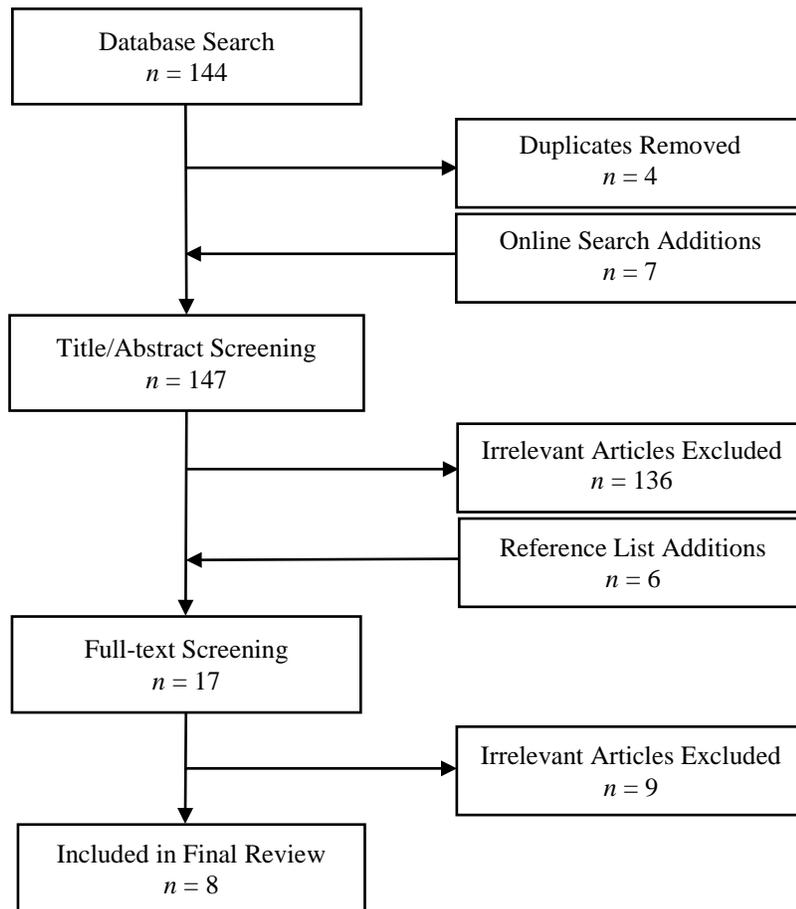
Herein we share results from a scoping review of the existing emerging literature related to the Fall Pause. It is important to note that, unlike more traditional systematic reviews, scoping reviews aim to offer a “snapshot of a particular topic” (Booth et al., 2012, p. 19) rather than a critical assessment of research quality. So, as McEvoy et al. (2015) have explained regarding these sorts of exercises, this scoping review is a charting venture rather than an evaluative one.

Search Boundaries and Results

An initial literature search of the keywords “spring break” or “study break” or “study week” or “reading week” or “fall pause” (in title, keywords, or abstract) was conducted using five common electronic databases: ProQuest Research Library (ProQuest), Journal Storage (JSTOR), SAGE Journals Online, ScienceDirect, and Web of Science. The databases were chosen because, together, they encompass a comprehensive catalogue of (higher) education-related literature. The searches were limited to English, peer-reviewed journal articles published between July 1st, 1999 and June 30th, 2019 (a 20-year period). Furthermore, a series of open and restricted access digital journal repositories were reviewed for relevant content. These included Google Scholar, Academia, and ResearchGate, as well as journal-specific websites (specifically the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* and *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*).

