

BRIEFING NOTE

ATTENTION	Senate Calendar Committee
SUBJECT	Welcome Day Programming Spring Term 2026
DATE	Friday, October 24, 2025
ED SPONSOR	Erin Biddlecombe – Executive Director, Student Affairs
UNIT/DEPARTMENT	“Welcome Day Working Group” chaired by Student Engagement & Retention in partnership with Faculty representatives, Residence & Housing, MECS, and International Services for Students
PREPARED BY	Erin Biddlecombe, Christine Barnett, Yavanna Scott, Andrea Tran

TOPIC

Shift of Welcome Day Spring Term programming from Friday, January 2, 2026 to Monday and Tuesday January 5 and 6, 2026.

BACKGROUND

1. The Senate Calendar Committee determines the dates for Welcome Day, SFU’s orientation day for new students.
2. Decades of higher education literature demonstrates that Orientation programming contributes to a positive student transition to university life.
3. Spring 2026 Welcome Day is scheduled for Friday, January 2, 2026. The group has a number of concerns about running programming on this date and has developed an alternate proposal for programming.
4. To be clear, the working group is not requesting for Welcome Day to formally be shifted by the Calendar Committee. Rather, they are seeking approval to not use the scheduled date of January 2nd and instead offer programming to students January 5 and 6.

CONSIDERATIONS

The working group identified several issues and risks associated with moving ahead with January 2nd, as follows:

1. International student arrival timing: Students travelling back to Vancouver will likely not arrive in time for January 2; most will travel over the course of the weekend (January 3-4) to arrive in time for the start of academic classes on Monday, January 5.
2. Conflict with Residence Move-in: Move-in is scheduled for Friday, January 2 all day. On this date, at least 60 exchange students and 200 new and returning students will be occupied with this event.
3. Limited staff availability: January 2nd is the Friday immediately after New Years’ Day and we understand that many staff across the University have plans to take this day off. This will result in reduced staff support for programming.
4. Campus Services may be closed or running at reduced capacity. This could impact participant safety and program offerings.

OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue with January 2nd as the date of Welcome Day programming. Potential impacts: low student turnout, low staff turnout, and limited services on campus.
2. Move programming to January 5 & 6 during blocks of time when students are least likely to be in class. Use data to determine best timing. Potential impacts: some students may need to attend class.

Recommendation: Option 2. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss with the Senate Calendar Committee about how we can avoid this type of issue in the future.

RISKS

1. Low new student attendance.
2. Minimal staffing available.
3. Possible safety implications given limited staffing of essential campus services.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. The working group would be responsible for communicating this shift to students, staff, and campus partner groups.
2. We believe this shift would be positively received by all involved.