

Report of the Academic Calendar Advisory Committee

Regarding the 4-1-4 Model

August 2009

Introduction

This report represents approximately the 15th report conducted by CSU Stanislaus to evaluate the 4-1-4 calendar model since 1973. “No single aspect of CSU Stanislaus’ operations has been debated, reviewed, reviled, praised, studied, researched, and surveyed more than its academic calendar” (Rhodes 2001, Appendix IID, p 1). That the campus has regularly re-evaluated its academic calendar model under varied presidential and faculty leaders, gives one pause. As one participant in a recent Academic Calendar Advisory Committee session wondered, “if it is working so well, why do we keep reviewing it?”

Discussions about eliminating the 4-1-4 model in favor of a semester model have occasionally in the past been perceived as a classic contest pitting efficiency against quality and administration/staff against the faculty. Mindful of this, the committee (with representatives from administration, staff, faculty and students) offers the following observations in a spirit of collegiality. Having done its best to interpret data, the committee also understands that these interpretations may not be shared universally. One outcome is certain: not everyone will be happy with the recommendations. It is the sincere hope of this committee that this report will be viewed and challenged on its merits.

It is important to state at the beginning of this report that the committee believes the development of the annual campus academic calendar to be the purview of the faculty as part of a healthy commitment to shared governance. That said, the particular model for the academic calendar is a critical element of the campus identity and has important implications for all areas on campus: academic, administrative, and cultural. The centrality of the calendar model to campus identity is reinforced in practice through the manner in which campus policies are enacted. While most actions require the validation of the President to become enacted, relatively few actions require the validation of the Chancellor’s Office—a calendar model change being one and certain mandatory student fees being another. Thus, the committee has undertaken its charge very seriously and with the understanding that their recommendations are not binding findings and would require further discussion and action. The intention is to provide a useful discussion to assist the President and standard faculty committees in evaluating the best course of action for the University.

Additionally, this report does not attempt to be an exhaustive review of all the factors relating to the 4-1-4 calendar. Ample discussion in past reports (see Appendix II) has already occurred, making restatement of much of the information redundant and unnecessary. What the committee has focused on is the cost/benefit analysis of the 4-1-4 calendar. This particular lens has not been central in past reviews. However, given our current economic situation, which threatens the core of the University, we must ask ourselves objectively if we can continue with the current calendar configuration. And having reviewed this question, we must do all that we can under difficult and evolving circumstances to be aware of the implications of changing or maintaining the current academic calendar model.

This report purposefully refers to the study topic as the “4-1-4 calendar”, not as the “winter term”, in most cases. “Winter term” is only one part of the 4-1-4 model. This is a distinction important to make. The existence of a winter term in and of itself is a common feature of many different calendar models. It is the overall application of the 4-1-4 model that has so consumed campus dialogue, not the existence per se of “winter term”.

Benefits and Detriments

The 1972 proposal for the 4-1-4 model was a replacement for the original quarter model. Campus leaders hoped that the new model would achieve benefits of both a quarter and a semester model by having longer instruction periods than the quarter, creating favorable starting and ending dates, reducing cycles for advising and registration, reducing annual course loads for students and faculty, creating better articulation with feeder institutions, increasing flexibility and innovation for curriculum, increasing student/faculty interaction, and developing a distinctive campus character that would lead to increased student enrollment. These positive characteristics continue to be cited today as benefits of the 4-1-4 calendar. Additional benefits that were shared with the committee include increased time for research and faculty refresh, attractiveness for faculty recruitment, improved student retention and graduation rates, and increased opportunity for students to achieve remediation goals or recover from probation.

Cited detriments for the 4-1-4 model are pedagogical limitations of a shortened course format for certain disciplines (foreign languages, nursing, sciences), cumbersome operational issues related to repeated cycles for admissions/advising/registration, necessary and time-consuming manual recalculation of financial aid and faculty payroll, unrealized student fee revenue, unrealized student financial aid, and diminished opportunities for consistent student programming.

Overview

It seems evident from readings of the past studies that the 4-1-4 model initially provided many of the desired improvements over the previous quarter system. (Aubert 1986, Appendix IIA, p 2). Over the years, the 4-1-4 model has become a valued part of the curriculum and much beloved by supporters, especially for its flexibility to accommodate experimental and innovative course offerings (including fieldwork and travel/study) during the winter session. This benefit was one of the original reasons for moving to the 4-1-4, and it has become one of the most influential factors cited by campus constituents in favor of continuing the model. The committee heard in-person testimonials and received written comments reinforcing the importance of the winter session to delivering creative course offerings and providing an intensive and unique teaching/learning environment that was qualitatively significant and academically enriching. However, it is only fair to acknowledge that while this was a highly valued outcome, it was but one of several desired outcomes, of which a secondary favorable outcome was to provide students with access to courses for remediation, as well as in the major and GE.

