



## CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, STANISLAUS

DEPT OF PHYSICS, PHYSICAL SCIENCE, AND GEOLOGY

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** July 14, 2009

**TO:** Dr Hamid Shirvani, President  
Dr Steven Filling, Speaker of the Faculty

**FROM:** Dr. Ian M. Littlewood, Chair  
University Educational Policies Committee

**SUBJECT:** UEPC Academic Calendar Progress Report

The UEPC has taken up the issue of changes to the Academic Calendar. Meetings have already been held, including a large forum for staff, students, and faculty to raise issues related to the calendar. Guests whose insight into the issues will help the UEPC in its deliberations have been scheduled to talk to the committee, and a web site for gathering information from the campus at large is close to being ready.

In narrowing its focus to the most important issues related to the Academic Calendar Review, the UEPC is working on the following items. That is not to say that other issues will not be taken up should they assume the same level of importance.

#### **A realistic estimate of the savings incurred by changing the academic calendar**

On July 7<sup>th</sup> 2009, the UEPC received from the President, through the Vice President for Business and Finance, an account of the costs incurred in offering a Winter Term to our students. This account assigns a dollar value to various activity categories, from the salaries and benefits paid to part time faculty to the cost of enrolling students three times a year instead of two.

However, after a cursory inspection of these figures it seems that only a fraction of these costs can be translated into savings. For example, the UEPC notes the following:

- The cost estimate includes a figure of approximately \$480k for part time faculty salary and benefits<sup>1</sup>. However, if the academic calendar is revised, then the classes which are currently being taught by these faculty in Winter Term will have to be transferred to the proposed fall and spring semesters. Since full time faculty already have full teaching loads these classes will still have to be taught by the same part time faculty, and the same

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<sup>1</sup> This figure should have been reduced, as a substantial portion of the teaching undertaken by part time faculty has already been eliminated by cost cutting measures taken in earlier responses to the budget shortfall.

\$480k will still be spent in hiring them. Although \$480k is assigned on this line, the net savings would be \$0.

- The cost estimate includes entries for staff wages and benefits for 784 workload hours for staff dealing with payroll issues related to the part time faculty being hired for the Winter Term. However, it appears that the estimate includes all the workload hours in winter, *whether the activity is related to Winter Term or not*. The UEPC notes that with 78 part time faculty being hired this would correspond to 10 hours of staff time for each and every one of them, a figure which seems to lack credibility. An independent estimate of the hours needed to process the paperwork is approximately 60. Clarification is currently being sought on this issue. It is presumed that similar overestimates of workload hours directly related to Winter Term might also be included in other lines of the cost estimate given to the UEPC.
- The amount of financial aid received by students is counted in the total at the bottom of the spreadsheet, and then again at the top as extra fees received by the university. Such apparent 'double counting' makes it difficult to arrive at an accurate estimate of the savings which would be realized if Winter Term were to be abolished.

### **How cost estimates might be translated into actual cost savings**

The cost estimate assigns a dollar value to the various activities. *However, simply removing the activities does not in itself constitute a cost savings*. Savings are only incurred when something, in this case workload hours, are not paid for. Since the full time staff who deal with these activities must be retained, it needs to be made clear how the cost estimates can be translated into actual cost savings.

It is worth noting at this point that two staff concerns have been raised related to these cost savings, and the fear that staff will again bear the brunt of campus cuts:

- That cost savings might be put into effect by reducing the time base for staff members from 12/12 to 11/12 or 10/12. Staff members who have been with the university for many years recall that exactly this was done in the past, and are afraid that it will be done again.
- That cost savings might be put into effect by combining departments and/or colleges. Each time two departments are combined into one there is the elimination of at least one staff position. Again, there are staff members who can remember this being done in the past. Combining colleges would result in two or more staff positions being lost.

### **Cost of changing the academic calendar**

Missing from the cost estimates supplied to the UEPC is an estimate of the cost that will be occurred in making the transition to a new calendar. There are currently 2,801 active courses in PeopleSoft, and each one will potentially need to be reviewed, some for catalog description, many for compatibility with the longer semester. Most, but not all, will only need a change of syllabus. Those specifically designed for Winter Term might need to be revised completely, and some fall and spring classes (for example laboratory classes) might need revision to fit the longer

semester. In addition, there are 117 academic programs<sup>2</sup> on campus, and every single program will need to be reviewed, including the “road maps to graduation” which departments were directed to develop only a few years ago. Finally, all changes to the catalog will require staff time to incorporate the updates into the catalog, PeopleSoft, etc.

