

Shortened semesters take root in Los Angeles, Coast Districts

California community colleges are finding ways around the 18-week teaching semesters their K-14 statutory roots mandate. A flexible regulatory definition of the 175-day school year has allowed districts to reduce the 18-week teaching semester, provided the number of hours that classes meet remains the same. Colleges in the Los Angeles and Coast districts have implemented 15-16 week "compressed semester" calendars, and CFT local districts Los Rios, El Camino, Glendale, and State Center are in the process of negotiating compressed semesters or will begin shortly.

"At Pierce," said Barrie Logan, a leader in negotiating the schedule with the Los Angeles College Guild, "we believe that a shorter term is better educationally. Our preliminary data follows the same pattern that was observed at Santa Monica College, where grade point averages and retention went up with the establishment of the shorter term. In addition, longer class periods encourage a greater variety of activities: student group work, integration of computer labs, multimedia, etc." At Coast, Local 1911 staff person Paul Jordan said that it is still too early to determine the effect of the compressed calendar on educational quality.

Enticing to students and faculty, a shortened semester is also a potential money-maker for districts that need to bolster enrollment and per-pupil state funding. There were "enormous enrollment gains" at Pierce, West Los Angeles, and Los Angeles Southwest, the three Los Angeles colleges that implemented the shortened semesters, according to College Guild member Bill de Rubertis. Fall enrollment was also "very strong" at Coast's Golden West College, said Jordan.

Winter intercessions of 4-6 weeks are made possible by com-

pressed semesters, and both Los Angeles and Coast reported excellent enrollment in their 2000-2001 intercessions. "Student retention during intercession courses was very good," said Jordan. "Students typically take just one course, and students willing to take a course during Christmas break are pretty motivated."

The compressed semesters also let districts provide the equivalent of trimester and year-round schooling, as Logan

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explained. The Pierce school year includes "a 5-week intercession inserted between two primary terms, followed by two non-overlapping 5-week summer sessions." Such a schedule gives students optimum flexibility in managing work, school, and families, or in moving more quickly towards college transfer or into the workforce. The winter intercession, according to Logan, also gives faculty greater flexibility, "allowing for the spreading out of a regular load, or an additional extra-pay assignment, or the time off."

College constituents all seem to be responding positively to the new semester configurations at Los Angeles and Coast. "At Pierce," said de Rubertis, "the morale of faculty, administrators, and classified staff was boosted even more significantly than our enrollments." An end-of-semester student survey at Golden West College produced very positive

results, according to Jordan, with many students saying they opted for Golden West because of the 16-week semesters. "Students have adapted to the new calendar most easily," said Logan. "They had no trouble adjusting to the odd start-stop times, and particularly liked the late start, the shorter term, and the flexibility made possible by the winter intercessions."

Of course there are a few downsides. "People are still adjusting to the 'train schedule' that classes begin and end on," said Jordan. There can be problems with a district's interpretation of the part-time faculty 60 percent rule and intercession courses, warned de Rubertis, but they were ironed out at Pierce. According to Logan, the compressed calendar can also create room availability problems, and there is less time in the day for committee work.

"Classified employees are the one group for which there are no clear benefits from a compressed calendar," Logan cautioned. "The winter intercession represents an additional registration period, and therefore an increased workload. At Pierce, we tried to anticipate and prepare for such problems, and things have worked quite smoothly." Jordan iterated the importance of having the classified union involved in all discussions of moving from the traditional calendar.

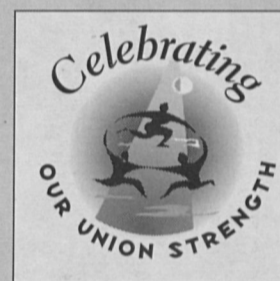
In the end, the decision to shorten semesters should be made on educationally valid grounds and with the strong support of faculty, administration, students, and classified staff. But once you make the decision to change, don't plan on going back, de Rubertis said: "To even suggest a return to the 18-week semester would get one tarred, feathered, and run off the Pierce campus."

By Tom Tyner, CCC president

Coming up

Convention 2001: Bigger and better

This year's statewide CFT convention will be held March 9-11 at Los Angeles' Wilshire Grand Hotel, and promises to be an exciting event. CCC members are looking at some important changes: officer's elections will be held for all positions, including president, and Tom Tyner has announced he will not be run-



ning for a third term. Elections will also include the four at-large part-time faculty council seats created last year.

For the first time, the convention will run a full three days, allowing for a record number of workshops of interest to community college faculty. Special CCC workshops will be *Maintaining Excellent Health Benefits in an Era of Higher Costs*, *Negotiating and Living with the Compressed Calendar*, *Distance Education Issues*, *Negotiating Part-Time Faculty Equity Issues*, and *Involving Part-Time Faculty in Your Local Union*.

The new schedule will also make room for exciting guest speakers, including celebrity Rob Reiner, whose Friday speech will address early childhood education, and online education critic David Noble of York University. Invited at the suggestion of the CCC's distance education committee, Noble's keynote speech at the fall 1999 Conference on Online Education sparked much discussion between both proponents and skeptics of distance education.

National Higher Education Issues

The AFT Higher Education Issues Conference, "Gathering Steam: Advancing Academic Values, Quality and Professionalism," will be held in our own backyard at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in San Francisco. Speakers at the April 20-22 conference will include AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, and Elaine Bernard, executive director of Harvard University's Trade Union Program. Workshops will focus, among a variety of subjects, on strengthening the union through involving the next generation of members and looking at new organizing opportunities including contingent faculty, graduate employees, and private colleges. Building coalitions through campus charters for fair labor practices, increasing the full-time faculty ranks, and legal and distance education issues will also be addressed. Ask your local president for more information, or check the AFT website, www.aft.org.

Lobby Day is April 29 - 30

It's time to mark your calendar for CFT's annual Lobby Day, April 29-30, when your fellow union members from throughout the state will head to Sacramento to meet with state legislators. Their goal will be to help them understand our work and our needs—for Partnership for Excellence funding, for a full \$75 million in part-timer equity funding and other legislative and local necessities. You should make plans to join them and experience how empowering lobbying your elected state representatives can be!

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