In terms of supporting the primary rationale for winter term, a cursory overview of winter term (three year period of 07, 08, 09, see table below) shows that specialty courses (highlighted) account for a small percentage (13%) of course offerings. The largest percentage of courses offered are in the Majors (approximately 41% all courses), followed by GE (23%), and Individual Study (13%).

It is important to note that the committee had limited information about the nature of the Individual Study (IS) offerings, and in at least one case it is clear that such an offering resulted in a travel/study opportunity. Remedial courses account for less than 2% of the offerings during winter.

	2007	2008	2009	Average%
GE	26.7	22.16	20.4	23.09%
Remedial	2.60	1.35	1.60	1.85%
Winter Only	3.90	4.05	4.50	4.15%
Fieldwk/res	4.50	8.11	5.10	5.90%
Internship	2.90	2.43	3.50	2.94%
IS	12.20	13.78	12.10	12.69%
Thesis	4.50	8.38	7.32	6.73%
Project	0.30	0.81	0.95	0.69%
Major course	41.10	37.84	43.90	40.95%
Travel/study	1.30	1.08	0.63	1.00%
TOTAL	100%	99.99%	100%	

Even the most favorable interpretation of data makes clear that the specially designed/innovative courses account for less than one quarter of the winter term menu.

The committee is not in a position to evaluate whether the curricular objectives are appropriate or being met with the 4-1-4 model or more specifically in winter term. There is no reason to doubt faculty colleagues in their expert assessment of the importance of winter session to the delivery of the curriculum.

Student academic success in winter term exceeds that in fall and spring, with 93.2% achieving a C or better in winter as compared to 87.8% in fall and 88.% in spring. A review of retention and graduation data was inconclusive in demonstrating a causal relationship between attendance in winter term and enhanced graduation or retention. These outcomes are dependent on many variables, and isolating the effect of the 4-1-4 or winter term on them was not possible given the material available.

Faculty participation in winter term by headcount is evenly divided between lecturers and full-time tenure track faculty (2009 data from Faculty Affairs noted 84 lecturers and 84 tenure track faculty participating). This represents approximately 34% of the full-time tenure track faculty.

Regarding student admissions, a very small number of freshmen students begin their university experience during winter term (average of 4) with transfers averaging 98 students admitted each term. With enrollment reduction, this number will be 0 for the coming year (2010), as winter and spring terms may likely continue to be closed for new admissions. Given the predicted continued economic stress in the State of California, there is little reason to expect future new enrollment during this term in the next several years. Approximately 60% of Stanislaus students enroll in winter term. See the data in Appendix I (B, G, and I) for specific enrollment data.

Discussion

All the above information would seem rather innocuous and hardly cause for winter term or the 4-1-4 to be characterized as a problem. It is very difficult for people to perceive how this modest term, favored by many faculty and students--albeit declining in delivering on the high expectations for innovative curricula (in terms of gross numbers of courses available)--could warrant criticism. However, when factoring costs, what is clear is that the 4-1-4 calendar model—and not winter term per se—delivers the educational program in an expensive, inefficient and unsustainable manner.

The CSU determines the annual fees for students. Campuses are obliged to adhere to the rate set by the Board of Trustees for the State University Fee. In 2008/09, this fee was \$3048 per year (full-time undergraduate). The fee is collected and retained by the campus. The campus also receives general fund dollars based on FTES directly from the Chancellor's Office. These two sources of funding represent almost all state funding Stanislaus receives to run the institution. Most regular semester campuses have two 15 week major terms, and the fees are divided 50/50 between the fall and spring semesters. Students at the other 18 CSUs with semester models paid \$1,524 each semester in 2008/09. At CSU Stanislaus, the calendar is comprised of two 13 week major semesters and one five week winter term. Because winter term at Stanislaus is a regular part of the state supported academic calendar, the campus divides the annual fee proportionally to span the three terms of unequal length (\$1,449 for major semesters and \$150 for winter). The campus has chosen

to divide the fee in a manner that is favorable to revenue collection. The 4-1-4 model results in fees currently being divided 47.54%/4.92%/47.54% among three terms, resulting in major semesters (with the greater numbers of students) generating less revenue than regular semester campus models because the fee has been reduced to reflect the length of the semester. The small difference applied to winter term does not make up the gap, as the winter enrollment is so much smaller. Theoretically, if the same enrollment for fall and spring were in winter, the financial gap would be closed. However, the committee found no evidence that winter term had ever achieved this feat, nor was it intended to as originally designed. What is different now, of course, are the extreme financial conditions and increased expectations for higher education institutions to be more cost-effective and accountable.