The workload hours required to handle all this review and revision will not be trivial, and the associated costs could be large. Changes to course descriptions will need to be written, reviewed by departmental curriculum committees, college curriculum committees, the Dean’s offices, and where appropriate the General Education Subcommittee, the Graduate Council, and/or the UEPC. Even those not needing a course catalog revision might demand considerable faculty time to adjust to the new calendar. The UEPC notes that at the time of previous proposal to change the academic calendar the Chancellor’s Office made available \$2M to each campus wanting to make the change. With inflation, the dollar value of the change is presumably larger now. The UEPC will try to estimate of the cost of changing the academic calendar in the near future.

### **Impact of changing the academic calendar on the teaching mission of this university**

The impact of Winter Term on student learning was adequately covered by the last review and summarized in the CROAC report. Their assessment of effectiveness, historic perspective, and literature review are accepted by the UEPC. In addition numerous responses have been received which indicate that some programs would be severely affected by the elimination of Winter Term, even to the point of jeopardizing the entire program. Most notable was the effect that it might have have on the new Ed. D program.

“Without the Winter (and Summer terms), the doctoral program here would face a significant challenge in complying with the commitments we have made to CSU-Long Beach and to WASC, not only with respect to the current cohort who have two more years of planned and approved Winter term (and Summer term) courses ahead of them, but also to the second cohort of candidate doctoral students that begins in a few days, one which also has the expectation of Intersession courses to complete their program.”

As one of the earliest campuses in the CSU system to receive permission to begin cohorts of doctoral students, CSU Stanislaus is rightly proud of this program. To jeopardize this program is not in the best interests of the university.

In a similar vein, the Department of Chemistry has pointed out a problem associated with accreditation, in that there is a limit on the number of hours that any instructor can spend per week in class. Coupled with their extensive laboratory offerings (3 hours in class for a 1 unit course) it causes problems in assigning faculty the appropriate number of classes;

“Winter Term allows the chair to spread out the workload. The combination of assigned time and Winter Term has allowed the chair to assign workloads that remain in compliance with this accreditation policy. In the past, we have been put on probation for violating this policy and we are closely scrutinized now. Many other CSU Chemistry departments struggle with this same issue, particular those on the traditional semester system.”

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<sup>2</sup> 41 undergraduate majors, 24 graduate majors, 44 minors, and 1 doctoral major. Many have concentrations to be reviewed also.

## **Impact of changing the academic calendar on students, their graduation rates and time to graduation**

This university is nationally recognized for its excellent student retention and graduation rates, for which the President and indeed the entire campus is justifiably proud. It is also true that a large percentage of the student body are first time college attendees, have significant work commitments on or off campus in order to pay for college, have family commitments, or all three.

Under the current calendar students can graduate on time (that is within 4 years) by taking four classes (12 units) in fall and spring, and two classes (6 units) in winter<sup>3</sup>. Changing to a two semester calendar would leave the student with two choices, to delay graduation or to attempt five classes (15 units) at a time rather than four. For many students four classes at a time is all that they should take, because of work commitments, because of family commitments, or because that is the maximum number of classes that they can handle. Many of these students will not have sufficient out-of-class time to devote to an extra class. We have all seen the effect of students taking too many classes; grades suffer, GPA's fall, classes have to be repeated, and students either take longer to graduate or fail to graduate at all.

The impact of changing the academic calendar on students needs to be investigated before precipitate action is taken.

## **Impact of changing the academic calendar on administration of the university**

It true that Winter Term does present problems in its administration, particularly in relation to the new People Soft package. This side of the coin was eloquently expressed at the UEPC meeting on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 as one of many opinions and points of view. If in the final analysis Winter Term is not cost effective then a change in the academic calendar is warranted. Otherwise it should be retained. Even if it is retained, these problems will need to be addressed in other ways.

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<sup>3</sup> Assuming 3 unit classes. The number of classes is adjusted when taking classes with different unit values.