

MEMO: TO ALL FACULTY AND STAFF

FROM: CALENDAR CHANGE DTF, 2-25-81

RE: POSSIBLE CHANGE TO SEMESTER CALENDAR

Please read this memo and give us your judgment in the boxes provided at the end. This is an informal, nonbinding questionnaire. Please return to Robin Erhart, LIB 2114. *by 3/11*

Our DTF was asked to investigate the possibility of using a different academic calendar. We have concluded that only our present quarter system and a modified early semester system make sense for Evergreen.

If Evergreen switched to the early semester system, faculty would report no earlier than September 1 and have one or two days for advising and final preparations before classes -- which would run until about December 21st. Spring semester would begin in mid- to late-January and continue until mid-May. Students would then be free for the summer, but faculty would stay an additional two weeks to prepare for the subsequent fall semester. Active teaching time in two semesters would equal the amount of active teaching time in three quarters. Summer school would occur in an eight- or ten-week session. It would probably begin in the second week of June and run until early to mid-August.

We think the arguments for the semester system are strong enough that we should seriously consider a change in calendar. But we recognize that those arguments are largely estimations. We list those arguments below; afterwards we list arguments in favor of our present system; and then ambiguous or "toss-up" issues. At the end we ask for your input on an informal ballot. Please read these arguments carefully before making your decision.

Our committee is holding public hearings on this matter on TUESDAY, MARCH 10: CAB, Main Floor, 11:30 to 1:30 and 4:30 to 6:30.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF THE MODIFIED EARLY SEMESTER SYSTEM

1. More time and energy would be available for teaching and learning because of less time given to start-up and wrap-up activities. We would gain a full week of instruction simply by eliminating one evaluation week. In addition, since the first week or more of each term tends to be undermined because of students entering late or changing programs, we would eliminate some of this disruption by having it occur only twice instead of three times. Students and faculty ~~would~~ have to write evaluations or letters of reflection only twice a year instead of three times.
2. Numerous other time consuming and expensive activities ~~would~~ occur only twice a year instead of three times: program planning; advising; registration; academic fair; contract negotiation; evaluation typing; evaluation recording; financial aid negotiation; housing enrollment. The work of program secretaries and registrar staff ~~would~~ be evened out. Program secretaries would probably be able to do more things to help faculty in teaching and even in research than they can now do. Some of these adjustments would result in substantial dollar savings each year. (For example The Evergreen Evening News costs about \$5,000 each time it is sent out.) These savings would almost certainly offset the one-time cost of conversion in two or three years.
3. Savings might well result in more support for services now being cut, such as counseling.
4. The semester system would reduce the size of the transcript.
5. It is not true that a move from three terms to two terms a year would give fewer options to students. That would only be true if all programs were now only one quarter long. In fact, the semester system would probably increase the number of real options for most students because our present system of one- and two- and three-quarter programs

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results in so many impossible curricular connections. That is, it frequently happens now that the ending of one program doesn't dove-tail with the beginning of the next program that the student wants to take. As a result, the student is driven either to quit a program before it is finished or to drop out of school for a quarter to wait for the next program.

6. The month-long winter vacation would provide students with a longer out-of-school break during the year for work or travel or other relief from school. This might ease the need many students now have for taking a quarter off from school and in this way improve our retention or FTE rate and help students lose less time in getting their degree.

7. Winter break would also give students more time for getting caught up if they have an incomplete. Now, students with incompletes can seldom give their full attention to the work of the new quarter.

8. The break would allow faculty to get in a substantial piece of study, research, or travel -- or simply to recharge their batteries. In most colleges, faculty can do research while teaching. This is difficult at Evergreen. Thus the semester's bunching of vacation would help.

9. The break would permit program secretaries and registration staff to finish with all the fall semester work before the next one begins. (It would probably eliminate the need for overtime work in the Registrar's office.)

10. Students would be able to make more informed decisions about what fall programs to take because program planning for fall semester would take place during the last two weeks in May. There would be detailed program descriptions, weekly schedules, and reading lists available at the beginning of summer. At present students must often choose programs without much knowledge of what will occur.

11. This will substantially aid summer recruitment of students.

12. Programs could be planned better because the planning would occur earlier. Under the present system, conscientious faculty members are forced to donate unpaid summer time planning for programs because many important matters such as book orders cannot be put off till September 15th. And it is hard to coordinate such summer planning because of faculty vacation travel. Semesters would make summer more secure and productive. If faculty members decide they want to do some summer preparation for their program, they will be able to do so far more efficiently because they will know precisely what they are preparing for. If they don't want to use their unpaid summer time for Evergreen work, nevertheless they will almost inevitably mull over and deepen their understanding of what they are going to do and come up with some good teaching ideas -- simply because they will have already planned their program in May.