This initial search, specific to the above-noted five common databases, yielded 144 articles (140 once all exact and close duplicates were removed). An additional seven articles were added at this stage, as a result of additional online searches. These additional online searches resulted in the identification of some grey literature—some of which is included in this review. Title/abstract screening of 147 articles and full-text reviews of the subsequent 17 articles resulted in a total of (only) eight being included in this review. This title/abstract screening process resulted in many articles being identified as unrelated to our focused topic. For example, some were related to undergraduate students’ emotional well-being or academic success (with no mention of a Fall [or Winter] Pause), some were related to outreach initiatives during exam weeks, and some were related to students’ vacation destinations and the restorative qualities of those vacations (during the Christmas recess). While we had been hopeful to find more than the eight articles included within this review, we unfortunately came up with no others; this presents an obvious limitation in some of the conclusions we share in the following sections. Our entire screening process is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Review Process and Results



Of these eight publications, seven are from Canada. Five are from peer-reviewed journals, and the remaining three are classified herein as grey literature. The peer-reviewed articles are all research articles and include a number of aims and research designs. For example, one is experimental and two are correlational-descriptive. The two others employ mixed-methods research designs. One of the grey literature sources details a quasi-experimental research study, while the other two are effectively position papers from two Canadian universities (i.e., Western University [Western] and University of Guelph [Guelph]).

Findings

The findings from this review of the existing limited literature reveal little in terms of supporting some of the previously mentioned commonly found arguments for the inclusion of a Fall Pause at Canadian universities. The limited literature that does exist forms around the periphery of the topic, maintaining a significant knowledge gap specific of the efficacy of the Fall Pause to support and enhance the university student experience. Considering this, the reviewed literature nonetheless offers some insight into the Fall Pause, particularly as it relates to student stress and mental health and wellness (see Table 2).

Table 2*Publications' Findings and Relevant Conclusions Related to a Fall Pause*

| Author(s), Year, Country | Publication | Participants (P) and Data Source(s) (DS) | Aim (A) and Research Design (RD) | Relevant Conclusion(s) |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Cramer & Pschibul, 2017, CAN | <i>Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching</i> | P: undergraduate students (<i>n</i> = 177) DS: survey responses | A: to investigate the time usage and levels of perceived stress, academic workload, and recreation time before, during, and after a Fall Pause RD: correlational- descriptive | Students' perceived stress after a Fall Pause was compared with how they spent their time before and during the break. Students who spent their time engaged in schoolwork before and during a Fall Pause reported less stress (and academic workload) following the break. Conversely, reported stress increased for students who spent more time recreating during a Fall Pause. |
| Harvey & McGuire, 2012, CAN | Grey Literature | P: N/A DS: N/A | A: to contend that a break of one to two days is appropriate as both a selling point for the university (Western) and a means to stem mental health-related issues for students RD: N/A | This paper supports the implementation of a Fall Pause at Western. In so doing, the paper proposes that student mental health would be promoted and the university would be offered a competitive advantage. The authors indicate that adoption of this policy would point to the university's concern for student mental health, success, and well-being. |

| Author(s), Year, Country | Publication | Participants (P) and Data Source(s) (DS) | Aim (A) and Research Design (RD) | Relevant Conclusion(s) |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Hulls et al., 2018, CAN | <i>Proceedings of the Canadian Engineering Education Association</i> | P: undergraduate students (n = 194) DS: survey responses, combined with course grades and focus group interviews | A: to examine the effects of a Fall Pause on course performance and investigate students' perceptions of a Fall Pause RD: mixed-methods (correlational/descriptive and qualitative) | Students shared some concerns about the negative impacts of a Fall Pause. A significant portion (29%) of first year students regretted how they spent their Fall Pause when asked at the end of the term. The study results also pointed to negative impacts of a Fall Pause on academic performance on final course exams. Thus, students may need assistance with how to effectively study, particularly when left with unstructured time during a Fall Pause. |
| Khan et al., 2018, CAN | <i>The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning</i> | P: undergraduate students (n = 16 [control group, n = 5; experimental group, n = 11]) DS: cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) hormone levels, collected through saliva samples | A: to determine the ratio of two stress-related metabolic hormones (before and after a Fall Pause) RD: experimental | Students who experienced a Fall Pause exhibited a marginally lower ratio of cortisol to DHEA afterwards than did those who did not experience the break. The authors suggested this is indicative of lower stress for the experimental group. Thus, a Fall Pause provides a marginal effect on stress levels for students. |