Full Time Undergraduate ONLY							
	4-1-4	# UG			semester	# UG	
Fall	\$1,449	6193	\$8,973,657		\$1,524	6193	\$9,438,132
Winter	\$150	4193	\$628,950		\$0		
Spring	\$1,449	5986	\$8,673,714		\$1,524	5986	\$9,122,664
TOTAL	\$3,048		\$18,276,321		\$3,048		\$18,560,796
Revenue Lost			\$284,475				

The \$284,475 in lost revenue for 2008/2009 is only part of the picture, as it is only calculated for the full-time undergraduates. There are similar losses in all enrollment categories (full time graduate, full-time credential, and part-time undergraduate, graduate, credential, and doctorate). The lost revenue alone from 2008/2009 was **\$445,681**. The projected lost revenue for 2009-2010 (due to the fee increases) is **\$672,234**. The committee has reviewed these numbers as presented by Russ Giambelluca, Vice President for Business and Finance (Appendix IA), and does not doubt their accuracy. In fact, the numbers do not account for increased re-distributed FTES, which might happen upon the move to a regular semester.

A similar relative distribution of the State University Fee applies to the financial aid that students are eligible to receive. To be eligible to receive financial aid, a student must complete 24 units during an academic year. However, much of this aid requires continuous enrollment across the academic calendar. If students take their 24 units only in fall and spring, the financial aid reserved for winter is lost to them. This is not just a theoretical loss. The Financial Aid Office has documented that Stanislaus students actually lost **\$430,500** in deserved financial aid because they did not enroll in Winter. This aid is not just for the State University Fee and books, but also for living expenses. Please see Appendix ID for a thorough discussion with examples of how the 4-1-4 impacts financial aid. The \$430,500 loss number does NOT include lost aid in the form of loans, as that was not easily discerned from the data reports. There are other reasons why loans may be decreased that are not linked to the term distribution (including students declining their loans); thus, this number was not presented; but the committee believes that it would increase the financial aid loss number if calculated.

The impact of the 4-1-4 on administrative workload is not inconsequential. The primary reason for the workload impact is that traditional systems for payroll and financial aid are designed for more standardized semester and quarter models, and do not exist for the 4-1-4. Since Stanislaus is part of a system of state supported colleges, it is expected to be able to report and operate within a rubric identified by the CSU system. This is the reality in which the staff must operate in order to ensure that faculty get paid according to Fair Labor Standards Act and bargaining unit requirements and that students receive aid as permitted according to Federal and State laws.

Payroll staff and academic administrators have been forced to develop convoluted processes to account properly for part-time lecturer appointments. In order to be eligible for benefits, faculty must have at least a 40% appointment according to the California Education Code. While a regular semester model would divide the 30 WTUs for a part-time lecturer into 6 WTUs each semester (meeting the 40% requirement), the 4-1-4 model requires the appointment to be established at 5 WTUs for the major terms. It is generally easy to find two 3 unit courses to meet the 6 WTU requirement, but it is not so easy to find a way to comprise the 5 WTU requirement. Adding to this is the concern that arises when breaks in service for part-time lecturers over winter term make them ineligible for benefits during that period. To manage the workload assignments of lecturers, the Faculty Affairs Office creates multiple and complex appointment assignments for the part-time faculty. Appendix IE contains a detailed explanation of this problem provided by Associate Vice President of Faculty Affairs, Dr. Ted Wendt. The committee read this analysis and met with Dr. Wendt to ensure a full understanding of the problem. The description of the labyrinthine administrative activities is exhausting in itself. The committee imagines that doing what is described is considerably more difficult than just hearing about it. A further complication for payroll is that the State Controller's Office will be moving to a new system shortly that will make managing payroll within the 4-1-4 even more complex.

Increased workload also is created for the Enrollment Services units when winter is open as an admission term and a graduation term (see Appendix IF). Because the term is so short, processing related to clearing students takes place in an overlapping and at times competing manner to the processing for fall and spring. Past staff reductions coupled with difficulties in transitioning to the new management system have created a situation in Enrollment Services where the unit's functionality is compromised to the point that simple tasks cannot be performed properly or timely. These tasks include posting grades, delivering transcripts, clearing students for graduation, and disenrolling academically disqualified students. The effect of this is distributed to students, preventing them from getting access to their academic information and from smoothly transitioning out of the University. It also has the effect of frustrating campus efforts to manage the enrollment target at a time when we are being asked to reduce FTES.

