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PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

Date: September 7, 2001

To: CSU Presidents

From: Jackie R. McClain  
Vice Chancellor  
Human Resources

David S. Spence  
Executive Vice Chancellor and  
Chief Academic Officer

Subject: Trimester Conversion Plans

Recently some campuses have expressed interest in converting to a trimester academic calendar composed of three 13- or 14-week trimesters. We think this approach is well worth exploring. However, there are several questions to be addressed before a trimester academic calendar can be approved. We are requesting that campuses considering this approach describe how they would deal with existing policy governing academic terms. Some, though not all, of these policy considerations are within the jurisdiction of the CSU to revise (see [http://www.ifap.ed.gov/regcomps/doc4061\\_bodyoftext.htm](http://www.ifap.ed.gov/regcomps/doc4061_bodyoftext.htm)).

1. "Semester" academic credits as a measure of student effort.

Presumably, a campus on a trimester calendar would award "semester" academic credit. WASC considers one unit of semester credit to require a minimum of 40 to 45 hours of effort on the part of the student, typically 15 hours of class and 30 hours of preparation. In a 15-week semester, one unit of credit would represent approximately 3 hours of effort per week. How would a trimester calendar accommodate this expectation of academic effort per semester unit?

2. Adequate number of instructional days (147 ± 2).

Current CSU norms and definitions, established by the Chancellor and the Executive Council, define an academic year—two semesters or three quarters—as consisting of 147 instructional days with a permissible variation of plus or minus two days (see HR 2001-13 or <http://www.calstate.edu/HRAAdm/pdf2001/HR2001-13.pdf>). Ordinarily, only weekdays count as "instructional days." Would a trimester calendar provide for an equivalent number of instructional days in two trimesters, or would faculty appointments, fee structures, etc. be unique to trimester calendars?

3. Appropriate number of work days (170-180).

Current CSU policy and the Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement (Provision 20.4) allow for a minimum of 170 and a maximum of 180 academic work days in an academic year (two semesters or three quarters). Would a trimester calendar provide for an equivalent number of faculty work days in two trimesters, or would the CSU need to create a two-trimester faculty appointment, distinct from an academic-year or 12-month appointment?

—More—

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**4. Federal financial aid requirements for students.**

Federal regulations pertaining to student financial aid (Title IV, HEA Programs) require an academic year (two semesters or three quarters) to consist of a minimum of 30 weeks that include regularly scheduled instruction, examinations, and/or preparation for examinations. For financial aid purposes, a week is defined as a consecutive seven-day period. Institutions may request permission from the Secretary of Education to reduce further this minimum period of instructional time (26 weeks is the absolute minimum that can be approved). Would a trimester calendar conform to the regular federal definition of an academic year, or would it be necessary to request a reduction in the length of the academic year?

(For related information, see (see <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/HEA/>; and <http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/20/1088.html>.)

If you are considering a trimester calendar, please send your preliminary plan for responding to these issues to Dr. Gary Hammerstrom, Associate Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs. Your comments will better enable us to help you prepare an academic calendar model. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

JRMcC/DSS/clm

c: Charles B. Reed  
Gary A. Hammerstrom  
Vice Presidents, Academic Affairs  
Vice Presidents, Administration  
Vice Presidents, Student Services