| Author(s), Year, Country | Publication | Participants (P) and Data Source(s) (DS) | Aim (A) and Research Design (RD) | Relevant Conclusion(s) |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Poole et al., 2017, CAN | <i>Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching</i> | P: undergraduate students (student surveys: $n = 997$ [pre-Fall Pause respondents], $n = 1444$; [post-Fall Pause respondents], $n = 1146$ [follow-up respondents]; self-reported time usage: $n = 595$; hormonal assessments: $n = 16$ [control group, $n = 5$; experimental group, $n = 11$]; focus groups: $n = 42$) DS: cortisol and DHEA hormone levels, collected through saliva samples, survey responses, self-reported time usage, focus group interviews | A: to measure the ratio of two stress-related metabolic hormones before and after a fall break, and to determine how a Fall Pause affects the workload and stress levels of undergraduate students RD: mixed-methods (experimental, correlational/descriptive, and qualitative) | Pre-Fall Pause stressors are general in nature (e.g., related to future, boring classes, sleep deprivation) and post-Fall Pause stressors are related to academic responsibilities (e.g., deadlines, projects due, upcoming academic difficulties). Students who experienced a Fall Pause exhibited a marginally lower ratio of cortisol to DHEA afterwards than did those who did not experience the break. While students appreciated the additional time to be with friends and family, rest, engage in leisure activities, catch up on course reading materials, and study for midterms, they also recognized negative impacts of a Fall Pause on course and midterm scheduling. |
| Poole et al., 2018, CAN | <i>Canadian Journal of Higher Education</i> | P: undergraduate students ($n = 997$ [pre-Fall Pause respondents]; $n = 1444$ [post-Fall Pause respondents]; $n = 1146$ [follow-up respondents]) DS: survey responses, focus group interviews | A: to address the gap in the literature about the efficacy of a Fall Pause on mental health of post-secondary students with the aim to investigate one important component of mental health (student stress) RD: correlational-descriptive | Although students reported experiencing fewer life event stressors after a Fall Pause than they did before it, they experienced higher levels of overall stress. The presented link between a Fall Pause and student stress is consistent with research on the relationship between stress and vacations in non-student samples. Thus, although stress usually drops during vacation, it often increases to pre-vacation levels once an individual resumes work; this is the case with a Fall Pause. |

| Author(s), Year, Country | Publication | Participants (P) and Data Source(s) (DS) | Aim (A) and Research Design (RD) | Relevant Conclusion(s) |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|--|--|--|
| Resch, 2015, USA | Grey Literature | P: undergraduate students (control group, <i>n</i> = 387; experimental group, <i>n</i> = 459) DS: survey responses | A: to examine how social awareness and sensitivity of mental health in a university setting is a key component for individuals to flourish academically and grow personally RD: quasi-experimental | A more frequent assignment schedule helped students increase confidence and overall grades while reducing anxiety and stress. Collected data outline considerations and suggestions for improving student mental health— one being the introduction of a Fall Pause. |

As already mentioned, local media sources and universities' communications suggest that a Fall Pause ought to be offered to students so that they may, as one possibility, engage in leisure activities with family and friends. Generally, these same sources and communications suggest such opportunities for leisure time during a Fall Pause will help alleviate stress for students. However, some of the reviewed research has shown that these two things may be incompatible. That is, Cramer and Pschibul (2017) found that students who spend more time recreating during a Fall Pause report an increased level of stress upon their return to class (the opposite was found for those who spent the Fall Pause attending to their academic workloads). Relatedly, Hulls et al. (2018) found that a sizeable percentage of students regretted how they spent their Fall Pause, and that they returned to class overstretched and overburdened with coursework and/or readings they had effectively neglected while on break. Also, and perhaps not surprisingly, those students who regretted how they spent the Fall Pause earned lower grades in their coursework than did their peers upon returning to class. So, while it might seem intuitive to believe that affording university students a week off during the term will result in them being able to return to class carrying less stress, the opposite is true for some—specifically for those who recreate and/or procrastinate during the week. So, with respect to their stress levels, after a Fall Pause, these students return to class in worse shape.