The administrative efforts described above were estimated and combined with other administrative costs necessary to support campus services directly linked to providing a winter term within the 4-1-4 model. Over 6,000 hours of staff time are expended to support the 4-1-4 version of winter term for a cost of approximately \$200,000 (salaries and benefits). The resources to pay part-time faculty to teach in winter term total \$480,000 (salaries and benefits) (see Appendix IA and C). The

committee has not focused on these dollars as being converted to cost savings under a different model for the academic calendar. While it is expected that the administration will provide appropriate services necessary to support the core mission of the University, the deployment of those resources ideally should be cost-effective. That said, the vagaries of system-wide bureaucracy and artificial constraints of software programs should not drive curriculum or pedagogy, nor prevent faculty from delivering education in the way that they know best.

The committee recognizes that past and future budget reductions have created and will continue to create impacts on all the areas of campus, one of which is increased workload due to fewer personnel. To the extent re-directing resources alleviates some of this workload impact, it would be beneficial to the overall operation of the University. The distribution of part-time lecturers is a function of the FTE, course schedule and available funding. The presence or absence of winter term as a state supported term does not per se drive part-time faculty numbers, except in a budget emergency situation, in so far as it adds expenses or deprives the University of needed resources.

One of the concerns about changing calendar models is the impact on the course schedule. Can the campus absorb re-directed FTES into the fall and spring related to classroom and schedule space? The committee did not conduct a space analysis, but notes that a move from a 4-1-4 (13 week) term where the instructional period is extended by two weeks, but where the daily class time is decreased (from 58 to 50 minutes MWF and from 87 to 75 minutes TTH), has the effect of increasing available schedule slots by 15% or 99 additional available periods per week (Aubert 1986, Appendix IIA, p 15). This increased schedule availability would also be achieved in part by extending the course offerings later in the afternoon and making more use of Friday.

It is not possible to predict accurately the effect of changing calendar models to FTE and student satisfaction. The committee notes, however, that other CSUs appear to operate in a functional manner under the traditional semester system.

Analysis

1. The CSU system and the campus will continue to experience financial hardship for the near future.
2. Re-tooling to change from a 4-1-4 model will have impacts on departments, in particular the College of Education, which has a sequence of courses required to be completed in one academic term, and the Ed.D, which utilizes winter.
3. There is no reason to doubt that there are valid and pedagogically sound reasons to deliver some courses during a winter session.
4. Student enrollments will most likely transition into the major semesters without a state supported winter session.

5. Enrollment target reduction will likely result in fewer courses available in winter and summer state supported sessions in the future.
6. There would be relief to staff workload by moving to a traditional semester model.
7. The 4-1-4 calendar model deprives the campus of resources it might otherwise realize when compared to a traditional semester model.
8. Resource conservation and revenue generation are critical at present, and all reasonable strategies should be reviewed in order to preserve jobs and the core mission of the University.
9. The resources expended along with the revenue lost are out of proportion to the benefit of the 4-1-4 model for the campus.

Recommendation

1. The campus should adopt a traditional semester model and seek to retain the pedagogical benefits of a winter term.

The committee is not recommending a specific academic calendar design under the semester model, as the committee believes that to be the purview of the faculty. Appendix IK provides samples of semesters for review. The committee does believe that a winter session can be maintained, either through self-support (UEE) or as a leading session that is part of the spring state-supported semester (as at CSU Chico). In either case, the benefit that accrues to the campus is that it is able to manage its resources more efficiently and retain significantly greater revenue at a time when resources are declining. Moving to a semester model (and away from the 4-1-4) would likely result in the winter break being shorter, but still would provide—depending upon design—two to four weeks for available instruction.

Secondary Recommendations

1. Deans are encouraged to work closely with departments as they revise curriculum. In discussions with the Deans, the committee has been informed that most changes can be accomplished at the syllabus level and would not require program/course description re-submission. However, there may be some programs that will require such steps, and the committee wishes to recognize this and encourage the University to be supportive in assisting them in this endeavor.
2. In particular, the College of Education will need special attention. Their curriculum design and the new Ed.D. are dependent upon using winter term. The design of the calendar should be sensitive to their needs. Furthermore, this college is undergoing re-accreditation,

and the changes on top of the re-accreditation task will put additional pressure on the faculty.

3. The impact of a calendar change should be carefully monitored. The campus should be attentive to implications related to faculty research, student retention, and time-to-degree. As the process commences, continued attention should be given to ensuring that what is delivered contributes to the overall quality of the academic mission.
4. The semester calendar model should be re-evaluated after five years.