13. The semester system would help year-long programs by removing the temptation for students to drop out in March when energy is liable to be low. Students who drop out then miss more than merely one-third of the program: they often miss out on the very essence of the program because many themes and issues don't come together till the program gets to the end.

14. The semester system would probably decrease spring attrition of students (which at present is substantial) and thereby even out the student faculty ratio over the year. This would mean that we wouldn't have to inflate the size of seminars in the fall in anticipation of spring declines.

15. It would be easier to help new students entering at mid-year. At present we need programs for new students (and switching students) for BOTH winter and spring quarters. It is hard to provide enough options. We have a particularly hard time attracting new students for spring quarter now -- at just the time when we lose many of the enrolled students.

16. The semester would give more time for developing a program theme and for building group cohesion; and more time for combining field work with classroom work.

17. At present, faculty must report at mid term which students are failing or liable to fail. This is frequently a difficult decision after only five weeks. It becomes more feasible after eight weeks.

18. The modified early semester would coordinate well with many other schools that are on semesters or the 4-1-4 system: UPS, PLU, WSU, St. Martins, Whitworth, Cornish, Gonzaga. Fifty-three percent of US institutions of higher education are on a semester system and there is a dramatically rising trend in this direction. It would fit us well with high schools. We would even match well at mid year with schools on the quarter system (and at present we get very few transfer students starting spring quarter).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST A CHANGE OF CALENDER

1. Students will perceive less flexibility in the curriculum. The need to conceptualize programs in larger blocks may mean the demise of specialized programs that can be offered in one-quarter length periods but which would not draw enough students to warrant a one-semester length period.

2. Semester-long programs and modules would be less attractive to part-time students, particularly those with other responsibilities such as jobs and child-care.

3. A semester system would allow insufficient time in the fall for orientation of students and new faculty and for final faculty preparations. A curricular planning period in May might be far less productive due to faculty fatigue.

4. The reductions in paper work in the Registrar's office and other offices would lead to suggestions of reducing the work force and thus have an adverse impact on staff morale.

5. With a semester system, students in a program or seminar they didn't like would be stuck there longer.

6. A common argument for semesters compared to quarters is that quarters are too short a period in which to absorb conceptually difficult materials. This argument may not hold at Evergreen where most instruction is in the program format, which encourages intensive study of less material compared to courses that enhance extensive coverage at the expense of depth.

7. Evergreen has had some difficult public relations problems in the Olympia community in the past. Changing to a semester system will simply add one more item on which the College will have to explain itself.

8. The Library would need to be open over much of the break between fall and spring semesters. It might be hard to staff it if the break were a month long.

9. A change to semesters would require the Library to re-evaluate its policies on lengths of loans for books and media equipment.

10. Signing up for a semester will be more expensive than for a quarter (\$309 vs. \$206). Students with cash-flow problems might have a problem in paying the large amount all at once.

11. The Registrar's Office would be required to build a conversion program for translating quarter-hour credits into semester-hour credits. This additional conversion will be in addition to the conversions required by earlier changes in the recording of work completed at the College. Future institutional research would be complicated by the additional series of units of credit.

12. Faculty would have substantially less opportunity for unpaid professional leave. Losing one-half a year's salary is less manageable than missing one-third of the year's money.

13. While in the transition phase, considerable faculty-planning effort would be required to convert to semesters. This work would have to occur just as the College is growing in size plus adding new master's-level programs, both of which are currently requiring substantial amounts of time. The additional conversion process might overload some of the best faculty planners. Staff of the College would also be adversely impacted during the transition period by having to plan new procedures plus educate themselves, faculty, and students on how the new system works.

TOSS UP OR AMBIGUOUS ISSUES

1. The semester calendar would help students get summer jobs by freeing them in mid-May. But it might inconvenience students trying to finish jobs because we would start earlier in September.

2. By switching to semesters we would probably retain some students that we now lose in March. But we would also probably lose some students in the fall because of an earlier start. Fewer weeks of late-summer recruitment time. No telling whether it would be ultimate gain or loss.

3. If we switch to semesters both one-quarter and two-quarter programs would probably end up being semester-length programs. Thus the effect would be both to shorten and to lengthen present programs.

4. At present most sabbatical awards for faculty paid leave are for two quarters. If we switch to semesters, most would probably be for a semester. Thus, more faculty would get paid leave but for somewhat less time.

5. There would be substantial computer costs in converting to semesters. But these costs would be greatly reduced if we knew of the switch by this summer because they are getting new equipment which they must program from scratch anyway.

INPUT FROM THE COMMUNITY

Please check one box

- I think we should have the quarter system we have now.
- I think we should have a modified early semester system as described above.
- I don't mind which system we have.

Your name: _____

Student Staff Faculty

(Individual responses will be kept confidential.)