While Cramer and Pschibul (2017) may have found that perceived stress levels for those students who attended to coursework during the Fall Pause were lower when they returned (and, again, this was not the case for those who recreated and/or procrastinated), Khan et al. (2018) and Poole et al. (2017, 2018) found that all students (i.e., those who did schoolwork and those who recreated) experienced marginally lower levels of stress upon their return (compared to those who did not have a Fall Pause). So, it is important to recognize that though there is some agreement here within the limited available literature, there also remains some disagreement. That is, the limited literature related to stress is equivocal, if not also incomplete.

In either case, it is also worth noting that Poole et al.'s (2017, 2018) student participants still recognized that the Fall Pause had a negative impact upon the scheduling of their courses, assignment due dates, and their scheduled midterm dates. Certainly, time taken—especially five days' worth of it—out of a normal schedule so that a Fall Pause can be offered needs to be replaced somehow. That is, if a five-day pause is to be added into an existing academic schedule, the classes that would normally occur during those five days must still occur—before the normal term would have begun or after it would have ended. This places new “pressure points” upon students' academic schedules and responsibilities. Students may need to start classes earlier and/or finish later. Their instructors may also be forced to assign coursework and/or schedule exams at altogether different times; these different times can have different intentions and/or consequences. For example, one instructor (or department or university) might load work before a Fall Pause (so as to give students a true break afterward) while another might load work after a Fall Pause (so as to give students dedicated preparation time). It is important to note that these sorts of potential burdens and consequences feared by those who have rejected a Fall Pause (e.g., those at UBC and McGill) have been realized by students in universities that have introduced one. That is, they certainly have ample reason to fear these sorts of burdens and consequences as they are the very things being faced by students with a newly introduced Fall Pause.

A common rationale for the introduction of a Fall Pause is to assist students in their pursuit of mental wellness. The literature (e.g., see Aherne, 2001; Beiter et al., 2015; Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013) generally supports the notion that university students can face considerable challenges as it relates to their overall mental health. Proponents of the Fall Pause, ostensibly, point to its potential to support students navigating mental unwellness. Harvey and McGuire (2012), Poole et al. (2018),

and Resche (2015) support this very point. So, some of the Fall Pause's popular mental-health related goals—as they have been reported in mainstream and site-specific media sources—are supported by this limited research. It is important to note, however, that these mental health-related outcomes are presented, in some of these publications, more or less, as envisioned possibilities rather than realized and measured outcomes.

Notwithstanding what might be gleaned from these findings, it is important to recognize that the body of literature related to the Fall Pause, particularly as it might be beneficial to university students, is very limited. We would concede that not much can be made of such a shallow pool of literature. But this is all that exists, presently. There simply is not much literature from which to draw many meaningful conclusions.

Moreover, despite our intentions to avoid evaluating research and research designs within this scoping exercise, we must also concede that there are additional limitations to be found in some of the references cited herein. More specifically, we are suggesting that an additional degree of skeptical caution might be in order when considering the limited number of journals from which these articles are located. Additionally, three of these studies (Khan et al., 2018; Poole et al., 2017, 2018) are from the same researchers and are seemingly related to the same research project. If these three studies are viewed in this way (i.e., as one), there remains even less literature to consider.

Suggestions for Future Practice and Inquiry

Given the comprehensive picture we have of Fall Pause practices across Canada, as well as the limited literature related to them, we have identified three needs that ought to be attended to, by us and by those like us in the academe. These needs relate to the following: researching Fall Pause outcomes and challenging evidence-free claims, sharing “in-house” findings, and embracing caution. Here, we offer some suggestions for future practice and inquiry as they relate to these outstanding needs.

Need to Research Fall Pause Outcomes and Challenge Evidence-free Claims

Given the limited research literature related to the Fall Pause and its outcomes for students—particularly in an environment where such deliverable outcomes are roundly espoused by many—additional research is needed. Future research might consider: (a) what students actually do during a Fall Pause (e.g., at sites where a Fall Pause has been introduced to afford students study time); (b) how stress and/or mental health is impacted by a Fall Pause, during and afterwards (e.g., at sites where a Fall Pause has been introduced as one mechanism to alleviate student stress and/or mental health unwellness); and/or (c) how a Fall Pause actually might contribute to isolation and unwellness for marginalized or “doubly disadvantaged” students (e.g., at sites that have adopted socially just and inclusive orientations to enrollment and instructional practices; see Jack, 2019). Such research ventures might consider a host of data sources including, for example, social media messaging, listserv messaging, surveys of university presidents/senior administrators, and/or surveys of students.

Relatedly, it is imperative upon those in the academe, particularly upon those who offer or are considering offering a Fall Pause, to challenge evidence-free claims about what a Fall Pause can deliver. While it certainly would be a noble intention to provide for students Fall Pause time so that they could better succeed academically (or so that they could be more mentally well), it is unwise to make that offering without any evidence for these sorts of claims. Such decisions ought

to be evidence-informed rather than evidence-free. And, as we have previously mentioned, we are wanting for such broadly shared and/or peer-reviewed evidence.

Need for Canadian Universities to Share their In-house Fall Pause Findings

Though we have suggested that we are wanting for broadly shared and/or peer-reviewed evidence related to the Fall Pause, we know that some Canadian universities, themselves, have collected some data on their own campuses. While some of our grey literature shared here (i.e., from Western and Guelph) gives some insight into a Fall Pause at specific institutions, we know other universities have undergone different manners of systematic inquiry. We know this because some of these “reports” are listed on universities’ websites (though access to them is not given to the general public, or sometimes to those outside a small circle of insiders at a university). Also, some of these Canadian universities (e.g., U of T Mississauga, Waterloo) have chosen to pilot (and review) a Fall Pause before making a more permanent commitment. Access to these pilot reviews would be helpful to many—not just to those at U of T Mississauga or Waterloo.

So, while publications (and ideally peer-reviewed publications) may provide the best way for the broader Canadian university community to access such important data, we also would suggest that institutions could share this information by way of any number of other possible channels. For example (and we concede some of this may have happened), academic vice-presidents at universities in the same province or across the country might make a purposeful effort to share this sort of information, particularly given that all are either offering a variation of a Fall Pause or are considering doing so.

Need to Embrace Caution when Adding or Continuing with a Fall Pause

Finally, given the need for more research in this area, a need for a healthy degree of skepticism when considering evidence-free claims, and the as-of-yet unrealized potential for all universities to share their in-house data related to their own iterations of a Fall Pause, those universities that are yet to introduce a Fall Pause must embrace some caution when adding a Fall Pause. This caution applies, too, to those with a Fall Pause in place if they are to continue the offering. We would suggest that U of T Mississauga and Waterloo ought to be viewed as exemplars in this respect. Piloting a Fall Pause before a wholesale adoption of one makes the most sense.

Concluding Comments

We work at one of the Canadian universities that recently introduced a one-week Fall Pause. At the time that the Fall Pause was first being considered, we held no strong beliefs in favour or against the proposal. We encountered colleagues like us, though we also encountered others who held very strong opinions—on both sides. In the end, we offered our support for the introduction of a Fall Pause. Yet, we know that we made this decision based on faith rather than reason. And, that has caused us some degree of unresolved angst.

Those who introduced the Fall Pause proposal at our university offered rationales not unlike those shared herein (e.g., that students might catch up on coursework, review or study for exams, and/or take a break or holiday from schooling). Importantly, they were also clear to explain a Fall Pause would be good for students and for students’ mental health. We believed these things were possible, but we recognized that these outcomes were being touted without any accompanying evidence—save for the testimonials of a small number of students. We do not mean to suggest

these testimonials were not real (nor valid), nor that these suggested outcomes were unlikely. Indeed, some of the testimonials were compelling and, as we have since seen, some of the idealized outcomes have been realized elsewhere. We are just suggesting, as did one of our colleagues at the time (who was especially opposed to introducing a Fall Pause), that we were making the decision without a suitable body of supportive literature.

We are also not saying we made the wrong decision. What we are saying is this: we and others should do this research, engage with this research, and make research-informed decisions about Fall Pauses moving forward. With this assertion, we recognize that our work herein is only a starting point—for us and for others.

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